

ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUMS IN *MUTATION*
EXPERIMENTS WITH EXHIBITIONARY PRACTICES IN
POST/COLONIAL EUROPE

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Abstract

In post/colonial times the roles and purposes of ethnographic museums have been challenged, prompting some institutions to rethink their practices. Recently, criticism has focused on the struggle of ethnographic museums based in post/colonial, multicultural European countries to adjust to the socio-political and cultural changes brought to societies through globalisation and international migration. This thesis explores recent efforts of a few institutions to respond to these changes by experimenting with new exhibitionary praxes.

While drawing on insights from several disciplines (primarily postcolonial studies, political theory, cultural studies, and museum studies), this study examines the application of a *thematic approach* to semi-permanent exhibitions, an exhibitionary praxis focusing on cross-cultural themes. By analysing data from research at two case studies, the Tropenmuseum (Amsterdam, the Netherlands) and the Museum of World Culture (Gothenburg, Sweden), this thesis investigates to what extent and how the application of a *thematic strategy* enables ethnographic museums to move beyond their endemic tendency to construct cultural 'others' and their complicity with neo-colonial discourses.

The thesis locates the two museums within their historical and socio-political contexts, and explores their ideological positions regarding cultural diversity which have legitimated the application of a *thematic strategy*. Analysis of selected exhibitions at these institutions suggests that a *thematic approach*, although posing new and as yet unresolved challenges, nevertheless holds considerable potential to challenge prevailing understandings of cultural diversity and to express postnational, fluid ideas of identities and belonging. Importantly, the investigation into exhibitionary processes has highlighted alterations in the 'structures of production' and revealed negotiations across expertise and power relationships. The thesis argues that attempts to introduce new exhibitionary praxes should be accompanied by efforts to alter museums' internal structures. Eventually, the broader implications of this study question established museological practices and indicate new perspectives for ethnographic museums in our contemporary, rapidly changing, plural Europe.

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1. Setting the frame

Please let us try to kill the 'us' and 'they' approach to life and culture. 'Foreigners' come from other planets; on this one we are all human beings and should share the experiences which art and culture take across national boundaries (Beckwith 1987: 3).

Our contemporary, post/colonial¹ world is increasingly witnessing the struggle between three forces: globalisation, multiculturalism and nationalism (Pollock et al. 2002). Societies, institutions and individuals are more and more entangled in this struggle, being pulled in different directions by those powerful, sometimes conflicting, forces. Museums are being touched in multiple ways by the proliferation of discourses of globalisation, multiculturalism and nationalism and, in many parts of the world, increasingly seek to respond to them by redefining their mandate, practices, and institutional identities. If every museum is being influenced by and seeking to contribute to these debates in some form or another, this doctoral thesis explores how the three forces are impacting upon museums located in post/colonial Europe (Thomas 2010) holding ethnographic collections, that is artefacts of 'non-Western' cultures. For the sake of brevity the expression *ethnographic museums* shall be

¹ I follow Bongie 2008 (quoted in Hoffmann and Peeren 2010: 14) that employs 'post/colonial' to stress the ambiguity of post-colonial condition in which 'the colonial and the postcolonial appear uneasily as one, joined together and yet also divided in a relationship of (dis)continuity.'

employed in this thesis to refer to a variety of museums holding ethnographic collections.²

This thesis seeks to contribute to contemporary debates around the (ir)relevance of ethnographic museums by exploring recent experiments with new strategies of display undertaken by a small number of institutions located in post/colonial Europe. It presents findings from *case study research* carried out at the Tropenmuseum (Amsterdam, the Netherlands) and the Museum of World Culture (Gothenburg, Sweden). The thesis begins with this introductory chapter, which sets the frame for the research by providing a rationale for its relevance and timeliness.

Entangled Discourses: Globalisation, Multiculturalism and Nationalism

In current times of accelerated globalisation, planetary movements of goods, money, knowledge and people have been described as the most vigorous driving factors in global change. Commentators have underlined several negative implications of globalisation, viewing this process as the main threat to the existence of the nation, the most significant cause of fragmentation and deterritorialisation, and the reason behind increasing cultural homogenisation or even ‘clashes of civilisations’ (Huntington 1996). The aspect of globalisation that has generated (and still generates) the most heated discussions is the rise of international movements of people.

² Ethnographic collections are held by a multiplicity of museums, ranging from ethnographic and anthropological museums to colonial, natural history, mankind, missionary, cultural history, universal, world culture and world art museums.

International migration is not a novel phenomenon of contemporary times or even of modernity. The first great migrations date back to antiquity, and the history of humanity has been shaped by continuous movements and the relocation of people all around the world. Pieterse (2003: 34) suggests that 'in a historical sense we are all migrants because our ancestors have all travelled to the place we come from.'

However, international movements have increased since 1945 and even further since the end of the 1980s, thus changing the 'cultural ecologies' of numerous nation-states. What is particularly distinctive about post-1945 migration is that people's movements 'have taken place within a historical context of decolonisation' (Bennett 2006: 58) marked by the inversion of direction of earlier migration patterns. These movements brought 'the natives home in the post-imperial countries' (Pieterse 2005: 164) who demanded the recognition of equal political, civic, and cultural rights. Moreover, increasingly movements took place within Europe, from Southern European countries to Northern European countries (Triandafyllidou et al. 2007).

Since the mid-1990s, and even more during the last decade, international migration has increased and movements have also become more complex, fragmented, and irregular (Hugo 2005). Movements have increasingly taken place *across* and *within* Europe, especially after the implementation of the Schengen Agreements (1995), and Southern European states have turned into immigration lands. These movements have altered the economic, political, and social structures of the EU nation-states (ERICarts 2008; Gropas and Triandafyllidou 2007; OECD 2008), adding to the number of languages, religions, ethnic and cultural backgrounds found in Europe. Several countries are experiencing what Vertovec (2007) names 'superdiversity', a level and

kind of complexity that surpasses anything previously experienced and is bringing into question such concepts as citizenship, national identity and belonging. In certain European nations a 'multicultural drift' has been registered, which Stuart Hall describes as 'not [the] state-inspired, state-funded multiculturalism but just the social shifts that happen very slowly, piecemeal all over the places' (Taylor 2011).

The notion of cultural diversity has found its place on the political agenda of many nations and of supra-national institutions such as the European Union and UNESCO, and political instruments have been introduced to manage the challenges inherent in the increasing cultural heterogeneity. In particular, UNESCO has been a strong advocate of the defence and promotion of cultural diversity since the 1970s. UNESCO (2009: 4) defines cultural diversity as 'above all a fact: there exists a wide range of distinct cultures, even if the contours delimiting a particular culture prove more difficult to establish than might at first sight appear.' After having long equated cultural diversity with the diversity of national cultures, UNESCO (ibid) has recognised the limitation of this approach and has moved its focus towards the recognition of the multiple, shifting character of contemporary (individual and collective) identities.

Issues of migration and questions of social cohesion have occupied, as Lewis and Neal (2005: 423) note, a 'dominant place on the agendas of national governments during the 1990s and 2000s.' However, debates around migration had dominated the public sphere of 'Western' countries since the 1960s and racism had been a major concern in national policies, particularly in the aftermath of the 'race riots' of the late 1970s and

the 1980s.³ It could be suggested, however, that anxiety towards migration and cultural diversity has increased in all the 'Western' (imperial) nations after the events of September 11 2001. In the context of this study this date deserves special attention. As Ray (2005: 575) suggests, 9/11 holds particular significance 'for those of us concerned with issue of empire, imperialism and postcolonialism...' Indeed in the post 11.9.2011 world public discourses have forcefully re-evoked 'hard boundaries between "us"/"them", "West"/"East" and "good"/"evil"' (Lewis and Neal 2005: 435). An inversion of opposition has been insinuated, however, by presenting 'the non-West against the West' (Ray 2005: 575).

In post 9/11 times, the employment of emotive and derogatory language about new migrants and asylum seekers in media and political discourses has become common practice (Bralo and Morrison 2005; Goodnow et al. 2008; van Selm 2005). (Certain) foreigners have been constructed as representing the 'enemy' (Bigo 2005) or even as 'potential terrorists' (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005). Yet, the general anxiety turned especially to migrants of Islamic faith (Bralo and Morrison 2005), whose beliefs were considered in contradiction with 'Western' values. Discrimination on the grounds of religion became commonplace (Modood 2005). Crowley and Hickman (2008: 1223) suggest that the construction of the 'outsider' was instrumental to validate foreign policy interventions undertaken by 'Western' states under the banner of the 'war on terror'. This situation has complicated the already conflicting relationship between the 'West' and the 'East', 'Christianity' and 'Islam' (Lewis and Neal 2005: 434) within each country and internationally. Biological racism has increasingly been replaced by a new racism,

³ For example, racial violence erupted in Britain in Brick Lane (1978), Bradford, Brixton and Liverpool (1981), Bradford, Burnley and Oldham (2001) (Mason 2001).

named 'cultural racism' (Gilroy 1990, Giroux 1993, Wylie 2001, Bonilla-Silva 2003, Modood 2005), which relies on cultural and national differences rather than on biological markers of racial superiority or inferiority. Culture has become a popular and political explanatory framework for rationalizing the unequal status and treatment of minorities and migrants.

Further terrorist attacks in Madrid (March 2003), in London (July 2005) and in Glasgow (June 2007) that saw the direct involvement not only of migrants but also nationals of the countries against which those attacks were 'perpetuated' have created even more panic. If in the 1990s security concerns had already been a high priority in the political agenda of the EU (Huysmans 2000), since 9/11 and the subsequent bombings, policies on security have been regarded as necessary instruments for the combating of terrorism (Wilkinson 2007) and migration has been securitized (Boswell 2005).

Critics, such as Goodhart (2004), have suggested that the alteration of demographic and socio-cultural structures was producing societies too diverse and fragmented. This idea has found increasing support, becoming popular in public discourses. Media and political debates have focused on how the presence of culturally diverse people undermine the moral and social fabric of society and dilute national identity (Calhoun et al. 2002; Crowley and Hickman 2007). Particularly irregular migrants and asylum seekers have been portrayed as 'threatening and undermining core values of European societies' (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005: 515). Several European states have foregrounded the notion of 'core national values' considered emblematic of the dominant group (Lewis and Neal 2005).

If at the end of the twentieth century it had already become evident that the decline of the nation-states and national cultures as result of globalisation had been prematurely proclaimed (Boswell 1999), in the last decade the contradiction between impulses towards globalisation and nationalism has become more manifest. Anti-immigrant, far-right parties have obtained large support across Europe (Bralo and Morrison 2005; Guild 2005), for instance the Front National (France), the Lega Nord (Italy) and the Party for Freedom (Netherlands). I shall return to the latter in chapter four. They have achieved success using the issue of migration (Gilroy 2008) and advocating monolithic, defensive, ethnoracial ideas of national identities and cultures (Guild 2005). The rise of far-right, anti-immigration parties is alarming for their employment of nationalistic political and policy discourses supporting the myth of common origin and advocating a fixed, homogenous construction of national culture and identity, which implicitly legitimates foreigners' exclusion (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005). As Guild (2005: 103) argues, 'the moment this idea of national culture becomes dominant...the separation of those who do not share the elements of the newly "national" culture from those who do take the form of dividing those who belong and the minorities and immigrants who are different.'

However, the question of identity has long troubled Europeans. After having their 'extremities' cut off during processes of decolonisation, in post/colonial times former imperial countries had to reconstruct a new sense of themselves. They often repressed those losses, being perhaps under the illusion that the uncomfortable memories of colonialism could be discarded without undergoing any painful 'memory work' (Hall

1996). They could not envisage that the arrival of (de)colonised peoples, who made the 'centres' of the ex-empires their homes, would have brought 'ghosts' from former colonies that would have 'haunted' them and disrupted their post/colonial present.

In the post 9/11 world the question of collective identity has become more strongly politicized. Topics such as who we are, what we believe in, what we feel attached to and in which ways we are different from 'other' people, especially Europe's new citizens or 'those whose citizenly presence has been annihilated or marginalized' (Bhabha 2004: xxii) have increasingly come to the fore. Attempts have been increasingly made to re-construct a sense of collective identities around ideas of shared origins, and memories and 'through a cultural perspective' (UNESCO 2009: 20), which stresses the importance of some of the historical and cultural 'attributes' of the nation, such as language, customs, religion, tradition presented as 'a set of fixed and repetitive practices' (ibid).

The cultural perspective of recent nationalistic constructions clashes with celebratory discourses about cultural diversity, multiculturalism and globalisation. Ambivalences can be registered within the diversity and immigration policies of 'Western' nations that celebrate cultural diversity and depict themselves as multicultural havens of tolerance and human rights, whilst trying to 'secure their borders' (Boswell 2005) and introducing restrictions on migration. Even states that pride themselves on their diversity, such as Australia and Canada, have stressed the idea of their homogenous national identity and culture connected to a particular territory and rooted in common

language, history, culture, literature, myths, religion, with which everyone living in this territory is invited (if not forced) to identify (Kymlicka 2007a).

In recent decades of extreme anxiety surrounding migration and cultural diversity, (ethnographic) museums have found themselves enmeshed in debates around globalisation, multiculturalism and nationalism as I explain hereafter.

The role of museums

As institutions belonging to the public sphere and as targets (and instruments) of cultural policies museums have been asked and have sought to contribute to debates about migration and the understandings of the diversity of their society. In the 1980s museums came under intense criticism. Their implication with the construction of ethnoracial, homogenous, exclusive discourses about national culture and identity was highlighted (Bennett 1995; Kaplan 1994). Critics paid attention to the role that museum displays played in constructing certain understandings of cultural differences and ideas of 'otherness' that reinforced the power of hegemonic groups (that is the educated upper-middle classes), while generating a sense of unbelonging in migrants, minority groups and other groups 'deviating from modernist normality' (Grinell 2010b: 182), including women and disabled people (Macdonald 2006, Sandell 2005). In the 1990s these debates tended to focus around the notions of the 'poetics and politics' of museum display (Karp and Lavine 1991; Lidchi 1997).

The emergence of a New Museology marked a major shift in the conception of museums' role in society (Vergo 1989). In an attempt to respond to the scholarly criticisms of the late 1980s a few museums began to undertake political acts of social inclusion and attempted to construct less discriminatory understandings of cultural differences (Hooper Greenhill 1997). They sought to operate as agents of social change and sites where understandings of difference were negotiated. In order to play this role, museums had to confront their 'colonial legacy' (Lagerkvist 2006: 52). They underwent an often difficult process of revising their practices and value systems which - as critics have highlighted - were deeply rooted in discourses of colonialism and European supremacy. For instance, Bennett's research (1988, 1995, 2004) highlighted the implication of nineteenth-century museums in articulating the rhetorics of imperialism and nationalism.

Since the end of the 1990s attention has been increasingly directed to the museum as a 'social technology'. The responsibilities that museums owe to society have been robustly stressed in museum scholarship (Dodd and Sandell 2001; Janes 2007; Janes and Conaty 2005; Marstine 2011; Sandell 2002, 2007a; Sandell, Dodd, Garland-Thomson 2010; Sandell and Nightingale 2012). The museum has been described as a 'contact zone' (Clifford 1997), a forum 'for confrontation, experimentation, debate' (Cameron 2004), and a 'sharing space' (ERICarts 2008). Despite these intense winds of changes 'a revolution in museum provision is still ongoing' (Knell 2011: 5); certainly further radical changes of museum provision continue to be needed.

The museum of ethnography

Conflicting globalising and localising forces of recent decades have produced intertwined social, political, cultural shifts that are creating both challenges and opportunities to museums, and are transforming their practices, structures and goals in varied, sometimes contradictory ways (Kratz and Karp 2006). It seems relatively safe to suggest that museums devoted to the representation of 'non-Western' cultures located in post/colonial Europe have been touched more profoundly by those globalizing and localizing processes. As a result, they represent a particularly effective context in which to study the impact of these processes on museological practices and museums' contribution to questions of belonging and processes of identification.

The creation of ethnographic museums was intimately tied in with European colonialism and imperialism, which can be regarded as the first stages of globalisation (Prösler 1996) and played a key role in defining the basic structures of the contemporary world (dis)order. By displaying the material culture of 'non-Western' people with whom 'enlightened' Europeans came into contact during their travels of exploration, exploitation and colonization of the world, ethnographic museums presented the world's cultural diversity to national audiences. In practice, they symbolized the geopolitical, economic and scientific power that the 'exhibiting nation' had on the other parts of the world that were exhibited (Hage 1998). They staged the nation and contributed to processes of identity formation of nation-states, even in countries that did not possess a colonial empire but indirectly contributed to the imperial project (Bouquet 2001). By drawing attention to distant 'otherness',

ethnographic museums downplayed internal factors of difference, particularly class, and strengthened a sense of national unity (Bouquet 2012). In colonial times the ethnographic museum acted as a space where the 'non-Western' world was ordered and a fantasy of complete control over it was materialised (Hage 1998).

Since the second half of the twentieth century the museum of ethnography, together with the discipline of anthropology, became the object of intense criticism to which I shall return in the next chapter. Decolonisation (formally) transformed the relationship between the 'Western' and 'non-Western' world and ethnographic museums were requested to confront their colonial roots and assess the legacies of colonial encounters. Their role as 'repositories for human remains and cultural objects requested for repatriation' (Phillips 2003: 160) was strongly questioned.

Transnational migration changed the demography of European nations and modified the audiences for which ethnographic museums had to be relevant, particularly in former imperial countries whose demographic structures had been radically altered by post-World War II migration. The fierce criticisms that indigenous communities had directed at ethnographic museums in settler societies were echoed by claims of (de)colonised migrants (Durand 2010) that challenged the authority of the ethnographic museum to speak *about* and *for* them, demanding their right to narrate 'their' stories and cultures.

This intense criticism placed the museum of ethnography in a status of profound crisis. As I shall explore more fully in the next chapter, different institutions embraced

diverse strategies in order to respond to the criticism. Many attempted to give voice to those 'non-Western' others they had previously silenced by seeking to overcome the geographical distance dividing them from their 'source communities' (Peers and Brown 2003) or initiating collaborations with their diasporic members living in Europe (Durand 2010).⁴ These collaborations have had positive implications for collection interpretations by enabling museums to move away from the traditional model of speaking *about* and *for* others. Currently museums increasingly seek to speak jointly with those 'others' they (still) wish to represent.

This approach to collaborative practice generated, I suggest, a sense of illusion in the sector that collaborations and/or strategies of self-representation alone could enable ethnographic museums to overcome their colonial legacy and solve the 'problems of representation' affecting their displays. These are mostly problems connected to representing 'others' and applying either *assimilating* or *exoticizing* exhibiting strategies (Pieterse 2005). I shall return to this in chapter two. As Ames (1992: 149) suggests even 'empowering people to speak for themselves, however worthy a project' does not challenge the museum's tendency to objectify and invent culture. 'Indigenous peoples are equally prone to "inventing culture", of course, and they should have equal rights to do so' (ibid).

⁴ Digital technologies are playing a central role in enabling collaborations with 'source communities'. For example, the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge is undertaking a three year project, *Artefacts of Encounter* (2010-2013). The project uses digital technology to involve Maori communities in processes of interpretation of objects exchanged in Polynesia during cross-cultural encounters that took place during more than 40 voyages from Europe to the Americas between 1765 and 1840 (Hogsden 2010; Hogsden and Poulter 2012).

If those institutions that embraced a collaborative strategy relinquished some authorial control, they shied away from questioning their mandate and purposes. They disregarded the differences in terms of socio-political contexts and/or genealogies and power relationships that have marked the *liaisons* of migrants and ethnic minorities with museums and other public institutions in post/colonial Europe, and the diverse political goals these groups sought, and still seek, to achieve through collaborations with museums.

It could be even suggested that most of the efforts ethnographic museums have made to respond to the postcolonial critique have remained limited to the search for 'more appropriate' ways to speak about 'otherness'. As Shatanawi (2009a) notes, they have often left unchallenged the same constructions of 'otherness' and binary division of the world on which they have been structured, an issue I return to in the next chapter. This approach is particularly problematic in contemporary Europe where cultural differences are to be found not only *there* and *then* but also *here* and *now* within the borders of nation-states, particularly in 'global cities' (Sassen 2001), which makes the focus on distant cultures obsolete and politically and epistemologically problematic. Every state has their own 'others' who actively contribute to the wealth of their societies, such as post/colonial people, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

In recent years critics have highlighted the struggle of ethnographic museums to respond to what Cummins (2008: vii) calls the *multicultural challenge*, that is 'the diversity that globalization and migration have brought to societies all over the world', and engage with processes of cultural change taking place in virtually every European

society.⁵ The cohabitation of individuals with different backgrounds and ways of living is generating new cultural expressions and activating processes of dialectic transformation and negotiation of identities. The reticence to explore those phenomena suggests that ethnographic museums have not overcome their colonial legacy and are suffering from some form of 'postcolonial melancholia', which Gilroy (2006) defines as the incapability of European countries to overcome their loss of global superiority.

Striving for change

I have so far voiced the political, philosophical and epistemological weaknesses of the strategy that ethnographic museums have usually favoured in their attempts to respond to the post-colonial critique. This is not to suggest, however, that audacious attempts have not been made by certain institutions seeking to robustly renew their identity, change the relationship with the societies in which they operate and reposition themselves in the museum panorama. In recent years ethnographic museums have been closed down, merged with other museums, transformed into meeting spaces for debate or have transferred their collections to other institutions (Shatanawi 2008). In countries such as France, Sweden and the Netherlands, ethnographic museums have undertaken significant processes of renovation of their buildings and/or refurbishment of their permanent displays.⁶ At the time of writing a few major processes of renovation are taking place in Switzerland, Denmark, and

⁵ See, for example, Faber and van Dartel 2009; Föster 2008; Iervolino and Sandell forthcoming 2013.

⁶ For example, the Musée du Quai Branly (Paris, France), the Tropenmuseum and the Museum of World Culture.

Germany.⁷ A new trend is gaining ground that sees ethnographic museums changing their denomination into museums of 'world culture' or 'world arts' (Basso Peressut 2012), for example the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg that grew out of the transformation of the Ethnographic Museum of Gothenburg, and the Wereldmuseum (World Art Museum) in Rotterdam, Holland, previously known as Museum voor Land en Volkenkunde (Museum for Geography and Ethnology).

Even museums that recently underwent processes of refurbishment have usually presented their collections through the prism of geography (e.g. the Musée du Quai Branly). They have organised their permanent displays around the geographical areas of origin of the objects, often corresponding to entire continents or other geographical constructions such as 'Middle East' or 'Sub-Saharan'. As Rogoff (2010: 11) states these 'geographies' are developed from positions of power that 'name and locate and identify places in relation to themselves as the centre of the world.' Critics suggest that this approach is problematic as it compartmentalises cultures in separate pigeon-holes, thus favouring essentialist understandings of cultures (O'Neill 2004). It is based on a perspective on culture that approaches it as a static entity, a destiny or essential given, frozen in space and time (Heywood 2002). By approaching cultures through 'geographies' ethnographic museums suggest the idea that cultural differences exist in spatially defined territories. Anthropologists Gupta and Ferguson (1991, 1997) argue that the assumed isomorphism of space/place/culture is based on the simplistic idea of the existence of distinct cultures mapping onto geographical territories, often

⁷ The Musée d'ethnographie (Genève, Switzerland) and the Moesgård Museum (Aarhus, Denmark) are due to re-open in 2014. The Weltkulturen Museum (Frankfurt, Germany) announced its plan of refurbishment in 2010.

corresponding to the borders of nation-states. This idea problematically reproduces binary dichotomies – our culture/their cultures, here/there, us/them – embedded in the ‘Western’ philosophical tradition of which ethnographic museums and the discipline of anthropology are part (Hallam 2000). An approach that favours a spatialised understanding of cultural differences is problematic in contemporary multicultural societies of Europe where ‘culture difference is present “here at home” too, and...“the other” need not be exotic or far away to be other’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1991: 14). Moreover, the employment of ““geography” as a set of understandings regarding belonging and rights has clearly been masking a great many fundamental shifts in identity formation’ (Rogoff 2000: 2). This is not to suggest that cultures and cultural differences have ceased to exist. I have earlier stressed the role that culture is playing in the construction of national identities, as marker of exclusion and base of racisms.

Despite the critique of the geographical approach in critical museology and academic anthropology, this strategy remains appropriate in certain contexts, particularly in North America. The recent reinstallation of the *American Indian galleries* at the Denver Art Museum (Denver, US), which was completed in January 2011, is a case in point. When reinstalling the galleries, the Denver Art Museum was confronted with the issue of whether to maintain its traditional regional structure or to re-organise the galleries around themes. After consulting its Native American advisory board and asking visitors in focus groups about other possible configurations, it was decided to maintain the geographical organisation, dividing the galleries into nine overall regional areas. Yet, the Native American advisory board advocated the maintenance of the regional

approach, considering it as a strong identity marker and as resonating with the heritage of Native American communities. In North America this strategy is favoured by Native Americans, even those so-called 'urban Indians', because it resonates with their attachment to ancestral land and territory. When referring to visitors' responses in focus groups, the exhibition's curator - Nancy Blomberg - states that they expressed a desire to maintain the geographical approach they learned as children. Blomberg argues: 'People said, "That's interesting, but give us something that we're comfortable with first, something we can hang our hat on first, and then take us in another direction"' (MacMillan 2012).

In Europe the debate around the unviability of a *geographical strategy* in our increasingly interconnected world became heated around the middle of the last decade when institutions such as the Museum of World Culture openly questioned this approach, experimenting with the application of a *thematic strategy* to their *semi-permanent* galleries.⁸ A *thematic strategy* was chosen as it was believed to effectively question monolithic, static ideas of cultures and identities, while presenting them as processes or interpretations (Sandahl 2008). The museum decided to do away with a geographic division and organized its semi-permanent galleries according to themes. More recently, the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne (Germany) also applied a thematic strategy to its *permanent* exhibition, *People in their Worlds*. When describing the exhibition's concept, the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum's website states:

⁸ Although the museum's exhibitions have been described as *temporary* (La Rocca 2012), they may be more correctly considered semi-permanent (or semi-temporary) as they last between six months and three years. In chapter five we shall see that the museum itself employs this classification (Magnusson 2010).

The new exhibition is a departure from the usual presentation of major geographical regions in comparable museums, which gives the misleading impression of encompassing a multitude of cultures in different habitats, regions, countries and even whole continents - often over many centuries. Instead, the Cologne exhibition follows a thematic arrangement in which associated and individual themes can be approached by the visitor separately or in combination, depending on his personal interests.⁹

If the application of the thematic strategy to exhibitions is not new, contemporary approaches and discourses are more 'sophisticated' than those in the past, and address diversity per contemporary conditions and views. Yet, ethnographic museums had started applying a *thematic strategy* to their *temporary* exhibitions since the 1980s. Shelton (2006: 77) describes these exhibitions as applying 'comparative thematic approaches' and refers to the Musée d'ethnographie Neuchâtel (Switzerland) as an institution that started experimenting with this approach with the exhibition *Naître, vivre et mourir* (1981).

In the 1980 several museums in the Netherlands, including the Museon in The Hague and the Volkenkunde Museum in Rotterdam, became particularly concerned with the role that they could play in addressing the increasing diversity of Dutch society. They produced exhibitions that addressed themes related to immigration, cultural diversity, and racism, and often attempted to highlight the fictional character of a pure Dutch culture. In 1989 the Volkenkunde in Leiden also displayed a large *semi-permanent*, cross-cultural exhibition on death, which included Dutch funerary practices alongside those of many other people.

⁹ See <http://www.museenkoeln.de/rautenstrauch-joest-museum/default.asp?s=2166> (Accessed 24/06/2013).

Although mainly applying the geographical approach, in the late 1970s and 1980s the Tropenmuseum also began to use other categories, such as nation-states and political entities, which sought to undermine the ahistorical, apolitical 'ethnographic present'. During these decades the Tropenmuseum also started addressing contemporary, often controversial themes relevant to the time, sometimes sparking heated debates in the Netherlands. Writing in 1983 Lightfoot (1983: 141) states that the museum was producing 'temporary exhibitions on many subjects that would be regarded as "no go" areas in most museums.' He also maintains that the Tropenmuseum was collaborating with 'special interest groups outside the museum' and was playing 'a leading role in the battle of ideas for the new ethnographic museum' (Ibid).

For instance, in 1982 the Tropenmuseum produced the exhibition *Mother's Milk, Powder Milk* that, as Kreps (1988: 57) explains, attempted 'to establish a casual relationship between the production of milkpowder in the Netherlands and high infant mortality in developing countries.' In 1983 Nico Bogaart, the then Director of the Tropenmuseum, openly advocated a 'modern, contemporary-minded and committed ethnographic museum' (Bogaart 1983: 145), whilst stressing the importance to carry out and respect traditional ethnographic practices. He suggested that there was a necessity of conjugating the regional and thematic approaches. According to Bogaart, if the aim of ethnographic museums is to communicate understanding of current developments in the 'non-Western' world,

...Answers can only be attempted from a combination of standpoints – social, economic, cultural, political and ideological/religious – seen in the light of contemporary history and environment. Such attempts should yield a *regional* approach focusing on certain features of history, socio-economic development, behaviour patterns, etc., common to a

number of societies and countries in a particular part of the world. There should also be scope for a *thematic* approach in which attention is focused on issues of universal concern affecting the course of the world as a whole. This category includes chains of cause and effect and parallels between similar problems and phenomena discernible in different regions (Ibid).

At the end of the 1980 the Tropenmuseum produced a famous thematic *temporary* exhibition, *Black on White* (December 1989 to August 1990). The exhibition presented thousand images of black people produced in Europe and the US in the previous two centuries for everyday items, such as packaging of toothpaste, coffee, and cigars, washing powder advertising, and images from books and newspapers. *Black on White* sought to tackle a complex theme by exploring the stereotypes that white people have made of blacks. As Harrie Leyten, the exhibition curator, states (1992: 18) the exhibition demonstrated ‘an unchallenged assumption of superiority on the part of white inhabitants of Europe and North America underlying their centuries-long humiliation of blacks.’

When in 1990 *Gallery 33* opened at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (UK), it was one of the first *permanent* ‘anthropology galleries’ to apply a thematic strategy in the UK. The exhibition, still standing in the museum almost unchanged, ‘is certainly not “ethnography” in its etymological sense – the description of a people’ (Wingfield 2006: 52). It seeks to reflect the cultural diversity of Birmingham and presents a discourse about what it means to be human. It shows objects from the ethnographic collection as well as from other collections, for instance applied art and fine art, and artefacts from minority groups living in the city.

If during the last decade the employment of 'geographies' as categories to study, classify and display ethnographic collections was questioned, the application of a *thematic strategy* to *semi-permanent* exhibitions also sparked heated discussions (Colugne 2009). Nonetheless, several institutions, including the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (van Dartel 2008), began to consider the application of a *thematic strategy*. During its last refurbishment the Tropenmuseum applied this treatment to two semi-permanent exhibitions, which shall be introduced in chapter five.

Aims of the research and contribution to knowledge

It is to contemporary debates about the application of a *thematic approach* to semi-permanent exhibitions that this thesis seeks to contribute by presenting findings from case study research carried out at the Tropenmuseum and the Museum of World Culture in 2010. When referring to the latter institution in this thesis, the acronym MWC will be employed. The study investigates the ideological position on cultural diversity of the two museums and their grounded discourses on differences. In this context those discourses are relevant as they provided a rationale for experimentations with a thematic exhibiting strategy. The research closely explores three thematic exhibitions displayed at the two museums and their processes of exhibition-making. More broadly, this thesis attempts to contribute to debates around the future of ethnographic museums by seeking to move the debate beyond the search for more appropriate ways to represent 'otherness', while proposing alternative formulations of the museum of ethnography.

Kreps (2009: 4) stresses the potential of ethnographic museums to act as 'a vehicle for intercultural dialogue'. Drawing on this concept, I aim to shed new light on how ethnographic museums are using the heritage in their custody to engage with questions of belonging, shift ideas of and attitudes towards cultural differences and contribute to the articulation of contemporary collective cultures and identities resulting from the intermixing and proximity of 'national selves' with migrants and other 'ethnic others' (Kaplan 1994).

This research draws on and seeks to contribute to discussions around the crisis of ethnographic museums and problems associated with displaying ethnographic collections in museum studies and other disciplines (for example, Ames 1992; Clifford 1997; Durrans 1988; Karp and Lavine 1990; Lidchi 1997; Pieterse 2005; Thomas 2010). It seeks to particularly contribute to recent research exploring the status of ethnographic museums in contemporary Europe. Bjerregaard (forthcoming) presents research undertaken in several ethnographic museums in Europe, the US and Canada, focusing particularly on the Museum für Völkerkunde (Vienna) and the Moesgård Museum (Højbjerg, Denmark). Durand (2010) explores the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Cambridge and the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm. At the time of writing two European projects are investigating museums holding ethnographic collections. The HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) project 'Photographs, Colonial Legacy and Museums in Contemporary European Culture', a comparative study between the UK, the Netherlands and Norway, is exploring to what extent and how museums are employing photographic records of Europe's colonial past. The European project 'Ethnography Museums and World Cultures' also known as RIME (Réseau International des Musées d'Ethnographie) aims

to rethink the role ethnographic museums can play in a multicultural, global and post/colonial world 'traversed by global cultural flows that are transforming the European scenario' (La Rocca 2012: 3). Central to the project is the relationship between ethnographic museums and modernity, which has also been explored in *Fetish Modern*, a travelling exhibition launched in April 2011 that I visited at the Nàprstek Museum (Prague) in July 2012.

This research is also positioned within recent and contemporary debates in museum studies around the conception of museums as agents for social change and the representation of differences in museum exhibitions I referred to earlier.

Arriving at a positionality

Having clarified the aims of this study, I now attempt to elucidate my effort to articulate a positionality for this project and develop a theoretical perspective that will guide the definition of my research design. Rogoff (2000: 3) argues that 'the effort of arriving at a positionality, rather than the clarity of having a position, should be focused on.' She reveals her dissatisfaction with publications that begin by proclaiming the authors' 'finite' position and ideological standpoint as if they have guided their intellectual projects from the very outset, without any doubt making itself conspicuous in the process. She stresses that the process of articulating such an intellectual standpoint is neither finite nor uncomplicated, requiring 'ever-increasing doubt and clarification' (ibid).

My positionality resulted from my effort to bring together insights from a variety of disciplines, particularly postcolonial studies, political theory, anthropology and museum studies, as well as critical race theory and migration studies. I strive to develop an analysis in which no discipline prevails but some parity is achieved between them. In the pages to come I shall move back and forward between these disciplines, employ concepts that cross disciplinary boundaries and attempt to develop a 'transdisciplinary language' to reply to my research questions. The thesis seeks 'to develop a meta-disciplinary view' (Dewdney et al. 2011: 55) on the research subject in the hope to study the museum of ethnography from a new perspective.

This research builds on recent discussions in postcolonial and cultural studies, political theory and anthropology about cultures, cultural differences, identities, and (un)belonging. When developing my theoretical framework I have drawn on theories that challenge ideas of cultures as stable and bounded 'wholes', while exploring their fluidity and interstitiality, processes of cultural mixing and production of cultural differences. Several scholars such as Homi Bhabha, James Clifford, Paul Gilroy, Ralph Grillo, Ghassan Hage, Stuart Hall, Irit Rogoff, Graziella Parati, and Nina Yuval-Davis, to name a few, have authored works on migration, multiculturalism, identities, and belonging, on which I build. I have resisted the temptation of selecting one of those writers as the 'main voice' on which to draw to support my argumentations. Instead, their voices shall emerge at different points when they 'sustain' my attempts to take issues with ethnographic museums' tendencies of naturalizing questions of identities and belonging. I do not summarise the arguments of those writers within the framework of this introduction or following chapters as this felt somehow redundant

and not achievable in the space of this thesis. Hereafter, I only attempt to elucidate the concepts that played a key role in the development of my theoretical framework.

Postcolonial theory is an 'interdisciplinary political, theoretical and historical work that sets out to serve as a transnational forum for studies grounded in the historical context of colonialism as well as in the political context of contemporary problems of globalization' (Young 1998: 4). My research is evidently grounded in the second context. I have placed at the heart of my study, postcolonial concepts such as hybridity (Bhabha 1994, 1996) and new ethnicities (Hall 1988), which express dynamic and fluid ways to think of identities. They have provided me with effective conceptual tools to employ in order to challenge ethno-racial ideas of identities. Particularly, the concept of hybridity has played a key role in this research. Yet, I found it useful to think beyond fixed, binary notions of – individual and collective – identities based on ideas of cultural, racial and national purity, and to redefine the 'imagined community' living within the national borders.

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha (1994) introduces the notion of hybridity to describe the processes of cultural change and identity formation in colonial settings. He argues that hybridity takes place when elements of the coloniser and colonised, that are incommensurable, interweave producing new hybrid subject-positions. Bhabha opposes the idea of a sovereign or essential subject and turns against received, binary notions of identity, such as native/foreigner and minority/majority. He argues that subjectivity and identity are both discursively produced and can be remade in new and

innovative ways. The discursive approach sees identification as a practice of construction that never ends, always 'in process' (Hall 1996).

The application of the concept of hybridity is not restricted to previously colonial societies. Indeed, it can be effectively employed in contemporary, post/colonial contexts to explore relationships between the hegemonic social formation and minorities (particularly members of migrant groups and other subjected people), and processes of intercultural negotiations and political resistance that their proximity activates. The notion of hybridity is effective in questioning essentialising discourses presenting cultures as pure and bounded, and in challenging the idea of a homogenous national community.

If processes of hybridization question essentialising discourses and ideological movements by sustaining dialogues across differences and favouring cross-cultural alliances, they are fraught with difficulties and resistance. Yet, defensive and essentialist actions are initiated by members of hegemonic majorities wishing to protect their access to privileges and resources. Voices from the 'margins' also challenge ideas of cultural hybridization through claims of their right to be different, and by asserting the distinctiveness of their cultures and identities as a form of resistance. Their wish 'to be recognised as different, and to retain their right to practice distinctive cultures and religions' (Webner 1997: 3) points to the limitations of hybridity. It demonstrates that cultural change and resistance to change are both entangled in processes of cross-cultural exchange and hybridization.

Although the concept of hybridity has a transgressive power that questions normative binary categories used to define relationships of power within the boundaries of nations, it is not free from problems. Yet, hybridity can result in a celebration of mixing and fusion of people and cultures, or even a commodification of differences, which overlooks essentialising and defensive actions of both the hegemonic majority and minorities. Moreover, it risks generating a celebration of cultural diversity and creativity that obscures real socio-political and economic inequalities that mark the lives of minorities in the metropolitan contexts of contemporary Europe and beyond. Yet, the notion of hybridity can leave unquestioned the problems of class and racial exploitation and complex hierarchies of power that characterise contemporary societies. Hybridity presents some of the problems that, as we shall see in chapter three, mark contemporary policies of multiculturalism. As Coombes and Brah (2000: 2-3) maintain,

[hybridity] shares the problems of the kinds of tokenism which aestheticizes politics by providing endlessly differentiated cultural experiences on an expanding menu of delectation while the subjects of this feast continue to experience the kind of discrimination which makes their own material existence at best precarious and at worst intolerable.

I shall return to the problematic nature of the concept of hybridity in the concluding chapter.

My research has also been influenced by recent scholarship developed by postcolonial theorists including Bhabha (2001), Quayson (2005) and Sharpe (2005) who have turned their attention to the 'internal colonialism' practiced towards the 'internal

colonized' in 'Western' countries with long histories of diversity, such as Asian and Caribbean people living in the UK.

However, this research interprets colonialism not only as a violent or exploitative practice to which *all* European states contributed in some form or another, but also as a specific ideological formation that justified a particular way to look at the world. If colonialism formally came to an end through the process of decolonisation, its ideological formation and modes of representation are still rooted in the contemporary "'post-colonial condition" of the...world' (van Dommelen 2006: 104). In taking this line I do not want to downplay the role played by internal colonization in Europe, for instance in Ireland, Alsace, Estonia, and Finland.¹⁰ However, I aim to stress that European colonization was one of the atrocities carried out by Europeans that still affects contemporary ways of seeing the world and power relations.

Drawing on Gilroy (2004, 2006, 2008) I suggest that post/colonial Europe is still marked by the historical memory of colonialism that shapes the political, social and economic lives of European countries. Yet, the logics of (neo)colonialism represent not an exclusive mindset of former empires but rather a state of mind common to the entire 'Western' Europe affecting the relationships between 'post-colonizers' and 'post-colonized people'. During (1995 quoted in Phillips 2003: 166) describes 'post-colonizers' as people that 'if they do not identify with imperialism, at least cannot jettison the culture and tongue of the imperialist nations', while post-colonized people

¹⁰ Some European countries were themselves colonized repeatedly by their neighbouring states and forms of internal colonization were, and are still, practiced in countries such as Spain (for instance, Catalonia and Basque Country) and the UK (in the case of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

'identify with the culture destroyed by colonialism'. Gilroy (2006) suggests that nowadays not only post-colonized people are considered 'the Others' but every individual that is 'hostage to a discourse on migrancy'. He further argues:

European nations have been in many ways unable to get past their loss of global pre-eminence and how their inability to get past that loss folds into and generates all sorts of pathological features in their contemporary encounters with the strangers, the Others, the migrants who are now within Europe's borders, within the metropolitan communities (Gilroy 2006: 2).

I regard ethnographic museums as institutions suffering from some form of 'postcolonial melancholia' and experiencing a mix of shame, denial, amnesia and guilt. They seem not to have found ways to play an active role in 'the process of "working through", in the acceptance and dealing with our colonial past' (Sjørøsløv 2008: 169).

My theoretical perspective has also been influenced by recent debates in political theory and racial and ethnic studies about the political governance of diversity (for example, Kymlicka 2007b; Grillo 2007), and by the global spreading of cultural diversity discourses and cultural policies stressing the unique role that the arts and cultural institutions can play in this context.

I also attempt to bring an anthropological perspective into my study of ethnographic museums by approaching them as 'artefacts' of their society, seeking to locate them within their historical, socio-political and economic contexts and exploring how these

contexts affect the ways they operate. Being influenced by Ames (1992: 108), I have attempted to carry out 'an anthropology that is connected to power'.

Methodology

Having described the theoretical framework that guided this research, I now turn my attention to its overall methodology. I clarify my epistemological and ontological positions, the specific research design, the methods of data generation and analysis applied to answer the research questions.

Ontological and epistemological positions

The ontological perspective relates to what researchers see as the nature and essence of things in the social world (Mason 2002). Broadly, my ontological position is constructivist. I conceive social phenomena and meanings as constructed by human beings and continuously negotiated through social interactions (Creswell 2008). I see culture and cultural products as emergent realities in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction, and consider exhibitions as always constructed in ways intended to communicate particular meanings. This is not to suggest, however, that visitors have no agency in decoding exhibitions as I shall clarify in chapter six.

Epistemology is a 'theory of knowledge' that expresses what the researcher regards as evidence or knowledge of things in the social world. My epistemological position is

influenced by interpretivism and feminism, which both critique claims of objectivity and value neutrality within traditional positivist, empirical 'Western' research methods. Interpretivism is an epistemology 'concerned with understanding the social world people have produced and which they reproduce through their continuing activities' (Blaikie 2000: 115). It suggests that individuals in the social world construct meanings based 'upon their individual experience, memories and expectations' (Flowers 2009: 3). I have attempted to develop an in-depth understanding of the social contexts of the two institutions and the personal factors that might have impacted upon people's interpretations of their 'social world'. I have also been influenced by feminist work in epistemology. Since the 1980s feminist scholars have strongly criticized ideas of the objectivity and neutrality of the researcher, while striving to develop approaches to research that incorporate the researcher's positionality and situatedness. I shall return to this point later in the chapter.

A qualitative research design

The above-described ontological and epistemological positions suggest that this project belongs to the interpretative, qualitative side of the human sciences and requires the application of a qualitative research strategy. Mason (2002) argues that qualitative research is an exploratory approach to inquiry that is grounded in an epistemological position that rejects positivism and embodies a view of social reality as constantly shifting. Qualitative research can be conceived as an investigative process where the researcher enters a social reality and gradually makes sense of social

phenomena (Creswell 2008). It follows that the researcher plays a central role by functioning as the primary data collection instrument.

In undertaking this research I have applied an inductive style. I have only developed a theoretical perspective and, as result of the data collection and analysis, I have attempted to draw some theoretical generalizations, which I present in the concluding chapter. Another reason for selecting a qualitative strategy is that the study is exploratory. My literature review revealed that very little research has been published on recent non-traditional geographically-focused, particularly on thematic, semi-permanent exhibitions.

My research design was defined in accordance to the Codes of Ethics for Museums, the University of Leicester Research Ethics Code of Conduct and the School of Museum Studies Ethics Procedures. As the study involved human participants, it was subjected to the University's ethical approval.

Research questions and objectives

In a qualitative study the researcher needs to narrow the focus of the study to specific questions to be answered that form the backbone of the research design (Mason 2002). The development of the research questions has been influenced by the selection of a qualitative approach and the specific strategy of inquiry, for this project that is the *case study* method.

The **research questions** that this project seeks to address are as follows:

1. In what ways are ethnographic museums using their collections to respond to the *multicultural challenge* and to conflicting discourses about globalisation, multiculturalism and nationalism, and what challenges and opportunities are associated with this work?
2. How do museums experimenting with a thematic strategy define their broader ideological position and discourses on cultural diversity, and what are the assumptions and rationales that encourage those experimentations?
3. To what extent do thematic exhibitions overcome critiques that have been aimed at the displays of ethnographic museums, and how might they reconfigure the social in more culturally plural ways?
4. In which ways does the production of thematic exhibitions require museums to alter their 'structures of production' and established practices, and impact upon their institutional structures and human actors?
5. What implications might the research findings have for the 'future' of the museum (of ethnography) and, more broadly, for museum practice?

The **research objectives** establish and clarify the intents of the study, that is, what the researcher intends to accomplish by undertaking the research. This research aims to pursue a number of research objectives listed hereafter.

- 1) To explore how the discourses of globalisation, multiculturalism and nationalism impact on exhibitionary practices in ethnographic museums.

- 2) To examine if and how internal factors (including mission, policies, staff values and beliefs) and external factors (migrants' patterns and settlement, governmental policies) inform museums' experimental application of a thematic strategy.
- 3) To analyse the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of thematic exhibiting approaches.
- 4) To examine to what extent (if at all) a thematic strategy overcomes some of the problems that affect geographically focused displays
- 5) To identify how notions of cultures and cultural differences are encoded within thematic exhibitions and to what extent they contribute to a fluid reformulation of concepts of collective identity and culture.
- 6) To explore if the application of a thematic strategy impacts upon established museological practices and requires museums to alter their working practices and internal 'structures of production'.
- 7) To develop concepts that can inform museum practice and cultural policy-making constituencies in settings beyond my case studies and stimulate further debates surrounding the future of ethnographic museums.

Research strategy

The researcher who selects a qualitative approach shall also identify within it a specific strategy of enquiry (Creswell 2008). Strategies of inquiry are types of qualitative designs that provide specific direction for procedures in a research design and guide the process of data gathering and analysis. In this study I utilise *case studies* as the primary research strategy.

Case studies are a strategy of enquiry in which the researcher explores in depth one or a few instances of a 'naturally occurring' contemporary phenomena over which they have little control (Yin 2003) seeking to provide an account of 'events, relationships, experiences occurring in that particular instance' (Denscombe 2007: 32) or to clarify one or a set of decisions (Schramm 1971). The restriction to the study of one or a few cases enables the researcher to look deeply into them in order to gain unique insights. Moreover, case study research includes the context as a major part of the study. It does not explore only the outcomes of a certain phenomenon but also the process that led to those outcomes (ibid). By studying relationships and processes within a setting in great detail, the researcher who applies a case study method is able to explore the complexity of a given situation and disentangle the workings of the relationships and processes within the social setting under investigation.

The use of case study research involves the selection of one or a few cases from a large number of possible events, people and organisations. The criteria used for the selection and the key attributes of the cases should be made explicit, as they form the basis for any generalization (Denscombe 2007).

The Tropenmuseum and the MWC were selected as case studies as they share several commonalities, while remaining highly distinctive. Although having dissimilar genealogies and histories and being situated in two different national contexts (presented in chapters three and four), both institutions were (differently) entangled in the European colonial project. The history of the Tropenmuseum is intimately

bounded to the imperial past of the Netherlands; most of its collections were assembled in colonial times in the Dutch empire. As I shall discuss in chapter five, Sweden instead did not possess an empire outside Europe. Nonetheless, the objects held by the MWC were mostly collected in colonial times in the 'non-Western' world, often in situations of unequal power relationships and with a Eurocentric, colonialist, racist mindset (Muñoz 2008). During the last decade the two museums have attempted to overcome their colonial legacy, redefine their role in post/colonial Europe and engage with the diversity of their societies. The two institutions represent 'extreme instance' cases as they provide 'something of a contrast with the norm' (Denscombe 2007: 57) for their experimentations (although to different extents) with the production of (semi)permanent thematic exhibitions. Each of these museums has selected different themes, drawing on the uniqueness of their collections or/and distinctiveness of the cultural diversity of their societies. However, the selected museums present several characteristics typical of other institutions that might have been chosen and the findings from the case studies are likely to apply elsewhere. Moreover, they are intrinsically interesting (Stake 1995).

Case study research can be conducted using a variety of research methods. In this project ethnography has been employed as the main research method. I have been particularly influenced by Macdonald's (2002) ethnography of the Science Museum. Ethnography is a methodology that places the researcher within the settings that s/he aims to understand in depth (Willis 2007). Reeves et al. (2008) argue that the aim of ethnography is to closely explore social phenomena from *within*, and requires the researcher's direct engagement with the 'world' s/he wants to study and its social

actors. By becoming part of the setting s/he wishes to study, the case study researcher who employs an ethnographic approach can generate rich insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

I spent two weeks at each museum in 2010 (from 17 to 31 January in Amsterdam and from 9 to 22 May in Gothenburg) during which time I became part of the organisations being studied. I was granted 'staff' access to the museum buildings and 'behind-the-scenes' spaces (before 'locking-up times' at night). I was also assigned a 'working station' - in Amsterdam in Daan van Dartel's office, whilst in Gothenburg in a vacant office whose glass walls and central location in the staff area (close to director's and curators' offices and the working stations of other employees) enabled me to observe working practices, while simultaneously being 'under observation'.

At the MWC I could use the staff kitchen/dining area and also took part in the Tuesdays' staff 'breakfast meetings'.¹¹ In Amsterdam I was assigned an institutional e-mail. Moreover, my research continued after leaving the museum as I kept informally discussing its evolutions with Richard van Alphen (*Coordinator Applications Collection Digitalisation* at the Tropenmuseum) and Denise Frank (who also collaborates with the museum) who kindly hosted me during fieldwork. It should be said that at both sites, apart from the formal, tape-recorded interviews, I undertook many conversations or 'informal' interviews (for example, during lunch in the Tropenmuseum's restaurant

¹¹ These Tuesday breakfasts are organized in turn by the museum's departments and attended by the entire staff (from front office to the National Museums of World Culture, as well as by employees located in the collection store, a separate 'House'). During these meetings matters of importance to the entire institution are discussed. Once a month they are followed by an hour and half of activities, for example workshops or debates.

and in the MWC's staff dining area) which enabled me to clarify emerging issues and ask questions about events, practices, specific occurrences away from the formality of the recorder. These conversations provided me with in-depth insights into my research settings.

Once I left the field, I maintained contacts with my informants over the long term and I was able to approach them, when needed, with follow up questions and requests of supplementary material, such as photographs and internal reports. A few staff members at the two institutions, such as Adriana Muñoz at the MWC or Koos van Brakel at the Tropenmuseum, agreed to give me feedback on some of the draft chapters or other essays I utilized when writing up the thesis. During the phases of data analysis and writing, I also had the opportunities to discuss some of the preliminary findings with some staff members I met at Conferences. For instance, in October 2011 I met Mats Widbom, the then new Director of the MWC, at the Symposium 'The Hybrid Museum – The Museum as Dialogue Institution' (The Centre Franco-Norvégien en Sciences Sociales et Humaines, Paris). Widbom not only commented on my paper, but also agreed to be interviewed. However, when writing-up this thesis I have not used this interview as it was conducted more than year after my fieldwork, at a time when the MWC was undergoing substantial organisational changes. However, this conversation provided me with some insights on how the institution had been evolving since I had conducted fieldwork at the Museum.

Data Sources

One of the main advantages of case study research is that it fosters the use of both multiple data sources and methods of data collection and analysis, which aid the development of *converging lines of enquiry*, a process of 'triangulation' that assures that every finding is likely to be more accurate (Yin 2003). Within each case I used the following types of data source:

Exhibitions: I focused my investigation on the exhibitions *Destination X* at the MWC and *Travelling Tales* and *World of Music* at the Tropenmuseum. When I was not carrying out interviews or database research, I spent my time within the galleries, examining the displays, their settings and the selection and arrangement of the semiotic resources such as objects, artworks, texts, videos, sounds. I also took pictures of and video-recorded the galleries. This visual material was particularly useful once I left the field as it enabled me to 're-visit' the exhibitions during the phase of data analysis. Both institutions also provided me with copies of all the films featured in the exhibitions. This rich data enabled me to explore the exhibitions' discourses about cultural differences and ideas of belonging, and assisted my critical reading of the exhibitions.

People: Interviews represent one of the most important methods of data generation in case studies (Yin 2003). As case studies focus on contemporary phenomena within a real-life setting, they are directly or indirectly about 'human affairs' (ibid) so that they generally implicate human interventions. As I set out to explore these human affairs

through the eyes of the people involved, I attempted to gain access to their views through interviews. Members of the three exhibition teams (staff and external personnel), key managerial members and employees responsible for developing exhibiting and collecting strategies and broader ideological positions as well as for articulating institutional missions were interviewed using an open-ended approach. Although I sought to pursue a consistent line of inquiry, the stream of questions asked took a fluid and flexible format. The knowledge produced through in-depth interviews is constructed through the dialogic interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee taking place during the interview (Holstein and Gubrium 2006). I conceived the interview as a 'social interaction' (Fontana and Frey 1998) or a 'face-to-face interactionary performance' (Babbie 2007) and strived to be active and reflexive in the process of data generation.

I conducted 35 interviews in total (17 in Amsterdam and 18 in Gothenburg), each lasting 60 to 150 minutes. At the MWC I recorded a guided tour and conducted a 'double interview' with the two conservators (for practical reasons). At the Tropenmuseum I had the opportunity to conduct two interviews within the gallery spaces. In Appendix One the list of my interviewees can be found, while in Appendix Two the interview questions are provided. However, those questions were always re-adapted according to the interviewee, their position and responsibility within the organisation and/or contribution to the exhibition process. By analysing those interviews I could answer those research questions seeking to explore the assumptions and rationales that guided the exhibition teams, the broader ideological position of the institutions and discourses on cultural diversity, as well as processes of exhibition-

making and the impact of a thematic strategy on working practices and internal structures.

The interviewees were given an 'Information Sheet for Participants' and were asked to sign a 'Research Consent Form'. All but one gave me permission to use their words in connection with their real name and institutional affiliation. If only some of the interviewees 'speak' in the thesis, they all provided me with useful information that contributed to my understanding of the research settings.

Documents: I collected and analysed higher lever documents such as mission statements, policy papers (such as exhibition and collecting policies) and reports, the majority of which were available in English. By analysing these documents I gained access to the official mission, goals and strategies of the museums as well as the assumptions, rationales and beliefs guiding their exhibitionary practices. I did not approach documents as 'providing objective accounts of a state of affairs' (Bryman 2008) but as constructions always written by certain individuals for specific purposes and a specific audience (Yin 2003).

Settings and environments: On my first day of fieldwork I immersed myself in the galleries as a visitor so as to gain first-hand experience. Following this I carried out visitor observations, which provided me with some understanding of how visitors utilise the exhibitions, their behaviour, and the amount of time spent in different parts of the galleries. I acted as an observer-participant so that my role as a researcher was disclosed to the public. The MWC designed a sign, which was put in the gallery informing visitors that I was in the space making observations (Appendix Three). I

registered my observations as they occurred while being in the exhibition spaces. This information was mainly employed to guide the subsequent processes of data generation.

Data analysis

Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing and testing the evidence generated to address the research questions and the initial propositions of the study (Yin 2003). If my research design and data collection and analysis were guided by my literature review and theoretical framework, I approached the analysis of the data without fixed ideas about the nature of things and the ways they operate. The analysis of the data was undertaken in an inductive thematic manner so that the data were explored looking for key issues and concepts 'emerging' from them. I initially used qualitative data analysis software (Nvivo 8) that helped me acquire familiarity with the data and start identifying recurrent themes. However, the more the analysis progressed the more I perceived the software was more of a hindrance than a help. Probably this was due to the richness and complexity of the information, the impossibility to develop a rigid coding tree around which to structure the data, and probably my need to establish almost a 'bodily' relationship with the data. Drawing on the understanding of the data I had developed using Nvivo, I returned to the word files of the interview transcripts and found them more useful as I could visualize, next to the interview texts, ideas about their meaning and how this might relate to other issues I had jotted down in 'comment boxes' while transcribing the interviews.

Position of the researcher

As I stated earlier, I have been influenced by feminist work in epistemology. Feminist scholars have supported an epistemology of situated and accountable positioning.

Haraway (1988: 589) has notoriously argued:

...for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, situating, where partiality and non universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims...I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.

Elaborating on Haraway (1991), Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2006: 13) explain that the researcher's situated location (their personal experiences and biographies) does not operate as a barrier to knowledge production. It is exactly from a situated location that s/he may be able to see the world from a unique viewpoint, which may provide 'a "focusing device" so to speak through which we may be able to catch, see, and/or understand phenomena in ways that others cannot.' In many instances the researcher's situated location may represent the very impetus behind the selection of a research topic or the formulation of a project. By embracing these elements, the researcher may 'gain new insights and understanding, or in other words, *new knowledge*' (14). The researcher is, however, encouraged to engage in a process of strong *reflexivity*, that is in self-questioning activities during which they attempt to openly acknowledge how their positionality can serve both as a resource for the creation of new knowledge and as a hindrance. Hereafter, I attempt to clarify the

aspects of my 'situated position' that formed the original impetus behind this research project.

My research interest in the ways in which ethnographic museums engage with the representation of cultural differences and contemporary cultures and identities grew out of my own experiences of unbelonging, migrancy and living 'in-between'. I found unfamiliar the context where I grew up (i.e. the Province of Naples, Italy) and opposed the patriarchal values on which its society is founded. I had a clear sense that something was profoundly wrong and tried to challenge what others seemed not to 'see' or had come to normalise as almost *essential* to human life. I had the opportunity to 'see' the abnormality of the familiar more clearly when the EU sponsored my first (privileged) 'displacement' in Spain as an Erasmus student. When I returned 'home', I realised I would have never belonged to my 'motherland' and decided to base my life on an active, political committed construction of unbelonging. As I could not belong where I was supposed to belong, it was easier for me to live where I was not 'expected' to belong. As soon as I had the opportunity, I left for the UK. Although this displacement was neither necessary nor forced, it was less privileged than the previous as I did not have the 'validating' frame of a European programme, I could hardly speak English and this was not what my family might have hoped for. Leaving Italy and facing the unknown gave me an enormous sense of freedom and a tremendous excitement as if I was finally free to reinvent myself. But, as Parati (2006: 7) notes, 'migration is never easy'. What I had imagined would have been an exciting 'adventure' in learning a different language and familiarising myself with a different culture became a painful journey in understanding and confronting an unknown bureaucratic system, forms of

(un)belonging determined by state-control apparatuses, the failure of the process of harmonisation of higher education in the EU, and in facing misunderstanding, stereotypes, and prejudice that mark cross-cultural encounters. Particularly my close friendship with a refugee from Iraq who escaped the regime and in the post 9/11 atmosphere made Britain his new home, going through the naturalisation process to become a British citizen, was significant. Yet, it enabled me to empathize with the painful experience of discrimination and racism that migrants, particularly refugees from countries considered as synonymous with Islamic terrorism, face in 'Western' countries. Despite my 'unproblematic' nationality, my identity was often 'mistaken' (Parati 2006:43) for that of a non-European, often 'Middle Eastern' (because of my complexion), by institutions and members of the public, sometimes with unpleasant consequences. Those experiences were crucial in the development of my research interest. They enabled me to 'see' the contradictions that mark so-called democratic, multicultural societies around issues of migration and cultural diversity. I learnt first hand that factors such as nationality, religion, appearance, fluency in a language, and accent may facilitate the inclusion of some foreigners, while decreeing the exclusion of others.

My migration became the 'anthropological context' where I began to explore 'cultures' and 'cultural identities' and pay attention to the continuous negotiations between languages, cultures and worldviews that have come to represent 'the political and cultural condition of my life' (Rogoff 2000: 6). I also found myself caught in a complex process of self-realisation and had to confront my suppressed 'rootedness' and the subtle ways in which my cultural background was (unconsciously) shaping who I was.

My interest started moving from the personal to the collective; societal negotiations of differences became my 'vexed questions' that required major intellectual attention and urged me to return to research. I was naturally drawn to certain literature in the field of postcolonial studies, anthropology, political theory, cultural studies that came to form the theoretical backbone of this thesis.

Because of my personal belief in the potential of museums and other cultural institutions to contribute towards a more equitable society, the museum became the most obvious 'context' (to me at least) within which to locate my investigation. I believe that, by drawing on the natural predisposition to the interculturality of arts, museums can be successful where alternative strategies are often unsuccessful. However, during my visits to European museums and in my research I identified a tendency to represent minority cultures and cultural differences in static ways, which do not give justice to processes of negotiation and hybridisation involved in the experience of migration, and fail to represent the fluid cultures of the 'in-between', people like me who are tied to several 'cultures'.

Today I feel I belong to many places and none at the same time. My attachments to specific cultural, political, and religious 'locations' are linked to the people, experiences and opportunities that have marked my last seven years of restless (intellectual, psychological and physical) movements. If some of these movements originated from my (privileged) status as a PhD researcher, many have resulted from my wish to continue placing myself in uncomfortable, 'foreign' contexts where I was required to question myself and attempt to overcome cultural, linguistic, socio-political, and

religious barriers. Within the latter category falls my decision to work (while studying for my PhD) as a youth worker in a deprived, white working-class estate located in the outskirts of Leicester, where I kept being reminded of my 'otherness'. This experience was *my attempt* to overcome 'the abstraction of the humanities from realities of social world' (Bennett 2006: 66) and remind myself of the realism and complexity of the matters I have attempted to tackle at an intellectual level.

It is from this 'location' that I began my research, with some anger but also with a real wish to contribute. The above-mentioned personal experiences provided me with a sort of 'insider perspective' of the positive implications of cultural diversity and its complexities, as well as the constitutions that can determine both belonging and unbelonging. Such an insider perspective, I believe, was much needed in museological scholarship dealing with the subject of diversity. Hereafter, I explain the structure of this thesis.

Structure

This introductory chapter has attempted to clarify the rationale of this research and position the project within contemporary debates about globalisation, multiculturalism and nationalism and their associated questions of identity and belonging. I also provide a justification for the decision to focus on ethnographic museums located in post/colonial Europe and investigate recent experimentations with the application of a thematic strategy to semi-permanent exhibitions. The chapter also describes the methodology and research design of the project. It clarifies the aims

of the study and the research questions and objectives, making the case for a qualitative research design and an ethnographic case study research strategy. Finally, I engaged in a process of 'strong reflexivity' and described my positionality.

Chapter two takes a historical perspective and presents a brief overview of the history of the museum of ethnography, focusing on its connection with European colonialism and the discipline of anthropology. It attempts to situate the history of the museum of ethnography in terms of post/colonial trajectories, and to elucidate how it has sought to respond to the political and socio-cultural changes taking place in post-colonial times. Finally, the chapter examines the recent and contemporary strategies applied by some institutions in an attempt to remain relevant in contemporary Europe.

Chapter three moves its focus away from the museum of ethnography by looking at the intersection between policies of governance of diversity and museum practices. It introduces the policies of management of diversity that since the second half of the last century plural 'Western' states have developed in an attempt to deal with the challenges arising from contemporary migration and its resulting social and cultural diversity. It then investigates museum practices, particularly exhibitions, taking as a point of entry *national* policies for the governance of diversity. The chapter concludes by discussing museums' recent attempts to develop alternative forms of representation of cultural diversity framed by notions of interculturalism, transculturalism and hybridity.

Chapter four and five describe the two institutions used as case studies for this research, the Tropenmuseum and the Museum of World Culture respectively. Drawing on published material and largely on data generated during fieldwork, the chapters attempt to illuminate the museums' broader ideological position and discourses on cultural diversity and the assumptions and rationales that encouraged experimentations with a thematic strategy. The chapters present a brief history of the two institutions, and situate the museums in the broader socio-political contexts in which they are located, the Netherlands and Sweden respectively. They seek to illuminate how the two organisations are altering their exhibitionary practices and discourses about diversity.

In chapter six I sharpen the focal point of my investigation by focusing on the three semi-permanent exhibitions I closely explored at the two case study museums. Drawing on my critical reading of the exhibitions as well as on empirical data generated during fieldwork, the chapter explores how the application of a thematic strategy shaped the displays. In particular, it presents themes and patterns that emerged from the data which help elucidate to what extent and how a thematic approach challenges conventional notions of cultures and prevailing understandings of cultural diversity. The chapter also looks at how the exhibitions articulate political projects of belonging alternative to the hegemonic nationalist project.

In chapter seven I move my attention to the exhibitionary processes. By focusing on the teams that produced the exhibitions, the chapter attempts to highlight the negotiations across expertise, disciplinary boundaries, and power relationships that

took place during the processes of production. The intention is to explore to what extent and how experimentations with a thematic strategy impacted upon established museological practices, modified power relationships within the organisations and demanded the museums to alter conventional working practices. The chapter also seeks to highlight forms of resistance that those experiments encountered. It draws attention to the difficulties that museums face when attempting to challenge the *status quo* and overcome rooted assumptions within the sector of what represents 'appropriate' practices.

The concluding chapter brings together the findings of my research and attempts to consider their broader implications for museological (particularly exhibitionary) practices in other settings beyond the case studies. It aims to move *beyond* the critical analysis by seeking to imagine alternative formulations for the museum of ethnography. The chapter attempts to envisage the skills and expertise as well as alterations of working practices and organisational structures that might enable ethnographic museums to move away from their endemic tendency to represent 'other' cultures and their complicity with neo-colonial discourses.

It is my hope that this research will point to new futures for the museum of ethnography and draw attention to the ways in which today's museums can more responsibly and morally represent cultures and cultural differences. I have neither the illusion nor the wish to generate consensus. Instead I aim to spark more debate and question established ideas about (ethnographic) museums' role in contemporary Europe, conventional museological practices and appropriate forms of representation

of 'national' and minority cultures. I wish to spark what Lynch (2011b: 156) calls 'creative conflict' and challenge established representations of cultural diversity that divide 'us' and 'them' and favour simplistic, patronizing, exclusivist and nationalistic constructions of cultures. Above all, I hope the reader will enjoy the 'journey'.

2. Ethnographic museums and their struggle in post/colonial Europe

This chapter focuses on the context or site within which the research is located: the museum of ethnography. By taking a historical approach, it presents background and contextual information so as to situate the developments of the museum of ethnography in terms of colonial/post-colonial trajectories. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first part a brief history of the museum of ethnography is presented, highlighting its connection with European colonialism and the discipline of anthropology. The role that ethnographic museums have played in constructing ideas of the 'other' and the 'self' is also discussed. The second section examines the most relevant socio-political factors that have affected the museum of ethnography in the decades after the Second World War. In the third section the dilemmas that mark ethnographic museums and their practices are analysed. The fourth section focuses on ethnographic museums' recent attempts to react to the dynamics of an increasingly multicultural Europe. It presents the strategies applied by institutions seeking to remain relevant in contemporary post/colonial times.

The birth of (public) ethnographic museums

Ethnographic museums can be considered, as Bouquet (2012) suggests, an 'invention' of the nineteenth century. Yet, they were established as part of the

nineteenth-century 'exhibitionary complex' (Bennett 1988; 1995).¹ If 'non-Western' objects had long inhabited European cabinets of curiosities, it was only in the nineteenth century that they were displayed in *specialist* museums to entertain and educate the 'general public' of European cities (Bouquet 2012).

Shelton (2006: 64) argues that the first museums were built in Europe to house ethnographic collections in two waves. The first wave (1849–1884) saw the opening of the majority of Europe's larger ethnographic museums.² Those institutions were strongly indebted to collections of 'exotic' objects that had found their way into the sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century royal cabinets of curiosities (Köpke 2000: 32). The museums that opened during the second wave (1890–1931) were established under a 'colonial paradigm'. They were influenced by 'colonial ideologies, policies and aspirations' (Shelton 2006: 65) that justified the European domination over the rest of the world.³ Indeed those decades witnessed a fierce rivalry between European powers over the control of 'non-Western' territories. Ethnographic museums functioned as public stages where the 'spoils' of expansionist ventures overseas were showcased. As ter Keurs (2007) argues, the story of colonial collecting was marked by several contradictions, particularly tensions between Europeans' willingness to subjugate 'other' people and ethnographic museums' declared intention to celebrate their cultures.

¹ The term refers to several nineteenth-century exhibitionary forms, including department stores, expositions, museums and art galleries.

² Among others, the Royal Ethnographic Museum of Copenhagen opened in 1849, the Gothenburg Museum in 1861, the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde in 1873, the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro (Paris) in 1878, the Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford) in 1883, the Museum voor Land-en Volkenkunde (Rotterdam) in 1883 and the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in 1884.

³ For instance, the Imperial Institute (London) was established in 1893, the Koloniaal Museum (later Tropenmuseum) in 1910, the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale (near Brussels) in 1891, the Musée des Colonies (Paris) in 1931, later the Musée des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie.

The objects that ended up in ethnographic museums were dissimilar in nature, being collected by diverse individuals including travellers, soldiers, colonial administrators, missionaries and researchers (van Dartel 2008). Ethnographic collections were chaotically assembled, frequently according to accidental circumstances (Shelton 2000). Processes of rationalisation of these collections were often initiated *after* objects had been incoherently assembled.

McMullen (2009: 69) suggests that European museums displaying 'non-Western' objects 'vacillated between representing others, colonial and imperial role, and Western hegemony.' They sought to respond to the demand for representation created by colonial expansion of how 'other' peoples lived in faraway places (Pimpaneau 2000). The act of gazing at 'other' (often colonised) peoples contributed to constructing a new sense of (national) identity amongst the audience (Bouquet 2012). Bennett (1988) maintains that, as one of the institutions comprising the 'exhibitionary complex', the ethnographic museum set the exotic 'other' as a category of visual spectacle, thus enabling the audience to imagine itself as homogenous, white and largely European. Anderson (1983) also points to the role that museums played in constructing nations (and empires) in the nineteenth century, circulating knowledge about their 'imagined communities'. Ethnographic displays gave material shape to 'Western' ideas of 'otherness' (Hallam and Street 2000) and accentuated visitors' pride 'in belonging to a Western nation' (Únsal 2008: 65). Colonies were presented as an extension of the nation and colonialism as a civilizing moral mission carried out by Europeans to bring progress and liberalism to 'other' peoples occupying earlier stages

of cultural development (ibid). It could be suggested that in ethnographic museums the dynamics of power between 'Western' and 'non-Western' world as well as between European nations were acted out publicly.

Since their establishment, ethnographic museums, as Pimpaneau (2000: 27) maintains, stood 'at the cross-roads between scientific research and colonial heritage.' They gave expression to the late-eighteenth-century interest in the universal study of humankind (Bouquet 2012). The birth of independent ethnographic museums and the emergence of ethnographica as a separate collection category were closely connected to the development of the science of humankind – anthropology. Hereafter, I briefly outline the relationship between the discipline of anthropology and its museum branch.⁴

(Ethnographic) museums and the discipline of anthropology

In the nineteenth-century the development of object-based epistemologies in human sciences⁵ made museums particularly important institutions (Herane 2005). In the late nineteenth and early twenty centuries museums became important research centres (Philipps 2003). They were key sites for the development of anthropology's mainstream paradigms, particularly in countries such as Britain, Germany and Denmark and (to a lesser extent) the United States (Shelton 2006). Museum anthropologists used museum artefacts to support the development of evolutionary

⁴ It should be said that the relationship between the discipline of anthropology and the museum (of ethnography) has not been alike in every European nation, being shaped by historical, socio-political, and scientific factors specific to each national context (see, for example, Senegal 2000). It is beyond the scope of this chapter, however, to examine the relationship in specific national contexts.

⁵ Object-based epistemological assumptions derived from positivism.

and diffusionist anthropology (González et al. 2000). Diffusionism analysed objects to gain evidence of the movement and diffusion of cultural traits from one society to another. Evolutionary anthropology developed in ethnographic (and archeological) museums through the employment of 'natural science modes' (Shelton 2000: 143). By presenting 'other' people as occupying earlier stages of the evolutionary pyramid, evolutionary anthropology functioned as an early criterion that enabled the ranking of societies (Únsal 2008). Evolutionism 'served as a master narrative' (Shelton 2000: 143) that provided justification for forms of external and internal colonialism (Shelton 2006). Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries 'evolutionism and diffusionism' was, as Shelton (2000: 157-160) suggests, one of the principal 'imageries' underlying the assemblage of ethnographic objects (together with 'curiosity' and 'empirical functionalism').

These early anthropological theories were applied to museums' exhibitionary praxes and classification systems. Many museums organised their ethnographic collections according to evolutionary perspectives, while a few institutions applied other strategies of display, such as geographical-cultural (e.g. British Museum) and typological classifications, for instance the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. Augustus Pitt Rivers developed the typological system of classification (still applied at the Museum today), drawing on his interest in the evolution of material culture (particularly firearms) and in social evolutionism (primarily Herbert Spencer's theories). As Bennett explains (1988: 73) the typological system 'grouped together all objects of a similar nature, irrespective of their ethnographic groupings, in an evolutionary series leading from the simple to the complex.'

Sturtevant (1969: 621-625) identifies three periods in the history of the relationship between the discipline of anthropology and 'its museum'. During the 'Museum Period' (1840–1890) anthropological research was carried out in museums and no university training was offered in anthropology. The 'Museum-University Period' (1890s-1920s) registered a shift from museum anthropology to university anthropology. Universities started offering formal training in anthropology. Frequently academic anthropologists also held museum appointments.⁶ Museum collections remained, however, important for research. The 'University Period of anthropology' began around 1920 and saw the reorientation of anthropology *away* from the study of material culture. According to González et al. (2000: 108), this shift was due to 'the theoretical emphasis on cultures in the United States and society in England and the emergence of a more behaviourally based anthropology.' Anthropology started focusing on the study of small-scale societies, which led to the abandonment of the evolutionary and diffusionist paradigms and the application of ahistorical models (Henare 2005). The adoption of functionalism marked a major shift in anthropological practice towards the field. The empirical 'fieldwork method' became the scientific approach specific to the study of cultures and societies (Shelton 2000).⁷ Anthropologists started conducting long-term fieldwork during which a specific society or ethnic group was studied. Shelton (1999: 13) states that society was conceived as an 'insular and self-regulating ensemble of

⁶ For instance, Edward Tylor, Keeper of the Oxford Museum [of Natural History] since 1882 (into which the Pitt-Rivers Collection was included), was appointed first professor of anthropology at the University of Oxford in 1895. Between 1895 and 1905 Franz Boas, the founder of academic anthropology in the United States, worked at both the Columbia University and the American Museum of Natural History.

⁷ Henare (2005: 211) argues that historians disagree on the timing of anthropology's 'turn' towards the field. Some critics point to 1922 (when Radcliffe-Brown's and Malinowski's major monographs were published), whilst others argue that the 'turn' happened earlier, exactly in 1898 with the Torres Strait Expedition.

interrelated institutions and belief systems'. He notes that this notion of society represents 'by far the most enduring legacy in museum representation of other cultures' (ibid). The turn toward the field resulted in the definitive break between museums and anthropology. Ethnographic museums lost their function as active research sites (Phillips 2003: 162) being 'abandoned to material culture studies' (Shelton 2006: 72). If the majority of ethnographic displays continued to be organised according to evolutionary perspectives, a few institutions created functionalist displays that reflected anthropology's move from grand narratives to 'particularising and essentialist representations of the other' (Shelton 2000: 179).

Although still applied to museum disciplines, functionalism started losing support in academic circles after the Second World War. Anthropology was influenced by the rise of structuralism, which regarded language as 'the model *par excellence* for understanding social phenomena' (Henare 2005: 259). Particularly Lévi-Strauss's (1963) work further moved anthropology 'away from artefact-based research towards the study of the "deep structures" of the human mind' (ibid). In the 1980s Marxist anthropologists attempted to reintroduce aspects of materialism by blending Marxism with structuralist ideas. They studied things focusing on their role in social structures. Appadurai (1986) and Thomas (1991) explored the 'politics of value', arguing that value derives from the 'socio-political interactions of persons and things' (Henare 2005: 266). Shelton (2000: 143) maintains, however, that Marxist anthropology 'simply signalled a change in political allegiances, without challenging the epistemological basis which allowed them to privilege their discourses above others...' The above-

mentioned theoretical approaches strongly influenced how museum anthropologists studied objects during the late twentieth century.

However, the post-war decades also witnessed the release of decolonising energies that initiated the 'postcolonial critique', which affected disciplines through the humanities and social sciences, particularly anthropology. Critiques focused on anthropology's methodologies and practices (particularly the 'fieldwork method') and its cultural products (especially texts and museum displays). Questions of representation, power, and transparency came to the fore giving impetus to the 'crisis in representation' (Shannon 2009: 221). The authority of ethnographic museums to represent and interpret 'other' cultures was strongly contested.

In 1986 two seminal texts were published that illustrated the discomfort that characterised the discipline of anthropology and its museum branch in the 1980s. Edited by Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture* critically analysed the main product of anthropological research, ethnography. The book suggests that 'forms of representation actively constitute subjects in relations of power' (Clifford 2012: 423). It argues that anthropological texts produced imaginary 'others' and created 'ethnographic authority' using stylistic devices and allegorical patterns.⁸ In addition, Ames published *Museums, the Public and Anthropology* that questioned the very existence of both anthropology and museums. In the 1990s more texts were published

⁸ See Clifford (1988).

exploring the problems of representation that affected anthropology, and calling for a reconfiguration of the discipline.⁹

In the 1990s a large amount of material was also produced in the field of museum studies on problems of representation and ownership issues (particularly of human remains and sacred objects). The role museums played within their societies went under examination (Bennett 1990; Vergo 1989; Hooper-Greenhill 1989). Museums were analysed as sites where power is negotiated through representations and narratives (Bennett 1992, Kahn 1995, Macdonald 1998). Their tendency to exclude or marginalize the voices of particular groups (including, for example, indigenous peoples, migrants, racial and ethnic minorities, women and disabled people) was criticised (Macdonald 2006). Since the 1960s those groups had begun to make claims for recognition and justice (Clifford 2012). Indigenous peoples made pressure for the restitution of their materials or claimed the control over their interpretation (Simpson 1996), whilst migrant and minority groups made demands for their contribution to the history of European nation-states to be acknowledged (Thomas 2010). In the 1990s several conferences were organised and edited volumes were published examining the museum's crisis, including *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Karp and Lavine 1991) and *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Karp et al. 1992).¹⁰ Museums sought to react to the crisis by embarking upon processes of decolonisation (Taylor 1995) and adopting more

⁹ For instance, Ames 1992, Holmes and Marcus 2005, Clifford 1997, Marcus 1998, Marcus and Fisher 1999.

¹⁰ The former was inspired by 'The Poetics and Politics of Representation' conference (September 1988), while the 'Museums and Communities' conference (March 1990) resulted in the latter book.

inclusive exhibitionary and collecting practices (Simpson 1996). Ethnographic museums were seriously implicated in these debates, because of their focus on the representation of 'other' peoples, their tendency to silence their voices, and their implication in post/colonial power relationships.

The academic fervour of the late-twentieth-century did not generate, however, a *substantial* re-convergence between museums and academic anthropologies. If new theoretical orientations and methodologies were increasingly introduced resulting 'in different types of anthropologies being done' (Kurin 1997: 84), those innovative developments did not strongly inform museum practices. Durrans (1988: 155-156), for instance, argues:

While academic and 'applied' anthropologists are now engaged in an enormous variety of research programmes in societies of different kinds, their museum counterparts are still largely preoccupied with relatively small-scale 'tribal' and exotic cultures.

Jamin (2000) likewise maintains that the most relevant developments of the discipline have been initiated by academic anthropologists, having little or no effect on ethnographic museums.

Shelton (2006: 74) accurately notes, however, that the intellectual turmoil of last decades induced some anthropologists 'to turn their attention to the museum once again.' Bouquet (2012) points to the 1980s as the beginning of a reappearance of theoretical interest in material culture. This turn *back* to material culture was, as

Dudley maintains (2011: 3-4), part of a wider effort to relocate museum objects at the centre of object theory. She refers to material culture research that, during last decades, has impacted more greatly on museum studies, including biographical and social life approaches to objects (e.g. Pearce 1992, 1995), the field of anthropology of art (for instance Morphy 1991; Morphy and Perkins 2006) and phenomenologically informed approaches (such as Ingold 2000; Tilley 2004). In recent years increasing attention has been paid to *museum studies* of objects (particularly studies of people-object engagements), which is further bringing museums *back* at the centre of material culture studies (Dudley 2009, 2012; Dudley et al. 2011, 2012).

Bouquet (2012: 81) also notes that since the turn of the twenty-first century 'a dramatic reconvergence between academic and museum anthropologies' has taken place, for instance, at the University of Oxford. She argues that 'the reinvention of the relationship between the museum and academic anthropology is producing new knowledge about ethnographic collections...' (2006: 9). Indeed, in recent years museum-based anthropology has flourished at the Pitt River Museum (Peers and Brown 2003). It could be suggested, however, that this research has left unchallenged ethnographic museums' traditional *outward* focus on the study, collection, and display of 'non-Western' cultures.

From my perspective, the most interesting anthropological research has been conducted by academic anthropologists who have carried out anthropologies *of* museums. This research has shifted the focus from the study of the material culture of 'non-Western' people to 'an ethnographically-informed anthropology of museums...'

(González et al. 2000: 107). Two notable examples of ethnographically-informed anthropologies of museums are Macdonald's (2002) ethnography of exhibiting-making and Katriel's (1997) ethnography of guided tours. Bouquet (2012: 95) suggests that an anthropology of museums fits into recent developments in material culture studies (highlighted above) as well as in visual cultural studies.

It could be suggested, nonetheless, that methodological and theoretical developments in innovative subfields of anthropology have as yet been ignored by ethnographic museums. If contemporary anthropological research and theory (for instance around notions of identity, migration, nationalism, 'race') are increasingly shaping museum studies (Dias 2000), they have informed the exhibiting and collecting practices of *only* a few ethnographic museums (mainly through the work of progressive scholar-practitioners).¹¹ They have had little impact on the majority of ethnographic museums, which often continue to produce what Dias (2000: 95) describes as 'monographic exhibitions' focusing 'on a particular culture or specific ethnic group without any cross-cultural comparative and thematic exhibits.' Apart from a few notable exceptions, ethnographic museums have rarely used their collections to encourage visitors' critical examination of their society and its multicultural dimension. An effective collaboration between anthropology (particularly its more innovative sub-fields, for example, urban anthropology)¹² and ethnographic museums seems to offer one fruitful way forward.¹³

Such collaboration, I suggest, would enable ethnographic museums to engage with

¹¹ For instance, Nuno Porto at the Museu de Antropologia at the Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal or Anthony Shelton at MOA, Vancouver.

¹² See, for example, Basham (1978) and Hannerz (1980).

¹³ The applied research that Alaki Wali is conducting at the Chicago Field Museum through the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (CCUC) represents a concrete, fascinating example of the positive implications of effective collaborations between ethnographic museums and the discipline of anthropology.

their socio-cultural environment and bring reflection on contemporary socio-political matters such as racism, nationalism and migration. As 'museums are embedded in the social, economic and political complexities of contemporary societies' (Ames 1994: 98), they represent effective platforms from which to study the socio-cultural environment they are located in, thus being again critical sites of contemporary anthropological research. I shall further expand on this in the concluding chapter. I now turn my attention to one of the ideas that emerged in the last decades of intense critical enquiry, that is ethnographic museums' implication in constructing notions of the 'other' and the 'self'.

Constructing the 'other' and the 'self'

Karp (1991a: 15) has famously noted that museum exhibitions are 'privileged arenas for presenting images of the self and "other"'. He argues that the representation of the 'other' has usually been constructed on a paradox in both anthropological discourse and museums' displays (1991b: 374). The 'other' has been portrayed in negative terms 'as lacking the quality of dominant, usually colonial, cultural groups', while also stressing positive associations (ibid). Karp (ibid: 375-376) names an exhibiting strategy focusing on cultural differences *exoticizing*, while one that stresses similarities *assimilating*. By representing a culture from the point of view of another culture, both strategies maintain an outsider perspective that impedes a connection of subjectivities. They create distance between visitors and the people represented. 'Whether we domesticate or exoticise others, we still interpret cultural

differences in terms of our own familiarity, comfort or distance from what we are viewing. Often we do both at the same time' (Karp and Kratz 2000: 207).

No genre of museums that exhibits cultures escapes the problems of representation and is bound to find itself enmeshed in the problems connected to *exoticizing* and *assimilating* strategies (Karp 1991b: 378). However, particularly museums devoted to the representation of 'other' cultures struggle with these problems. As Pieterse (2005: 163) argues, since their establishment ethnographic museums have been 'particularly concerned with discourses about "others"'. Their 'obsession' with the 'other' has guided their tireless study, collection and display of faraway cultures. Pieterse (169) maintains that *exoticizing* and *assimilating* approaches are hegemonic strategies that, taking two opposite roads, reiterate old notions of 'otherness'. He notes that *exoticizing* or *assimilating* exhibiting strategies continue to be employed in ethnographic museums. Drawing on Karp (1991b), Pieterse refers to the *in-situ* approach as an example of *exoticizing* exhibiting strategy and to the art-type approach (discussed later in the chapter), which presents 'non-Western' artefacts as fine art, as the most pervasive assimilating strategy. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991: 389) describes the *in-situ* approach as an exhibiting strategy that practices the 'art of mimesis' by producing environmental and recreative displays. It attempts to create realistic representations of the world in the gallery space using instruments such as dioramas or stage sets. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (ibid) suggests that *in-situ* displays 'appeal to those who argue that cultures are coherent wholes in their own right...' She stresses that "'wholes" are not given but constituted, and often they are hotly contested' (ibid). Indeed *in-situ* displays are not neutral as they are created by the ethnographer. It

could be even argued, as Durrans (1988: 162) does, that the utmost realism of *in-situ* displays achieves the opposite effect of stressing their artificiality.

Museums and exhibitions play important roles in enabling people to construct their own sense of (personal and collective) identity. Karp and Kratz (2000: 194) acknowledge that cultural identities are always constructed through the simultaneous combination of exaggerated differences and the assertion of similarity. The representation of cultural 'others' in museum exhibitions is instrumental in the formation of individual and collective identities (ibid). Karp and Kratz (195) also state that, through museums and exhibitions, imaginary 'others' are not simply *represented* but rather *invented* together 'with imaginary cultural selves to accompany them'. By representing cultural 'others', museum exhibitions provide visitors with opportunities to imagine themselves as a homogenous entity.

It could be suggested that today essentialist notions concerning both the 'other/s' and the 'self' still pervade the displays of some ethnographic museums. Pieterse (2005: 170) argues persuasively that the dichotomy 'self' and 'other' is increasingly outdated in a contemporary post/colonial, global and plural world. Yet, decolonisation, globalisation, multiculturalism have destabilized this dichotomy making room for new identity formations, such as transnational and diaspora identities. Nevertheless, ethnographic museums often reiterate binary dichotomies 'self'/'other/s', 'us'/'them', minority/majority, and citizen/foreigner. If differentiating between the 'self' and the 'other' is a critical part of the process of constructing personal and collective identities, it is 'a potential source of error' (Durrans, 1988: 145) and can even generate divisions.

The reiteration of binary dichotomies in museum displays is utterly problematic in

contemporary European societies characterised by increasing cultural diversity. By perpetuating those dichotomies, ethnographic museums leave unchallenged the power imbalance between majority society and minority groups. They preserve the hegemony of the majority over the definition of national cultures, identities, and resources. I now briefly turn to the main historic forces for changes that since the second half of the twentieth century have placed ethnographic museums in a 'state of crisis': decolonisation, multiculturalism and globalisation.

Factors of change in post-war Europe

It could be suggested that decolonisation, globalisation and the rise of multiculturalism are the three most influential factors of change that since the 1960s have shifted power relationships and discursive locations at global and local levels. Clifford (2012: 421) describes globalisation and decolonisation as 'two unfinished, postwar historical forces working in tension and synergy' that have contributed 'to decenter the West, to "provincialize Europe"' (423). As these forces have strongly impacted upon ethnographic museums, they deserve further attention.

The achievement of formal independence by colonies in Asia and Africa in the post-war decades represents the historical event that marked the beginning of decolonising processes. Decolonisation radically altered (formally *at least*) the power relationship between former colonies and post-imperial countries, centres and peripheries, the 'West' and the 'Rest'. It initiated a 'new set of geographical and cultural movements among the ex-colonies and the West' (Behdad 2005: 396). Housing collections mostly

assembled in former colonies, their fate was, and still is, 'closely tied to the vicissitudes of colonial and postcolonial history' (Shelton 2006: 73). Ethnographic museums 'entered in a state of *emerging crisis*' (dos Santos 2008: 41) to which they reacted by seeking to get rid of their colonial aura. They sought to alter the ways they function and their relationships with the cultures represented (Simpson 1996: 1). While some institutions introduced new collecting and exhibiting approaches, others such as the Colonial Museum (to be Tropenmuseum) changed their names that carried colonial connotations (chapter four). The end of colonialism did not coincide, however, with the disappearance of a colonial mindset. Pieterse (2005: 177) notes that 'colonialism is behind us, but repressed rather than assimilated.' If colonialism had *formally* ended, a Eurocentric perspective continued to guide, and still guides, the practices of ethnographic museums. Indeed, in post/colonial times the assemblage of 'non-Western' objects has been often driven, as Shatanawi suggests (2009b), by the notion of development cooperation, which can be regarded as a continuation of the colonial discourse. However, decolonisation should be considered, as Clifford (2012: 425) rightly stresses, an unfinished historical process, a 'recurring history – blocked diverted, continually reinvented.' Yet, decolonising energies are destined to 'reemerge in unexpected sites and forms' (ibid), thus continuing the inexorable process of decentering of the 'West'. This process is certain to affect (ethnographic) museums in the years to come.

Critics point to the post-war rise of globalisation as another force that has strongly affected ethnographic museums, exacerbating their status of crisis (van Dartel 2009a; Shatanawi 2009a). Advancements in technologies of transportation, communication

and information (particularly the Internet), increasing possibilities for global tourism and multiplying global connectivities have made the world smaller. According to Faber and van Dartel (2009), these circumstances have diluted the importance of ethnographic museums as institutions of knowledge presentation about 'non-Western' societies. Today they are *only* one of the 'instruments' through which information about faraway societies can be obtained. Van Dartel (2009b) even maintains that other media are probably more effective as means of information provision about the 'non-Western' world. Shelton (2001: 222) stresses that ethnographic museums 'must, more than any others, chart their way through the political complexities and ethical compromises that globalisation is unleashing.'

The third epochal shift that has affected ethnographic museums is multiculturalism (Pieterse 2005), as I highlighted in the introduction. In the post-war years almost all European countries experienced a shortage of workforce, which they overcame by drawing on different sources of labour migration depending on their history. Ex-colonial empires recruited post/colonial peoples who were soon joined by migrants coming from Southern Europe. The migration of the post-war decades and, more strongly, of the last decade has altered the demographic, socio-political and cultural structures of virtually every European society (Gropas and Triandafyllidou 2007). Ethnographic museums have been faced with the challenge of *how* to cope with multicultural societies (dos Santos 2008: 48). I shall further expand on debates about 'multiculturalism' and their impact on museum practice in the next chapter.

Today ethnographic museums often still refrain from responding to the changes activated by postcolonialism, multiculturalism and globalisation. They continue to act as self-appointed keepers and interpreters of 'non-Western cultures', which they represent in ways that enable visitors to look at them only superficially from a 'safe distance' (Köpke 2000: 33). As Rassool (2009) notes, contemporary ethnographic museums often apply exhibitionary praxes grounded in colonial legacies (especially those associated with old-fashioned positivist frameworks of ethnography and racial science), while shying away from engaging with their own socio-cultural environment. Their exhibiting strategies risk generating anger and discontent, particularly amongst people inhabiting Europe whose origins lay outside the continent. It could be suggested that in the years to come ethnographic museums wishing to avoid the risk of obsolescence (Colugne 2009) will need to respond to those factors of change. Moreover, they will need to seriously consider and confront some dilemmas underpinning their practices, which I discuss hereafter.

Dilemmas of ethnographic museums

One of the dilemmas that has marked, and still marks, ethnographic museums is how they can overcome their tendency to essentialize and totalize 'other' cultures.¹⁴ Legêne (2007: 225) suggests that essentializing means 'showing the quintessence of a culture', while totalizing means 'seeing the whole through the parts' (ibid). This tendency can still be detected in contemporary displays of some institutions, which depict cultures as essences by treating them monolithically. They present

¹⁴ Anthropologists have admitted their complicity in essentialising and totalising (Fabian 1993).

ethnographica as metaphors for an entire culture and representation of a collective identity, an approach that obscures differences within cultures and does not do justice to the dynamic nature of culture (Baldwin et al. 2005). Shatanawi (2009a: 36) suggests that essentialism results from the internal structure of ethnographic museums organised around continents or particular geographical areas of the 'non Western' world.¹⁵

Another pitfall of ethnographic museums is their tendency to resort to stereotypes when representing 'other' cultures (Ames 1992). Kratz (2002: 105) explains that 'social stereotypes categorize and characterize people as types, whether focused on ethnicity, gender, class, race, or other social groups and identities. They summarize and generalize but are never neutral.' Whether they present positive or negative images, stereotypes create (implicitly or explicitly) hierarchical evaluations by differentiating amongst different *types* of people (108). One of my interviewees, Susan Legêne (2010), former *Head of the Curatorial Department* at the Tropenmuseum, refers to the employment of stereotypes as a strategy deeply embedded in modes of representation of ethnographic museums. These institutions have made '...ethnicities and cultures understandable through a certain range of objects that you repeat ... Every time you repeat the same object visitors start to "see"...this is this culture, this is that culture'. Certain objects have come to be firmly attached to specific cultures, which has generated expectations in visitors who anticipate to see *certain* objects or stories when a 'culture' is displayed. Moreover, Legêne (2007) notes that each object

¹⁵ However, essentialism derives from a number of factors in addition to the geographical approach, including canons of reducing 'culture to artefact' and approaching objects as 'stand-ins' for whole cultures or 'information carriers'. I shall return to this in chapter seven.

presented in ethnographic displays is only one of a series of many others kept in the stores. This approach overlooks the specific meaning of objects, which are instead presented as 'examples of certain *categories*' according to art-historical or ethnographic discourses (225).¹⁶

Apart from the binary dichotomy 'self' and 'other' (discussed earlier), ethnographic museums have reiterated, and often still reiterate, other four binary dichotomies: there/here, past/present, arts/artefacts and 'West'/the 'Rest'.

Ethnographic museums represent *here*, in post/colonial Europe, 'other' cultures existing over *there*, in faraway parts of the world. If attempts have been made to give voice to the people represented (explored later in this chapter), their displays continue to be constructed mainly by 'Western' experts for consumption in the 'West'.

Ethnographic museums use *historical* objects to produce exhibitions that (declare to) represent 'other' cultures in the *present*. Shatanawi (2008: 2) argues that, if the 'traditional ethnographic museum' employed its historical materials, it claimed 'to present the world *as it now exists*: the contemporary, not the historical, was its main attraction' (Shatanawi 2009a: 371). The tendency of ethnographic exhibitions and texts to use the anthropological device of the 'ethnographic present', which 'freezes' the

¹⁶ See also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991).

people represented in an artificial timeless zone, thus creating static notions of culture, has been long highlighted (Fabian 1983).¹⁷

Ethnographic museums have usually collected and exhibited 'non-Western' materials 'they classify as "artefacts" or "specimens"' (Ames 1994: 104). Shatanawi (2009a) suggests that when 'non-Western' art has been exhibited in ethnographic museums, it has been presented as an example of a cultural landscape (being treated as an *artefact*), while its subjective aspect has been obscured. In recent decades 'non-Western' art has been increasingly displayed in galleries and art museums, being evaluated according to the 'Western theory of aesthetics' (Ames 1994: 104) rather than to aesthetic conventions of their creators (Durrans 1988: 157).¹⁸ In the last two decades the same division *art* and *artefact*, however, has been increasingly questioned (Errington 1998; Leyten and Damen 1992; Price 1989; Vogel 1989). Jyotindra Jain (quoted in Cologne 2009: 27) has recently asked 'if the ethnographic museums are concerned with all aspects of cultures or the society they represent, can they leave out the art of that society to be taken care of by the art museum? Can we separate "art" from "artefacts"?' Jain points, however, to the problems of 'including contemporary art as an artefact to identify a culture, instead of the individual' (ibid). It is exactly the capacity of art to offer an 'individual interpretation of the collective' that makes, according to Shatanawi (2009a: 378), its inclusion in ethnographic exhibitions particularly appealing.

¹⁷ Clifford (1988: 228) explains that the 'ethnographic presents' were 'times neither of antiquity nor of the twentieth century but rather representing the "authentic" context of the collected objects, often just prior to their collection or display.'

¹⁸ Even museums that focused on 'Western' art are increasingly presenting 'non-Western' art (Shatanawi 2009a). The temporary exhibition *Walid Raad - Préface à la première édition* (January – April 2013) at the Louvre (Paris) powerfully exemplifies this trend.

The last dichotomy is the antagonist pair that opposes the 'West' versus the 'Rest'. Van der Horst (2007) refers to 'imaginary geography' in which the 'West' and the 'East' are simply opposed. Ethnographic museums have treated the world as if it was formed by two separate halves: 'one half observes and owns, while the other is observed and owned' (Shatanawi 2009a: 381). If in colonial times this division validated the supremacy of Europe, nowadays it survives as a political construct justifying current neo-colonial power structures.

I would suggest that, if ethnographic museums want to overcome their 'crisis', they need to introduce strategies that enable them to dissolve the above-discussed dichotomies and confront the problems engrained in their displays. In the remainder of this chapter it is my intention to discuss the strategies that some institutions have applied to respond to the powerful forces of decolonization, globalization and multiculturalism.

Alternative strategies of representation

I now turn my attention to the strategies that in recent decades ethnographic museums have applied to legitimise their existence in the post/colonial world. Yet, their role as self-appointed keepers and interpreters of 'other' peoples' heritage and culture has become untenable. Displays presenting 'exotic' people from the 'non-Western' world have been increasingly regarded as 'not simply insensitive but also

relics of a colonial past without a place in a postmodern, global society' (MacDougall and Carlson 2009: 167). Some institutions have made energetic attempts to reevaluate their identity, decolonise their museological practices and transform their relationships with both the societies from which their objects originate and the society in which they operate. Hereafter, I present an overview of the strategies that have found applications in institutions seeking to respond to the 'crisis'. As it will be highlighted hereafter, those efforts have not always been positively received. Indeed attempts to 'modernize' and make relevant 'what are mostly nineteenth-century collections have proven extremely difficult' (Bouquet 2012: 90).

Collaborative museology

Since the turn of the twenty-first century ethnographic museums located in post/colonial Europe have increasingly sought to initiate collaborations with 'source communities' or 'originating communities'. Peers and Brown (2003: 1) define 'source communities' as the groups 'from which museum collections originate' - indigenous people and their contemporary descendents (for instance, Aboriginal, First Nations, Maori, and settler groups) as well as other 'cultural groups' such as immigrant and diaspora 'communities', religious groups, settlers and local people. Nowadays it is widely accepted that ethnographic museums cannot be the only voice of authority in the interpretation of 'other' peoples' material culture, but have to involve 'source community' members in decisions regarding their material culture.

Phillips (2003: 157) argues that the first experiments of *collaborative museology* were undertaken in settler societies (that is Australia, New Zealand and North America) during the last decade of the twentieth century. Since the turn of the century European ethnographic museums have increasingly attempted to collaborate with their source communities. Curators have often travelled to the faraway places where ethnographica were assembled to develop closer relationships with contemporary descendents of their source communities. In a few instances contemporary source community members have travelled to Europe to work with objects made by their ancestors, stored in ethnographic museums.¹⁹

Peers and Brown (2003) suggest that the development of closer relationships between ethnographic museums and 'source communities' represents probably the initiative that has activated more profound changes in ethnographic institutions. Yet, collaborative projects have challenged traditional museum practice and destabilised curatorial authority, occasionally creating tensions within institutions.²⁰ Collaborative projects have focused on collections and conservation practices as well as on processes of exhibition-making. Participation has ranged from mere consultations (a strategy with which the museum maintains the power) to genuine partnerships (an approach which challenges conventional power relationships).

Phillips (2003) identifies a spectrum of recurrent models of *community exhibitions* ranging from community-based to multivocal exhibitions. In community-based

¹⁹ For instance, the 'Haida Project' at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

²⁰ For example, Shannon (2009) describes the challenges generated by the exhibition *Native Voice* (2004) at the National Museum of the American Indian, especially frictions between the curatorial team and the Exhibition and Education departments.

exhibitions²¹ the 'community' controls the main components of the exhibition and museum professionals mainly play the role of facilitators, while in multivocal exhibitions²² museum staff and community members work together to present multiple perspectives. If *community exhibitions* challenge the monolithic, authoritative voice of the 'modernist museum' (165), they do not erase 'Western' discipline-based interpretations and display conventions.

Peers and Brown (2003: 3) emphasise the capacity of collaborative projects to transform museums 'into arenas for cross-cultural debate and learning'. Here they implicitly refer to Clifford's (1997) concept of museums as 'contact zones' elaborated - drawing on Pratt (1992) - in the renowned essay 'Museums as Contact Zones' considered a cornerstone in the literature around ethnographic museum. The notion was developed to conceptualise the role that the Portland Museum of Art, Oregon, had played in 1989 when inviting a group of Tlingit authorities (Pacific Northwest Coast Indians of North America) as well as anthropologists, art experts, and Clifford to discuss how the museum's Northwest Coast Indian collection should have been reinstalled. The concept attempted to illustrate the role played by a specific museum located in a *settler society* as a space for egalitarian, cross-cultural encounters between members of a group of First Nations peoples and museum staff. Since its formulation, the concept has inspired academics, museum practitioners and policy makers far beyond the socio-political context where it was developed. It has 'travelled' to

²¹ For instance, the exhibition *Kaxlaya Gvilas* at MOA, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (Philipps 2003), the Blackfoot Gallery at the Glenbow Museum, Calgary (Conaty 2003) and the Community Archaeology Project at Quseir, Egypt (Moser et al. 2003).

²² For example, the *African Worlds* at the Horniman Museum (Shelton 2003) and the *Torres Strait Islanders* at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archeology and Anthropology (Herle 2003).

post/colonial Europe where it has been employed by museum critics and professionals when discussing museums' collaborations with minority groups, most often post/colonial peoples, ethnic minorities and migrant groups. I would suggest, however, that not sufficient attention has been paid as yet to the historical specificities of the migration of those groups and of immigrant lives, to the marginal status they occupy in contemporary European societies and the post/colonial reconfiguration of power relations their arrival generated.

In recent years new concepts have been introduced to illustrate the role that museums increasingly play as spaces for cross-cultural encounters in plural societies, for instance the notion of 'sharing spaces' (ERICarts, 2008). This concept points to the potential of museums as platforms for cross-cultural understanding, dialogue and engagement between majority and minority groups in multicultural European societies. In July 2011 a deliberate attempt was made to review Clifford's concept of the 'contact zone' in the light of recent research, policy directions and museum practices. A conference titled 'Re-Visiting the Contact Zone: Museums, Theory and Practice' (funded by the European Science Fund and chaired by Professor Sharon Macdonald) took place in Linköping, Sweden, which brought together museum practitioners and researchers from several disciplines. Having personally contributed to the conference I would suggest that, if a reformulation of the concept did not come to fruition, the event did generate productive debate and further reflection around the potential of museums as platforms for dialogue and cross-cultural encounters in our post/colonial or neo-colonial contemporary world.

The aesthetic or art-type approach

A strategy that during the last decade has become prominent in ethnographic museums attempting to move away from conventional ways of presenting 'non-Western' cultures is to present ethnographic objects as fine art displaying them according to 'Western' exhibiting strategies. Shelton (2006) refers to this strategy as the aesthetic or art-type approach. This approach found initially application in modern art museums and subsequently was applied in other institutions. The exhibition "*Primitivism*" in *Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* held in 1984 at the Museum of Modern Art (New York) represents one of the earlier attempts to apply an aesthetic approach to the display of 'non-Western' objects. If Karp (1991: 376) lauds the intention of William Rubin, the curator of "*Primitivism*", 'to place "primitive" aesthetics on a par with modernist aesthetics', he suggests that the exhibition constructs 'cultural "others" whose beliefs, values, institutions, and histories are significant only in the making of modern art.' Yet, "*Primitivism*" was criticised for its application of an aesthetic approach and for perpetuating a Eurocentric strategy that interprets modernism as a European innovation. The exhibition reductively regarded the relationship between modernism and 'non-Western' cultures as one of stylistic affinity.

In the wake of "*Primitivism*" two other, equally controversial, exhibitions opened in 1989 in two European modern art museums: *Magiciens de la Terre* at the Centre Georges Pompidou and La Villette (Paris), and *The Other Story* in the Hayward Gallery (London), which will be discussed in the next chapter. *Magiciens* displayed works of

100 artists, half from the 'West' and half from the margins, seeking to present them all on an equal footing. The exhibition's attempt to investigate the perseverance of a neo-colonial mentality in the 'West' was lauded by some, while strongly criticised by others. Nonetheless, *Magiciens* represented an important break from traditional notions of modernism. It initiated, as Fisher (2009) notes, 'a "postmodern" wave of neo-imperial "exploration" of the exotic.'

The Louvre (*Pavillon des Sessions*) and the Quai Branly in Paris represent two emblematic examples of museums that have recently presented ethnographic materials as masterpieces of World Art, raising heated debates on the merits of aesthetic approaches to ethnographica. The *Pavillon des Sessions*, a wing dedicated to the arts of Africa, Oceania, Asia and the Americas, opened in 2000 at the Louvre; it was one of Jacques Chirac's *projects presidential*. The objects displayed in the gallery (about 120), mostly every-day and ritual objects gathered from private and state collections, were strictly selected for their aesthetic merits. They are displayed and interpreted as aesthetic objects according to the same criteria usually applied to 'Western' art (Dias 2008). They are presented in a sober exhibiting space with beige walls and soft lighting. The labels provide only minimal information, while some contextualization is offered by interactive consoles located at the end of the galleries (Mark 2000).

The entry of the *arts premiers*²³ in the French 'temple' of high art and world's greatest classical fine arts museum was an epochal event. However, it was not unanimously

²³ *Premiers* means first, earlier, neologism that replaced the even more controversial expression *primitives*.

received raising heated debates between those who strongly opposed this move (fearing it would have compromised the aesthetic level of the museum), and those who supported the project and accused the other front of racism (Corbey 2000). The latter stressed that the project 'demonstrated France's openness toward the other' (Dias 2008: 146). They argued that the *Pavillion* indirectly stated the equivalence of cultures and recognised the power, beauty, quality and diversity of the artistic creations of non-European peoples (Martin 2006).

The Musée du Quai Branly (hereafter MQB) was inaugurated in June 2006 by President Chirac as the Parisian museum for the *arts premiers*. The MQB presents itself as an art museum devoted to the display of cultural diversity rather than an ethnographic institution (Ruiz-Gómez 2006). The museum is specifically devoted to the arts of Africa, Oceania, Asia and the Americas. It merged the collections of two pre-existing institutions, the Musée de l'Homme and the Musée des Arts de l'Afrique et de l'Océanie. According to Harney (2006), the project of a museum devoted to 'non-Western' arts was permeated by a praiseworthy avant-garde politics of change. At the inauguration Chirac argued that the MQB rejected the 'Western' ethnocentric approach and the:

...pseudo-evolutionistic notion that some people are mired in earlier stage of human evolution and their so-called 'primitive' cultures are no more than subjects of study for anthropologists or, at best, sources of inspiration for Western artists. These are shocking and absurd prejudices. They must be fought against. For there is no more a

hierarchy between arts and cultures than there is between peoples themselves (Chirac quoted in Bourgoin 2001: 59).

Chirac also stated that the MQB's opening was 'about France giving rightful homage to peoples who through the ages have too often been the victims of the history... Peoples who today are still far too often marginalized, destabilized, and threatened by the inexorable advance of modern world' (ibid).

Despite Chirac's (questionably) progressive intentions, the MQB has been criticised for both its architectural and display strategy (Ruiz-Gómez 2006), which stresses both *exoticism* and *otherness* (Dias 2008). The museum applies a geographical approach to its permanent galleries, which are divided in four areas corresponding to four continents - Africa, Oceania, Asia and the Americas, while neglecting to include Europe. The gallery space has been described in derogatory terms as a 'spooky jungle, red and black and murky...' (Kimmelman quoted in Bourgoin 2006: 60). The objects are displayed according to a strictly 'Western' European perspective. The labels provide limited contextualization, which typically come from unnamed commentators or anthropologists of the late colonial period (Hennes 2009). Some information is offered by interactive platforms located in each of the four geographical spaces and in a *secteur transversal* connecting the four areas. Objects from different periods are grouped together, which denies any history to 'other' societies (Blasselle and Guarneri 2006). Furthermore, very little mention is made of how these objects were acquired so that there is almost no reference to the long history of French colonisation.

The most problematic aspect of the application of a strictly aesthetic 'Western' approach to the display of 'non-Western' objects is that it judges their artistic value in relation to strictly 'Western' aesthetic standards. Although displays applying aesthetic approaches might be regarded as progressive anti-evolutionistic statements that assert the equality of people and societies (Dias 2008), they restrict the equality of cultures and societies only to the category of art objects selected by 'Western' experts for being considered as masterpieces. However, what Europeans consider as masterpieces according to the 'Western' canon rarely corresponds to how their makers and users think about them.²⁴ In my view, aesthetic approaches to the display of ethnographic objects assembled in situations of inequality of power (such as in colonial times) are particularly problematic when their application enables ethnographic museums to hold back from the complex task of critically examining and problematising the history of their collections and their (direct and indirect) involvement in the European colonial project.

Exhibiting and collecting contemporary 'non-Western' art

In recent years ethnographic museums have begun to exhibit (and sometimes collect) 'non-Western' art, that is the creations of artists born and working in the 'non-Western' world as well as of those with 'non-Western' backgrounds but born and working in the 'West'. Shatanawi (2009a: 370) argues that the inclusion of contemporary art is often regarded as 'one of the more constructive approaches for effective changes in ethnographic museums.'

²⁴ See, for instance, Vogel (1997).

This trend is effectively exemplified by the Tropenmuseum's recent acquisition of the miniature painting 'Some like it hotter' (figure 2.1) by the Singh Twins Amrit and Rabindra, two internationally well-known contemporary British artists born in London of Sikh parents who migrated from Punjab (India) to England. The piece was commissioned in 2007 for the semi-permanent exhibition *Round and About India*.



2.1 Singh Twins, 'Some like it hotter', *Round and About India*, Tropenmuseum.

Nowadays 'non-Western' art is considered as an integral part of the field of global art rather than as a separate category (ibid). Yet, 'non-Western' art functions according to the rules of a global art market and increasingly operates within an internationalist art discourse that stresses the universal character of contemporary art. The universalist claims of contemporary art challenge ethnographic museums as they 'run counter to

the conventional lines of reasoning and organizational models' on which those institutions are built (370).

While the inclusion of contemporary 'non-Western' art in both permanent and temporary exhibitions has become common practice, it seems that ethnographic museums still struggle with their collecting approaches to 'non-Western' art. By discussing the challenges that the Tropenmuseum faced when selecting, amongst the objects sourced for the temporary exhibition *Urban Islam*, those to include in its permanent collections, Shatanawi (2008) points to the problems that museums housing 'non-Western' (historical) collections confront when collecting contemporary art. *Urban Islam* aimed to challenge a traditional, static, unchanging view of Islam (and generally of cultures), whilst seeking to represent it as a modern religion. Shatanawi highlights the contradictions between those aims and the contemporary artworks and artefacts that the Tropenmuseum eventually acquired, which reinforced the very same view that the exhibition sought to challenge. In chapter four I shall further expand on those debates when returning to *Urban Islam*.

The main weakness of ethnographic museums' approaches to displaying and collecting contemporary 'non-Western' art is that they treat it as a metaphor for a cultural landscape, thus applying what could be named an ethnographical approach to art. According to Shatanawi (ibid), this approach suggests that the more the 'West' and the rest become closer and the very dichotomy 'West'/'non-West' is destabilised, the more ethnographic museums crave for objects that reinforce 'traditional', static ideas of 'non-Western' cultures. This denotes that ethnographic museums have not as yet

come 'to terms with the modern aspiration in societies other than our own' (374). Furthermore, by privileging objects that favour an interpretation of 'non-Western' cultures as static and presenting them as *accurate* representations of contemporary 'non-Western' cultures, those collecting practices imply the existence of strong links between the traditional and the contemporary.

In recent years ethnographic museums have started displaying and collecting artworks produced by 'Western' artists, particularly those exploring issues of cultural exchanges and hybridity and engaging with multicultural debates. For instance, in 2010 the Tropenmuseum acquired the statue *Madonna (Omomá & Céline)* (2008) by the Dutch artist Roy Villevoeye (figure 2.2).²⁵

From my perspective, the display and acquisition of artworks produced by 'Western' artists may represent an effective strategy for ethnographic museums to move away from their traditional focus on the 'non-Western' world. In doing so, they may contribute to the dissolution of the dichotomies between the 'West' and the 'Rest', 'Western' and 'non-Western' cultures, which are meaningless in our interconnected, global world.

²⁵ For more information about *Madonna* see Iervolino and Sandell (forthcoming 2013).



2.2 Roy Villevoye, 'Madonna (Omomá & Céline)', Tropenmuseum.

The Universal Museum

Another approach that has recently found application in museums holding ethnographic (but also archeological and art) collections is to claim their status as 'universal museums'. Those institutions have argued they play important roles by employing their geographically and temporally varied collections to tell the story of all humanity under one roof. In so doing, they would enable their visitors to see the unity of the world and promote a more tolerant world (O'Neill 2004: 1). If the model of the 'universal museum' was born during the-eighteenth-century European Enlightenment, it was refashioned as a feasible philosophical framework at the beginning of the last decade (Flynn 2004).

In 2002 about thirty of the world's greatest museums declared themselves 'universal' signing the 'Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums' elaborated by the British Museum Director, Neil MacGregor. The declaration stresses the international relevance of 'universal museums' as institutions capable of serving not only the people of the country where they are located but the entire world. Apart from the British Museum, The Berlin State Museum, the Louvre, the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, and the Metropolitan Museum (New York) are some of the signatories to the declaration.

Although the declaration condemns contemporary illegal traffic in artefacts, it justifies the acquisition of objects assembled in previous times in ways considered illegitimate or, at least, problematic according to today's standards. According to the declaration,

those objects should be viewed in the light of the values of the times of their acquisition. Many criticised the refashioning of the idea of the 'universal museum' considering it as a strategy employed by institutions seeking to counter the growing number of repatriation claims and the criticism directed to their ways of representing 'other' cultures.²⁶ The declaration even refers to a 'threat' posed by repatriation claims to disperse universal collections, thus diminishing their capability of demonstrating the unity of the world (O'Neill 2004).

It could also be suggested, however, that universal museums have problematically left unchanged their epistemological basis and display modes. They often employ traditional forms of curatorship and favour conservative art-historical approaches (Flynn 2004). Moreover, they present their collections in ways that tend to reinforce the unequal power relations that informed their earlier collecting practices. Their displays continue to present authoritative grand narratives, to rely upon (Victorian) taxonomies and speak on behalf of 'others' whose voices are excluded. According to O'Neill (2004: 197), they may present the world as one, but one still 'appropriately ruled by the West and where the Western aesthetic' is a universally valid approach. He also questions their application of a geographic approach to the presentation of cultures in separate galleries, which favours essentialist, self-contained views of cultures. O'Neill (ibid: 191) argues that in order to employ their potential to contribute to the creation of respect and understanding in our contemporary world, they need to identify a universal perspective on cultural difference 'which achieves credibility and

²⁶ For instance, the British Museum was receiving political pressure by Greece over the restitution of the Parthenon Marbles (Flynn 2004).

currency outside western cultural elites.’ Moreover, they need to employ a more collaborative, internationalist approach and subvert traditional power relationships.

The reflexive approach

Another strategy that a few ethnographic museums have recently applied in an attempt to challenge their colonial legacy is what I would refer to as a ‘reflexive approach’. This strategy has, most often, found application in special projects, particularly exhibitions or collection projects. Pieterse (2005) describes this approach as a self-questioning and self-critical strategy that problematizes the politics of representation and seeks to move the institution’s focus from the study and representation of the ‘other’ to the investigation of the logics behind processes of ‘othering’, the relationship between the ‘other’ and self, and the institutional history of collecting.

Some institutions have put under scrutiny the ‘self’ as the Pitt Rivers Museum did when carrying out ‘The Other Within: an anthropology of Englishness’ (April 2006 - March 2009). This project sought to challenge the conventional image of the institution as a museum of the ‘exotic’ by exploring its *English* archaeological and ethnographic collection, as well as the people and institutions that contributed to its assemblage. As its title suggests, the project sought to apply a reflective approach by practicing an ‘anthropology-in-reverse’ (Pieterse 2005: 174) or ‘auto-ethnography’ (Legêne 2009: 19). By investigating the English collection, the project aimed (in theory at least) to contribute to one of the most heated debates of the last decade: that around what it means to be English in today’s world. Recognising the challenges

connected to define what it means to be English or identify the English national character, the project chose to regard as English three types of artefacts: those produced and used in England, made somewhere else but used in England, or created in England for trade elsewhere. The project produced a number of important outputs, including databases containing information about the museum's English collection and the people associated with it, mapping of and statistic findings about this collection, detailed biographies of specific objects and a series of articles discussing some of the main themes that emerged during the research.

From my perspective 'The Other Within' is probably the most interesting project recently carried out by the Pitt River, the English temple of the 'exotic', as it saw the museum striving to move its focus from the 'other' to the 'self'. However, I would argue that the project did not achieve the bold aim set out at the very outset, that is to employ 'a major museum collection to throw light on the modern construction of Englishness.'²⁷ It basically produced an analytic examination of the museum's English collection, while revealing very little about contemporary constructions of Englishness, which was problematically conflated with Britishness. What constitutes 'Englishness' or 'Britishness' 'remains an obsession with political conservatism' (Fisher 2009) that would have required *more* than a systematic examination of the museum's English collection. A more critical approach and methodology were necessary and more sophisticated and intellectually-rich strategies and activities were to be undertaken if the museum truly wanted to analyse contemporary formulations of 'Britishness' using its English collection.

²⁷ See www.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness.html (Accessed 08/02/13)

Another example of a project that, perhaps more successfully, focused on the 'self' by practicing anthropology-in-reverse or auto-ethnography is the semi-permanent exhibition *Eastward Bound! Art, culture and colonialism* (figure 2.3) at the Tropenmuseum. The exhibition that opened in 2003 presents the history of early-twentieth-century Dutch colonialism up to the events that signed the end of the colonial rule in Indonesia. The exhibition tells a history that links together the Netherlands and Indonesia, but it radically reverses the established museological discourse on Dutch colonialism.



2.3 *Eastward Bound! Art, culture and colonialism*, Tropenmuseum.

Rather than presenting the story and the culture of the colonized people, it presents those of the Dutch colonizers. Nine puppets representing historical archetypes of

Dutch people that took part in the colonial project in Indonesia are displayed. The gallery tells *their* stories, 'not about others but about themselves in their relationship with these others' (Legêne 2009: 18). The puppets are 'surrounded by objects that mark out their position in colonial society, and by three of the plaster-cast types belonging to the museum's exhibition history' (Legêne 2007: 239). By collecting the objects that formed the basis of the Tropenmuseum's collection, these people played a very central role in the creation of images of 'otherness'.

If the exhibition has been very positively received by experts, being often regarded as the best of the Tropenmuseum's current semi-permanent exhibitions, the reaction of general visitors has been not always favourable. One of my interviewees, Van Dartel (2010), *Collection Researcher*, maintains that visitors generally like the gallery's design, but they often do not 'get the point' of the exhibition or they do without realising it. She adds that sometimes the exhibition has raised fierce reactions. Indeed, a few visitors have criticized the exhibition's exclusion of the voices of oppressed Indonesian people. She recalls, for instance, a time when she was accompanying a 'group of feminists' around the museum and 'they were really angry that the voices of the suppressed Indonesian were not represented in the exhibit...' She stresses that this was what the exhibition set out to do by reversing the established focus. Yet, by representing *only* Dutch people and those Indonesians that collaborated with them, the exhibit intended to make visitors experience Dutch colonial rule and its unfair treatment of Indonesian people. She acknowledges 'you miss the story of the other side which was, I think, intended that way, because how can we speak for that side?' It is interesting to note here how a project engrained with an avant-garde philosophy

aiming to critically review traditional strategies of representation in ethnographic museums might be positively received by scholars, whilst being more difficult to grasp by the visiting public.²⁸ I now turn my attention to the last strategy, I wish to discuss here, applied by ethnographic museums attempting to challenge their colonial legacy.

Museums of World Culture/s and Arts

As I argued in the introduction, during the last decade a new trend has gained ground amongst ethnographic museums seeking to overcome their images as obsolete institutions displaying 'exotic' objects. A few institutions have re-institutionalized their identity as museums of world culture/s (Shelton 2006) or world arts (Lagerkvist 2008), thus doing away with the term 'ethnographic' (Voogt 2008). This trend resembles the mid-twentieth-century approach (discussed earlier) that saw colonial museums doing away with the term 'colonial'. Heal (2008) suggests that the expression 'world culture' first appeared in the museological panorama about twenty years ago. Yet, in the 1990s a few museums, such as the World Culture Galleries at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter, redisplayed their ethnographic collections in new World Culture/s Galleries. Len Pole, a museum consultant specialised in ethnography, maintains (quoted in Heal 2008: 25) that 'ethnography is an unfamiliar word – world cultures is

²⁸ The controversy surrounding the exhibition *Into the Heart of Africa* at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto, Canada, (November 1989 - August 1990) represents a notorious example of the challenges involved in attempts to display ethnographic materials in a reflexive fashion. Many visitors did not grasp the intention of the exhibition curator, cultural anthropologist Jeanne Cannizzo, to critique the project of colonial collecting and its imperial logics, and to highlight the multiple meanings of the ROM's African collection. The exhibition generated divergent readings and was vehemently contested by those who considered it racist and argued it achieved the opposite goal of glorified colonialism. Particularly, Cannizzo's use of quotation marks to present the voices of colonial soldiers and missionaries in an ironic fashion was criticised. As Shelley Butler acknowledges (1999: 10) in her ethnography *Contested Representations: Revising 'Into the Heart of Africa'*, 'the exhibit teaches us the possibilities and pitfalls of reflexive curatorship.'

easier to understand, whereas ethnography is opaque.’ Apart from the MWC in Gothenburg, in the introduction I also referred to the Wereldmuseum in Rotterdam as another example of this trend. Another notable example is the Weltkulturen Museum or Museum of World Cultures (translated in the *plural*) in Frankfurt (Germany), previously known as Museum of Ethnology.²⁹

The new emerging world culture/s museums have increasingly experimented with new exhibitionary praxes. As Shelton (2006: 75) notes, in exhibitions and programmes they often engage with global issues ‘to which anthropology has itself turned’. They draw upon recent theoretical and political debates seeking to overcome traditional approaches to the representation focusing on cultural differences. Museums of World Culture/s, such as the Gothenburg MWC, often explore topics such as globalisation, migration, multiculturalism and cultural encounters. They engage with recent research in several disciplines, not only anthropology or material culture, but also cultural study, globalisation theory and so forth. Referring specifically to the MWC (to which I return in chapter five), Föster (2008: 26) maintains that it carries out ‘an ethnography of globalization and internationalization’.

Amongst the other strategies that have found application in some ethnographic museums (including the MWC) is the application of thematic exhibiting approach, briefly presented in the introduction. In the chapters to come, particularly six and

²⁹ It is worth noting that the Weltkulturen Museum has created a ‘research lab’ at the cross-road between anthropology and art practice where invited artists and researchers work with the collections to prepare the ground for new exhibitions. As part of the museum’s current process of revamping, a permanent exhibition is being produced, which will be structured neither in purely geographical nor in purely thematic terms. See <http://www.weltkulturenmuseum.de/en/new-building> (Accessed 13/03/2013).

seven, the application of this approach will be closely explored through my case studies. Before introducing my case studies, however, I wish to look *beyond* ethnographic museums. Yet, in the following chapter I turn my attention to the governance of diversity in contemporary post/colonial European societies and discuss how diversity policies have shaped museum practice (particularly exhibitionary praxes).

3. Museums and the political governance of diversity

In the previous chapter I referred to several factors of change that since the second half of twentieth-century have impacted upon ethnographic museums, including the increasing human migration and its resulting cultural diversity. In this chapter I turn my attention to policies on diversity introduced by culturally diverse countries in an effort to manage their pluralism. I seek to elucidate how these policies have impacted upon museum practices, especially exhibition forms and narratives.

The chapter can be divided in three main sections. In the first part I discuss the policies on diversity that multicultural countries have developed in an attempt to respond to the increasing diversity of their societies. In the context of this research these policies deserve further attention. In fact, they define the configuration of power relations between majoritarian and minoritarian groups, that is their '*rapport de forces*', which - Pieterse (2005: 165) suggests - shape 'actual politics of representations'. Drawing on Grillo (2007), I focus on three main phases in the governance of diversity: from assimilation, to multiculturalism and to cultural diversity. I pay particular attention to debates that have revolved around the ideology and policies of multiculturalism. In the second part of the chapter I bring my attention back to museums and, temporarily leaving aside the ethnographic museum, I look at museum practices. Different museums have proposed diverse exhibition forms and narratives to address the cultural pluralism of their societies. Here my intention is to discuss the exhibition

forms and narratives that have become commonplace strategies in the representation of cultural differences.

In the final part of the chapter I discuss forms of representation recently developed by museums attempting to move away from conventional exhibition forms and narratives. I pay particular attention to forms of representation influenced by alternative discourses of diversity, for instance interculturalism, and to exhibitions applying a thematic exhibiting strategy.

Before turning to the realm of politics and a discussion of the management of cultural diversity, I would like to make a note on terminology and stress the difference between 'multicultural' (or plural) and 'multiculturalist' societies. The former expression refers only to the fact of the cultural diversity in itself, while the latter to a normative response to it. In order to become multiculturalist, a multicultural (or plural) society needs to develop official policies specifically designed to bring about a multiculturalist society (Parekh 2000b).

Political governance of cultural diversity

During the last thirty years the governance of diversity has become 'a key issue in contemporary politics, both domestically and internationally' (Koeing and Guchteneire 2007: 14). Policies on diversity have been primarily conceptualized and studied within the frame of the classical model of nation-state, which is based on the idea of a close correspondence between *political* and *cultural* collectivity (4). To put it

differently, this model conflates state citizenship and membership in a (culturally homogenous) national collectivity. If the idea of the close connection between political and cultural collectivity has never corresponded to reality, the increasing cultural diversity registered since the end of the Second World War has further challenged their fictional correspondence.

Since the 1980s international legal instruments on cultural diversity have been developed by supra-national institutions such as UNESCO, initially articulated through the idea of cultural development. Those instruments have influenced how nations address cultural diversity. Both the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity¹ and the 2005 Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions are recent legal instruments that have had a strong resonance in all UNESCO Member States. Together with several reports that UNESCO produced around cultural diversity and cultural policy since 1982,² these documents have informed the governance of diversity.

Herein I focus my attention on *national* policies on diversity. The reason for maintaining a national focus is twofold: firstly, international legal instruments on cultural diversity are political documents that have limited direct significance in national systems;³ secondly, museums, the institutions I explore, tend to fall (directly or indirectly) within nationally defined arenas of civic governance. Moreover, national

¹ If the Declaration importantly highlights the interconnection existing between different cultures, it problematically presents them as separate and sharply distinct.

² For example, the 1982 Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, the 1996 Report 'Our Creative Diversity' of the World Commission on Culture and Development, and the 1998 Report of the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development.

³ The 2001 Universal Declaration, for example, only laid down general guidelines on cultural diversity, which had to be turned into effective policies by the Member States of UNESCO.

policies deserve particular attention because they increasingly attempt to reconcile two apparently contradictory aims: 'the recognition of cultural differences...with the social reproduction of trust and solidarity that is necessary for the maintenance of a democratic polity' (Koeing and Guchteneire 2007: 5). In other words, they strive to respond to claims for recognition of diverse cultural practices and identities, while aiming to create un-fragmented civic societies characterised by strong forms of 'social solidarity' and 'social capital' (Putnam 2000, 2007).

'Western' nation-states took a dissimilar attitude towards the multiethnic and multicultural drift of the post Second World War period. Systematic attention was paid to migration from the late 1940s. It was in that period that immigration and racial legislation was introduced to regulate the arrival of immigrants and to deal with discrimination in key areas, such as employment and housing.⁴ Since then different countries have developed their own policies in accordance with specific patterns of immigration and their own experiences of nation-state formation. A succession of different policy models of governance of diversity has been developed by virtually every state in response to historical events taking place within their borders and world-wide. However, Grillo (2007: 979) suggests that common paths can be identified as 'European multi-ethnic, multicultural societies have gone through three phases in the governance of diversity - from assimilation, to multiculturalism and, finally, to cultural diversity', which I describe hereafter.

⁴ For instance, migration policy was a major feature of Australian governance from the late 1940s; it sought to facilitate the entry of different, primarily European populations to meet labour shortages.

Assimilation

The assimilation phase started in the late nineteenth century and lasted until the mid-1960s. During this period ‘the principal way of dealing with ethnic/cultural differences was to abolish them’ (ibid). The elimination of cultural differences was considered the ‘price’ that migrants had to pay in order to become members of the nation, which was regarded as essential for political stability. Migrants were expected to assimilate into the host society through a *one-sided* process of adaptation and give up their distinctive linguistic, cultural or social characteristics to become indistinguishable from the majority (Kymlicka 2007a). Cultural differences were accepted, albeit only in the private sphere (Mitchell 2004). People regarded as too diverse and not capable of assimilation were often prohibited from entering certain countries.⁵ The assimilation model has been applied in all immigration countries to some extent, although in different moments and for dissimilar duration (Castle and Miller 2003).⁶

Multiculturalist policies

In the mid-1960s an ideology of assimilation could not be sustained any longer and was replaced by discourses of multiculturalism (Grillo 1998). Official policies on multiculturalism were first formally introduced in the 1970s by the governments of

⁵ In Canada and the United States, for example, Chinese people were denied access, while the ‘White Australia’ policy restricted migration to, primarily, people of European descent (Kymlicka 2008).

⁶ France is probably the European country that has remained loyal to the assimilation model for the longest (Kymlicka 2007a). For instance, in 2010 the National Assembly and the Senate of France approved a bill which prohibits wearing face-covering veils (or other masks) in public spaces, including niqabs and burquas (Costa-Kostritsky 2012).

countries, such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Following those examples, European countries such as the UK and the Netherlands embraced (more or less formally) a multicultural approach to the accommodation of migrants into their society (Kymlicka 2007a). These policies recognised migrants' legitimacy to express their cultural background (Johnston et al. 2004) and granted them equal rights in both the private and the public spheres. They started placing public institutions, including cultural institutions, under the obligation to accommodate the cultural diversity.⁷ In exchange, migrants were expected to conform to some 'key' national values.

Models of multiculturalism strongly varied from one country to another. Grillo (2007) differentiates between 'weak multiculturalism', which recognises cultural differences in the private sphere and fosters assimilation to the majority's culture, and 'strong multiculturalism', which accepts differences in the public sphere and tries to increase the participation and expression of each group to the whole society. He suggests that 'weak multiculturalism' has generally achieved larger success across Europe, being applied in most of European countries, albeit in its strongest forms.

Political philosophers developed theories of multiculturalism that largely influenced political models of governance of cultural diversity. Will Kymlicka (1989, 1995, 2007a; 2007b) developed the most influential theory of multiculturalism. Setting his analysis firmly within the tradition of liberalism, he strongly advocates for group-differentiated rights for minorities that, he argues, are part of liberal thought and can be viewed as

⁷ For instance, the Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (Parekh 2000b), which discusses the *status of affairs* of policies of multiculturalism in Britain at the end of last century stressed the potential of cultural institutions to 'promote inclusion, equity, a respect for difference and...combat prejudice and discrimination' (Sandell 2004: 1).

necessary for freedom and equality. Kymlicka (2007b) stresses the importance (but also the difficulties) in developing a sense of shared identity associated with the nation-state in 'polyethnic states' characterized by the cohabitation of diverse cultural groups and various ways of belonging. Charles Taylor's (1994) normative case for a multicultural 'politics of recognition' has also been influential. Taylor argues that, although apparently incompatible, the two traditions in liberal political theory - the politics of universalism (which emphasises the equal dignity of all citizens) and the politics of difference (based on the need of recognition of the unique identities of individuals and groups) - are in fact based on the politics of equal respect and recognition. He regards multiculturalism as an extension of the 'politics of recognition' and argues that diverse cultural identities should be recognised as of equal worth and specific rights for minority groups should be developed, thus replacing the traditional liberal regime of identical rights for all citizens.

Multiculturalist policies have always been controversial and there has been intense ideological debate about their validity also in countries where they were first conceived. Since the beginning of the 1990s and even more by the early years of the twenty-first century, nonetheless, they started receiving more vehement criticisms, which I discuss hereafter.

Criticisms of multiculturalist policies and discourses

Several commentators have affirmed that multiculturalism as a paradigm failed to respond to the cultural diversity of the society. Criticisms came from both the Right and the Left and from other diverse ideological positions. Feminists criticised the

tolerance for practices, such as the wearing of the Muslim headscarves, clashing with norms of gender equality endorsed by liberal states (Okin 1999). Liberalists incriminated multiculturalism for failing to induce minorities to accept the very fabric of secular and democratic 'Western' societies and act in the interest of the national good (Pathak 2008). They also argued that - through attempts not to offend the susceptibilities of minority groups - multiculturalism was threatening the core 'Western' value of freedom of expression.⁸ Some stressed that multiculturalism, in recognising the equality of worth in all cultures, was leading to cultural relativism (Bruckner 2007).

Critics also argued that multiculturalism was leading to a growing separation of society into groups, promoting urban segregation and a sort of cultural apartheid, while obstructing an effective mixing between groups and a real integration of minorities into mainstream economic and socio-cultural structures. Especially models of multiculturalism based on 'communitarianism', such as the British model, (Moodod 2007) were declared to have failed. It was claimed that they increased separatism and division by granting full participation in national societies to migrants and ethnic groups as 'cultural' minorities.⁹ The paradox of these models was highlighted. Yet, it was suggested that they accord the same treatment to all communities but not to their 'members', somehow chaining these individuals to their roots. The idea of the nation as a 'community of communities' (Parekh 2000b), on which models of

⁸ Notable controversy followed, for example, the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (O'Neill 1999) and of the Danish Jyllands-Posten anti-Muslim cartoons (Klausen 2009). At the time of writing violent anti-American and anti-'Western' protests are taking place across the 'Middle-East' following the publication of an anti-Islamic video titled 'Innocence of Muslims' (Graham-Harrison 2012).

⁹ *The Cattle Report*, for example, published in response to the riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham (UK), identified in the segregation of the Asian community and the lack of mixing with the mainstream British society the main cause of the disturbance (Cantle 2001).

communitarianism are based, has been judged as a construction that reifies and homogenizes 'communities', whilst not doing justice to the fact that their boundaries are contested and often cross national borders (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005).

Postcolonial theorists likewise have criticised state multiculturalism discourse and policy for their 'implicit assumption that "ethnic groups" are the inherent proprietors of "culture" and that "cultures" are fixed and static realities', and for failing to transform 'the white-dominated dominant culture' (Ang 2006: 227). Some stressed that European and US discourses on multiculturalism simplistically assume that individuals belong to single, bounded groups typically defined by cultures and ethnicity, while eliding other factors such as class, gender, and sexuality (Hague et al. 2005). I shall return to this criticism when discussing the dominant forms of representation of diversity in the section 'Pitfalls of the *multicultural exhibition*'.

Others have argued instead that multiculturalism has created more fragmented nations with little sense of a common identity, making room for the growth of religious fanaticism. Multiculturalism appears as a threat to social cohesion and national culture and identity (Schlesinger 1992; Calhoun et al. 2002). It is suggested that European countries had become 'too diverse' because of migration and multiculturalist policies (Goodhart 2004), which lead to an 'excess of alterity' (Sartori 2002). Kepel (2005) and Pfaff (2005) suggest that policies of multiculturalism can even be blamed for the 9/11, the 7/7 and 21/7 terroristic attacks.

Ghassan Hage's (1998) critique of multicultural policy is particularly relevant to my discussion of museums' responses to the *multicultural challenge*. Although Hage has

concentrated his critique on Australian multicultural policies approved under the Labour Hawke-Keating governments between 1983 and 1996, his analysis has relevance beyond Australian borders. Hage takes issues with those arguing that policies of multiculturalism generate a loss of national identity and undermine the power of the majority, the latter of which he calls 'White power'. He argues instead that multiculturalism achieves the opposite effect of reinforcing that power, and suggests that multiculturalists (not less than racists) are nationalists and consider the nation as a space they control. They see migrants as objects to be managed and/or exhibited according to the 'national will'. Hage (1998: 18) labels this belief in the mastery of the nation the "'White nation" fantasy', a fantasy of white supremacy. This fantasy, he argues, characterizes both racism and multiculturalism. If multiculturalism recognises the value of all the cultures, it accords a less important status to minority cultures, whose significance consists in *enriching* the majority culture and contributing to the country's wealth (117-133). Hage suggests that state multiculturalism activates a dialectics of economic inclusion (especially in terms of labour) and socio-political exclusion (in the social, political and cultural spheres) (134-138). Later in this chapter I shall return to Hage's discussion of multiculturalism as an exhibitionary practice.

Cultural diversity policies

In response to the criticisms highlighted above, during the last decade significant changes in national and international approaches to the governance of diversity have been registered in virtually every plural 'Western' society (Martiniello and Rath 2010). Some have referred to this as a 'backlash' (Grillo 2003) or a 'cultural-

diversity sceptical turn' (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2005). A general moral panic about difference and the compatibility of different ways of living has characterized both policies and public debates. Some critics have argued that the multicultural moment is over (Joppke 2004, Faist 2009), even naming this change 'new assimilationism' (Alba and Nee 2003). Increasingly, discourses of assimilation have found their way back into national and supra-national policies of governance of diversity, through an emphasis on cultural integration, social cohesion, and notions of national identity (Witcomb 2009). A non-interventionist, rather superficial model of the management of diversity has been promoted, which ascribes the effectiveness of migrants' integration to their own personal effort. In Europe a retreat from multiculturalism has been declared in almost all nations. In 2010 Angela Merkel argued that Germany's 'attempts to create a multicultural society have "utterly failed"' (Weaver 2010); in 2011 David Cameron criticised British state multiculturalism 'which encourages different cultures to live separate lives' (Wright and Taylor 2011), while the Dutch Interior Minister, Piet Hein Donner, stated that 'the government shares the social dissatisfaction over the multicultural society model and plans to shift priority to the values of the Dutch' (Kern 2011).

Cultural diversity is a model of the governance of diversity that does not stress the right of migrants or minorities as groups, shifting instead from the recognition of collective to individual identities (Faist 2009). It seeks to influence how differences are dealt with in the fabric of every-day social life and how institutions adapt their practices to respond to cultural heterogeneity. Cultural diversity policies require cultural organisations to become more responsive to the cultural diversity of their

society. They recognise the right to be different not only for migrants but for all groups of people who have been placed outside dominant cultural and social norms, such as disabled people, gays and lesbians, women, and the elderly (Bennett 2001). In doing so they corroborate the theory of politics of differences proposed by Young (1990, 2000) who argues that the affirmation (rather than repression) of difference is essential to social justice and the good society. Although cultural diversity policies may be accused of presenting the same weaknesses as policies of multiculturalism, Faist (2009) suggests that their use is likely to continue to be a central way of accommodating diversity within and across the borders of national states. Hereafter, I turn my attention back to museums and explore how they have sought to respond to the fact of diversity and to what extent and how they have been influenced by policies of government of diversity.

Museums' responses to cultural diversity

In the late 1970s and especially since the beginning of the 1990s in many parts of the world museums began to respond to the challenges and opportunities resulting from migration and the multicultural composition of contemporary societies (Hooper-Greenhill 1997; Simpson 1996). Since then the number of museums seeking to become more reflective of the diversity of their population has increased. Sandell (2004) suggests that three areas of museum practice have been particularly affected by the 'multicultural turn': access, participation, and representation. Here, I focus my attention on the third area. Many institutions have attempted to develop more

democratic, unbiased representations of what many critics have referred to as their diverse 'communities' (Bennett 2006; Sandell 2002; Sandell 2007a; Sandell et al. 2010; Watson 2007). Nowadays, virtually every museum is seeking to respond to the *multicultural challenge* in some form or another.

Different museums have proposed diverse modes of representation to address the cultural diversity of their society, being more or less successful in achieving this aspiration. The representation of cultural diversity through the medium of exhibitions has proven to be problematic. Museums have faced problems of representations that Karp argues (1991b: 378) 'no genre of museum is able to escape' when exhibiting 'other' cultures or 'examining diversity within their societies.' They have found it difficult to rethink their museological practices and review their narratives and exhibiting strategies. In certain instances they have even achieved the opposite goal to promote cultural differences and instead reinforced stereotypical images, sometimes becoming embroiled in bitter debates.

Following Bennett (1998: 195), I approach exhibitions as cultural products that are framed by and embody governmental policies. I have elsewhere argued that policies of governance of diversity have strongly impacted upon museum activities (Iervolino 2013). I here wish to suggest that museums' initial attempts to represent their countries' cultural diversity were strongly influenced by the discourse and policy of multiculturalism. Bennett (2006: 59) maintains that official policies of multiculturalism proposed a new 'conception of museums as the kind of "differentiating machine"' conceived 'as a facilitator of cross-cultural exchange'. During the last decade museums

have increasingly attempted to represent the cultural diversity of their society and to inform discussions on migration and cultural diversity that have marked the post 9/11 world (Goodnow and Akman 2008). However, in recent years museum practices have been influenced by cultural diversity policies that, I have earlier suggested, have substantially reiterated old discourses of assimilation through ideas of civic integration (Shatanawi 2011).

Using a range of examples, I now discuss the three main exhibition forms that have become the 'dominant regimes of representation' (Hall 1997: 232) of cultural diversity in different types of museums, specifically exhibitions on minority groups, *migration exhibitions* and *community exhibitions*. I collectively name these exhibitions *multicultural exhibitions* and seek to illuminate to what extent and how each exhibition form has been shaped by and embodied the ideology and the politics of multiculturalism. I pay particular attention to *community exhibitions* as they have found large application in European ethnographic museums seeking to respond to the post-colonial critique and the multicultural challenge (Shatanawi 2012).

Mainstreaming the art of minority cultures

As early as the mid-1980s, in an attempt to be more reflective of the multicultural composition of their society, mainstream art museums started organising exhibitions presenting the creations of artists from minority groups living in their society. These exhibitions were constructed around the notions of group or collective identities. Two iconic examples are the *Other Story* (1898) shown at Hayward Gallery

and *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* (1987), first displayed at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, which toured various US cities. The *Other Story* presented the work of British visual artists of African, Caribbean and Asian ancestry, while The *Hispanic Art* displayed the artistic creations of Hispanic artists living in the US (Livingston and Beardsley 1991; Marzio 1991). If this exhibition form succeeded in including the arts of minority groups into mainstream art establishments, it problematically lumped together artists from diverse countries, thus constructing a shared identity.

Reflecting on the application of this approach to the representation of Latin American and Latino art in the US in the nineties, Ramírez (1996: 34) argues this strategy was shaped by official multiculturalism and its ethnic-based identity politics. It enabled artists from marginalised groups to *finally* enter mainstream institutions, but only 'on the basis of an essentialist "difference" or desirable "otherness"'. It created a 'new type of multicultural art' based on 'a new exaltation of difference and particularity', which is essentially 'another form of cultural colonialism'. Fisher (2009) likewise argues that the *Other Story* was produced in an intellectual climate

...dominated by the sociologically biased philosophy of 'recognition of difference', 'redistribution of wealth', and 'equality of opportunity'. Whilst this constituted one of the most important anti-colonial attacks on British complacency, it tended...to obscure the fact that cross-cultural encounters *produce* difference; and on the other hand, to fetishise difference...

Ramírez's and Fisher's critiques point out the challenges of (art) exhibitions constructed from the perspective of identity politics, especially around notions of ethnicity. If those exhibitions enable mainstream (art) museums to attract new audiences, they are problematically based on 'a fallacious *construct* – a *mise en scène* of identity' (Ramírez 1996: 26). They assume one dimension in group formation, while obstructing the exploration of differences (of gender, age, class, etc.) existing between individuals belonging to the same ethnic minority. As Silvén (2008: 18) suggests, ethnic-based identity 'can also lock people into unwanted and static forms of belonging where essentialism replaces cultural hybridism and flexibility'. Araeen (2002 referred in Díaz 2008) argues that the pitfall of 'multicultural art' is that it prioritises the origin (in terms of *exotic* geographies) and cultural background of 'non-Western' artists as markers of authenticity. He suggests that this approach forces the artistic creations of 'non-Western' artists into anthropological categories, and limits their potential to create an alternative discourse for their practices. Gundara (2010: 12) also maintains that the artistic creations of 'non-Western' artists are often categorized as 'ethnic arts', which suggests that they 'are not "art", to rate with the art of Europe, but "arts", a humble activity that deserves less serious notice.'

Migration exhibitions

In the last three decades a variety of museums (for instance museums of urban history¹⁰ and art museums) started introducing the *migration exhibition*, another form of *multicultural exhibitions*. Andrea Witcomb (2009) suggests that the two main

¹⁰ For example, the Museum of London (Merriman 2007).

reasons behind the success of *migration exhibitions* are the introduction of the official policies of multiculturalism and the increase of interest in social history, particularly migration history. *Migration exhibitions* often reiterate conventional narratives, such as the journey, the enrichment, the suitcase, the redemptive or rebirth narratives (ibid). Only recently some institutions have attempted to diversify these narratives by adding more voices, exploring intergenerational differences and processes of cultural change (Goodnow 2008b). Some museums have also organised exhibitions focusing on the histories of refugees.¹¹ Moreover, migration museums and museums of urban immigration¹² have opened in several multicultural countries (e.g. Australia, Canada, Argentina, and Brazil) and, more recently, in European countries (such as the UK, France, Germany and Spain).¹³ These museums are specifically devoted to document and present the migration experience, deconstruct stereotypes on migration, and celebrate cultural pluralism.

Migration exhibitions effectively draw attention to the histories and experiences of migrants. They successfully highlight migrants' cultural and economic contribution to their host society, foster their sense of belonging, and develop empathy among the host population. However, by presenting cultural diversity as if it is synonymous with migrants and minorities cultures, they suggest the existence of a monolithic culture prior to their arrival and present migrants as 'the others', while overlooking the cross-cultural contacts taking place in multicultural societies. Such exhibitions do not usually

¹¹ For instance, in 2006 the Museum of London opened the exhibition *Belonging: Voices of London's Refugees* (Day 2009; Day et al. 2010). For other examples see Goodnow with Lohman and Philip Marfleet 2008; Skartveit and Goodnow (2010).

¹² For instance, the Tenement Museum, New York (Abram 2002).

¹³ Research suggests that migration museums attract migrants and subject-specialists, while failing to appeal to the general public (Servole 2007; Arquez-Roth 2008).

critically explore the (national and supra-national) events and political, social, and economic structures generating and framing migration patterns.

Community exhibitions

In the 1990s mainstream museums located in pluralist countries began to produce *community exhibitions*, that is, exhibitions presenting the history, traditions and religion of diverse 'communities' typically defined by factors such as ethnicity, nationality and religious belief. They are produced in collaboration with long-established and new migrant groups or national minorities, normally drawing on collections of particular relevance for these groups and working with community 'representatives', that is individuals who have, or claim to have, moral authority in the community. Community exhibitions have been praised for being a significant strategy of democratization of museums (Cox and Singh 1997; Karp et al. 1992; Hemming 1997; Guntarik 2010; Watson 2007). By providing minorities with opportunities to put *their* cultures and histories on public displays in civic society, it has been argued that community exhibitions 'empower' minority groups and facilitate a sense of inclusion in the hosting country.

Sandell (2005) distinguishes two types of community exhibitions: 'compensatory' or 'celebratory'. While 'compensatory' exhibitions are usually produced in response to criticisms from communities angered by the lack of positive representations or the presence of displays perceived as offensive, 'celebratory' exhibitions laud the group's contribution to the culture and economy of the hosting society. Goodnow (2008b: 230)

describes 'celebratory exhibitions' using the expression 'enhancement narratives' and argues that they focus on differences, highlight 'what minorities *add* to the country', and often lead to stereotyping. She argues that they present the host country as culturally homogenous, though enriched by the inclusion of minority cultures conceived as separate from each other. It should be noticed that ethnic and community museums have opened with a focus on one particular ethnic or cultural group, aiming to provide an outlet for the voice of the minority cultural group they represent, such as the Anacostia Community Museum in Washington, D.C. However, as specialised museums created by or for minorities, they also risk reinforcing divisions and cultural separatism by representing each minority group separately.¹⁴

The idea of 'community' has been long 'been integrated with museums and heritage' (Crooke 2008: 7), founding extensive application in museum policy and practice. As Grinell (2010b: 185) states 'community' collaborations have 'become a standard and obligatory part of the ideal museum exhibition', being regarded 'as the ultimate solution to problems of representation'. According to Shatanami (2012: 77), the notion of 'community' remains a prominent strategy as it makes more manageable the complexity that characterises contemporary societies by providing museums 'a tool to work with, without having to profoundly change their institutional practice and outlook on the world'. Writing from southern Europe, Nuno Porto powerfully maintains:

¹⁴ For a debate of culturally and racially specific exhibitions see Kurin (1999).

I wonder if the term [community] applies to anything else but a politically useful interlocution unit which, more often than not, fails to be acknowledged as such in the first place, thus allowing the 'collaborative'; or the 'consultation' to assume that communities were natural entities 'out there' (Shelton 2008: 224).

Apart from a few exceptions, the political implications of employing the notion of 'community' in museum practices and discourses have been largely overlooked. From my perspective, museums have employed this notion without having a profound understanding of the political significance of the term. Museums have seldom questioned the underlying biases on which constructions of cultural diversity rooted in notions of 'community' are based. Before discussing these underlying biases hereafter, I wish to stress that it is not my intention to dismiss the community exhibition or suggest that this exhibition form should be abandoned all together. Rather, I wish to reflect on the problematic *political* implications of employing the notion of 'community' as the main gateway to the representation of the cultural diversity of European societies.

If surely there is still space for community exhibitions in contemporary museum practice, in my view museums should be critically informed in relation to the notion of 'community'. Following Rose (1999: 195), I suggest that in contemporary, plural societies 'communities' should be imagined not as fixed and given 'but locally and situationally constructed...as mobile collectivities, as spaces of indeterminacy or becoming', constructed forms 'for the collective unworking of identities and moralities'. These 'becoming' communities are self-identified and self-chosen by their

members and are constructed on forms of collectivisation based on new creative but contingent ways of thinking, acting and expressing oneself, both individually and collectively.

The limits of the community exhibition

It could be stated that community exhibitions are based on two misconstructions: firstly, migrants and minorities (of different ethnicity, nationality and religion from the majority) are more appropriately approached 'as part of communities rather than as individual visitors' (Shatanami 2011: 3); secondly, they can be better approached through objects from *their* own cultures.

When using the notion of 'community' to work with long-established and recent migrants, museums often disregard the point that no 'community' can be understood 'as a single ethnicity or unified cultural group' (Witcomb 2007: 138). Several factors (such as the geographical area of origin, class, educational background, time of arrival, reasons for migrating) should be taken into account. Moreover, 'community' boundaries are contested and often cross national borders; their members always belong to several groups simultaneously (Witcomb 2003). By considering 'community' representatives as able to express the voices of their members, museums have also taken for granted the 'authority of community authority' (Rose 1999: 189) and have disregarded that 'community' leaders 'are very often from the group's oligarchy' (Grinell 2010b: 182). Furthermore, museum/community partnerships have not ensured that real power shifts from the museum to the community have taken place. Lynch (2011a, 2011b) and Lynch and Alberti (2010) argue that museums often

maintain control on collaborations, manipulate community partners and shy away from conflicts. Finally, misrepresentations and stereotypes have not always been avoided, as sometimes 'community' members have employed what Spivak (1988: 205) names 'strategic essentialism'; that is, 'the *strategic* use of positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest.' In other words, essentialist categories or attributes of human identities have been employed by the community itself to reach specific political ends.

If divergent perspectives on what should be said and how about *their* cultures have emerged between 'community' members during processes of exhibition production (Witcomb 2007; Shatanawi 2012), those internal divisions have usually been obscured in community exhibitions, which represent 'communities' as if they are internally homogenous. This is due, I argue, to the political and practical complexities of expressing these internal differences. One of my interviewees, Alex van Stipriaan (2010), *Curator Culture and History Latin America & the Caribbean* at the Tropenmuseum, for example, refers to the challenges that emerged during the production of the *Art of Survival: Maroon Culture from Suriname* (November 2009-May 2010). The exhibition presented Maroon culture¹⁵ and explored how it is responding to the pressure of globalisation;¹⁶ it was produced in consultation with two focus groups, one of Maroons living in Suriname and one of Maroons living in the Netherlands.

¹⁵ Maroons were brought as slaves from Africa to Suriname by the Dutch, but managed to escape slavery and formed independent settlements in Suriname.

¹⁶ The theme was chosen as 'Maroons are part of the Surinamese population and...the Surinamese population is a *major* minority in the Netherlands. Their history is very problematic and is part of...Dutch colonial history' (van Stipriaan 2010).



3.1 *Art of Survival: Maroon Culture from Suriname*, Tropenmuseum.

Van Stipriaan argues that ‘fundamental differences’ emerged on virtually ‘every subject’ not only between the two focus groups but also within the group living in the Netherlands. He admits that if originally the intention was to show the differences within the latter focus group, the idea was eventually abandoned as it was thought that the complexity of the exhibition theme made this approach inappropriate. He states that this would be

...a step too far in a subject that most Dutch people do not know about...I am telling Dutch people a story which is part of their own story they do not know about, which is confusing and makes them uneasy...If you make another layer within the exhibition which problematises identity...you make it so difficult for the audience to understand...(van Stipriaan 2010).

If van Stipriaan's decision is reasonable, I wish to suggest that even when working with less problematic histories, museums tend to homogenise 'communities' and *their* cultures, shying away from exploring internal diversity and process of cultural hybridity. The problem might be that, by stressing communities' internal heterogeneity, community exhibitions would challenge the same notion on which they are constructed.

The examples above demonstrate that, although guided by a progressive wish to respond to the diversity brought to contemporary society by migration and globalization, the three forms of *multicultural exhibitions* present pitfalls both conceptually and politically. Decisions about how (minority) 'cultures' are presented are significant as 'they reflect deeper judgments of power and authority and can, indeed, resolve themselves into claims about what a nation is or ought to be as well as how citizens should relate to one other' (Lavine and Karp 1990: 2). Hereafter, I further discuss power relationships between minority and majority groups in plural societies and the ways these inform *multicultural exhibitions*.

Pitfalls of *multicultural exhibitions*

Regardless of the specific form they take, *multicultural exhibitions* present, I suggest, conventional 'discourses about the others' (Pieterse 2005). By focusing on the cultures and histories of long-established and recent migrants and presenting them as separate and sharply distinct from the culture and the history of the majority,

multicultural exhibitions implicitly reiterate dichotomies such as us/them, self/others, minority/majority; an approach which highlights 'otherness'. Such binary thinking is endemic to multicultural policies and operates as a tool for exclusion as much as for inclusion (Díaz 2008).

As the examples above demonstrate, the main pitfall of *multicultural exhibitions* is that they are based on simplistic and monolithic ideas of 'culture'. Pieterse (2005: 167) suggests that 'essentialist and territorial understandings of culture' inform static views of multiculturalism. They presuppose 'the existence of clearly distinguished, in themselves homogenous cultures – the only difference now being that these differences exist within one and the same state community' (Welsch 1999: 196). The idea of cohabitation of different cultures in the same society may be regarded as a progressive shift, especially when compared to fictional calls for homogenous (national) cultures. However, the understanding of cultures as separated spheres is both unrealistic and problematic. It is unrealistic as 'cultures de facto no longer have the insinuated form of homogeneity and separateness' but assume fluid forms crossing cultural boundaries (197). It is problematic as, by overemphasising the existence of particularist cultural identities, it may favour regressive tendencies and risks leading to separation and ghettoisation (ibid). As I stressed in the introduction, during recent decades in virtually all 'Western' countries we have witnessed increasing efforts to reclaim uncontaminated, authentic (national) identities and cultures.

Multicultural exhibitions embody, I argue, some of the most problematic aspects of established discourses and policies of multiculturalism. Firstly, the preference for

representing cultural diversity through collective identities is bounded to the extensive use of notions of 'community' in official multiculturalism. Yet, policies of multiculturalism have granted long-established and new migrants full participation in national societies as members of homogenous *cultural* 'communities' defined in ethnic, religious and national terms. This approach presupposes only 'a single dimension in group formation, rather than the individual forming part of many different but potentially overlapping groups' (Ashworth et al. 2007: 19). Moreover, it reduces the representation of cultural diversity to the display of the cultures of 'others' living within the national borders. Whilst highlighting that '*the others* are the neighbours' today (Muñoz 2008: 61), *multicultural exhibitions* approach them as members of national collectivities of 'other' countries, even when they have become citizens or have taken other forms of nationalities of their country of residence, and freeze their identities in the past and in the country of origin. For instance, Shatanawi (2011: 4) suggests that Dutch museums approach and represent Dutch citizens of Moroccan background as Moroccans. She argues 'on a more abstract level, the exhibitions reinforce the State's current position that Moroccans will remain foreigners in the Netherlands, no matter for how many generations they've lived there' (ibid).

The preference for the language of communitarism (particularly in community exhibitions) is also connected, I suggest, to its emergence as a key theme in debates about the nature of government. If the idea of communitarism has always been conspicuous in liberal political thought, the invention of 'communities' as a new object of government has become more prominent since the end of the twentieth century. Rose (2000: 1395) refers to the 'Third Way politics' in the UK, the US and parts

of Europe as a third way of governing based on a new politics of conduct (which he defines as *ethnopolitics*) 'that seeks to reconstruct citizens as moral subjects of responsible communities'. 'Communities' are imagined as defining the ethics guiding citizens' behaviour and become the instruments through which political subjects of government are collectivised. Rose (1999: 177) argues that although 'communities' are described as 'something that already exists and has a claim on us – our common fate as gay men, as women of colour, as people with AIDS, as members of an ethnic group, as residents in a village or suburb, as people with disability', they *constructed* using several devices and techniques. Members of the national polity are to be made aware of their connection to particular 'communities' through 'the work of educators, campaigns, activists, manipulators of symbols, narratives and identifications' (ibid). In turn, 'communities' actively participate in the governance of the conduct of their members. When museums, which Rose (2000: 1399) includes in the list of 'the politically organized and state-directed assemblages for moral management', work with 'communities' and represent *their* cultures, they contribute to their creation. Bennett (1990) also suggests that when museums *represent* 'communities', they do not simply act as facilitators of representation in the public space but *produce* the very notions of 'communities' and of (national and minority) cultures, thus contributing to the construction of what a culturally diverse society is.

In using the language of communitarism, I would argue, museums end up fixing or museumising 'communities' (Macdonald 2003) and construct them as apparently natural, non-political entities. They overemphasise the separateness of *their* cultures and grant minorities only a *partial* belonging to the nation. They reflect the politically

desired end (formalised in official multiculturalism) of constructing the notion of a culturally diverse society as one formed by a collection of several distinct and internally homogenous groups, completely isolated (not only culturally but also economically, politically and socially) from the rest of the society. They construct an idea of a multicultural nation as a 'community of communities', while failing 'to diagnose the power relationships created in the struggle over cultural diversity and certain forms of life' (Rose 1999: 194) and through this to enable the possibility of a redistribution of power.

It could even be argued that *multicultural exhibitions* operate not only as a technology of cultural preservation and maintenance but also as one of containment. For instance, Adriana Muñoz, *Curator of Collections* at the MWC, suggests that the recent trend that sees the Swedish government funding projects that focus on new migrants considered as 'problematic' (that is, Afghani, Iraqi and Iranian people) manifests a governmental attempt to control 'what is going on in these groups.' She argues 'in some way...you are controlling what is happening inside the associations', thus providing an example of museums as, in Rose's terms, 'agencies of control concerned with risk management and secure containment' (Rose 2000: 1407).

Returning to Hage's theory (1998), it could be suggested that *multicultural exhibitions* present cultural diversity as a national possession, while leaving unchallenged the homogenous vision of the majority culture. 'Ethnic' cultures living within the national borders are put *on display*, being constructed from the perspective of - and for the consumption of - the dominant culture, which is usually absent in *multicultural*

exhibitions. Hage (ibid 152-160) suggests that *multicultural exhibitions* are one of the contemporary cultural productions (together with Olympic Games, multicultural festivals and so forth) that are employed to construct the 'national self' - through the exhibition of 'otherness' that the nation 'possesses'. Referring to the 2000 Olympic Games, for instance, he (148-149) argues that Australia used the event to present itself to the international community as a multicultural society. However, he states that the 'multicultural' performers, such as the ethnic dancers, were 'objects/functions that White Australian decision-makers used in presenting "Australia"...' He argues that this approach is problematic as it constructs multiculturalism as something that the country *has* rather than *is*. He (ibid) maintains '...In so far as it [multiculturalism] is an exhibition of cultural diversity, it is less an exhibition of a culturally diverse Australia than an exhibition of the cultural diversity that Australia *has*.' Hage describes the 'multicultural exhibition' as the post/colonial descendent of the colonial fair:

For, if the exhibition of the 'exotic natives' was the product of the power relation between the coloniser and the colonised *in the colonies* as it came to exist in the colonial era, the multicultural exhibition is the product of the power relationship between the post-colonial powers and the post-colonised as it developed *in the metropolis* following the migratory processes that characterised the post-colonial era (1998: 160-161).

His statement clearly elucidates the unequal power relationships produced by processes of migration in 'Western' societies, and the ways these are embodied in *multicultural exhibitions*.

From my perspective, despite their pitfalls, *multicultural exhibitions* represent a crucial step towards the museum's transformation into a more democratic and inclusive institution. By representing people left out of the 'mainstream', they have enabled museums to be more reflective of the diversity of their societies. Their introduction provided museums with an exhibition form through which they could challenge their traditional role as institutions devoted to the representation (and construction) of national cultures and identities as monolithic and homogenous entities. *Multicultural exhibitions* should be considered a product of a specific historical and political context. Yet, they gained momentum in liberal democratic 'Western' nations in the last decades of the twentieth century, influenced by the intellectual and political climate dominated by the struggle of identity politics movements, such as those concerning women, Blacks, gays, and lesbians. These groups were constructed around specific aspects of people's identity (for instance, race, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation) regarded as forming the basis for alliances around the shared experiences of injustice, oppression and marginalization of their members. They strongly demanded the recognition of their differences and equal civil rights. These identity politics were closely associated with the politics of difference that played a central role in certain discourses of multiculturalism.

In recent decades, there has been an increasing awareness of the limitations of forms of representation of cultural diversity as the presence of distinct minority cultures. Their tendency to reinforce cultural separatism has induced some museums to search for alternative ways to represent the cultural diversity of their society. Critics have pointed to museums' inclination to overlook the changes brought by migration to what

Graziella Parati (2005: 17) names 'destination culture'.¹⁷ As Parati (ibid) explains, a 'destination culture' is 'not only the culture of the country toward which people migrate.' In other words, it is not the (supposedly bounded) culture of the hegemonic majority that migrants should embrace and to which they are asked to demonstrate loyalty. Instead a 'destination culture' is 'the result of a process of hybridization between local and incoming culture', which - Parati (ibid) argues - is 'a destination culture for native[s]...as well.' Importantly Parati's concept draws attention to the process of construction of new cultural expressions and identities to which both hegemonic majorities and migrants and racialised minorities contribute. Some institutions have introduced alternative exhibition forms in an attempt to represent this 'destination culture', which I discuss hereafter.

Beyond *multicultural exhibitions*

The consciousness of the shortcomings of dominant forms of representation inspired some museums to develop new exhibition forms seeking to better reflect the variety of forms that diversity takes in the contemporary plural societies of postcolonial Europe. Being influenced by the critique of multiculturalism and debates in academia around the fluidity of contemporary cultures and identities, some institutions have attempted to move away from 'discourses about the others' and to

¹⁷ Parati's concept of 'destination culture' as discussed in her book *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture* (2005) should not be mistaken with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's earlier work entitled *Destination Culture. Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (1998). Although the two publications address related themes and issues, Parati's work specifically explores processes of cultural hybridization activated by migration movements to Italy, particularly in the fields of Italian literature and cinema. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1998: 1) work instead 'deals with agencies of display in museums, festivals, world's fairs, historical recreations, and tourist attractions' in the international context.

question binary dichotomies such as us/them, majority/minority, migrant/host cultures, which support simplistic notions of 'belonging' and 'unbelonging'. If the presence of new immigrants and long-established minorities has long been regarded as the pivotal form that diversity takes in plural societies (Parekh 2000a), recently there has also been an increasing attention to the social diversity generated by the existence of other individuals or groups 'excluded' from the mainstream society, such as disabled people, gays, lesbians, women. Hereafter, I present the three main alternatives to *multicultural exhibitions: pluralistic displays, intercultural exhibitions* and *cross-cultural exhibitions*.

Pluralist displays

Some institutions have organised exhibitions seeking to bring together different groups within a unifying interpretative framework and paying attention to both similarities and differences. Sandell (2005: 191-192) names this exhibition form *pluralist displays* and suggests that they are 'more likely to draw upon and emphasize concepts of sameness, in some cases purposefully downplaying difference in order to suggest common and shared experience, values and beliefs between different groups'. He argues that *pluralist displays* often employ a geographic (focusing on a particular city or location) and/or thematic (exploring a theme from different perspectives) interpretative framework. The exhibition *The Peopling of London: 15,000 years of Settlement from Overseas* at the Museum of London (1993) can be considered a pioneer *pluralist display* that simultaneously focused on London and the theme of population movement from overseas. The exhibition sought 'to challenge the "them"

and “us” mentality by showing that all communities come ultimately from overseas’ (Merriman 2007: 338). *Gallery 33* (1991) at the Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, to which I referred in the introduction, is another landmark *pluralist* permanent exhibition that focuses on the city of Birmingham and seeks to reflect its multicultural character by exploring several themes (such as music traditions, food and drink, and body decoration).

Sandell also refers to a display technique that is often employed in pluralist displays, which attempts to offer a unifying or non-hierarchical reading by bringing together and placing side-by-side (without prioritising one over the other) a range of objects from different cultures or religions in an overarching theme. He refers to the exhibition *Circle of Life* at Nottingham Castle and Museum and Art Gallery (Sandell 2002) and the *Gallery of Religious Art* at the St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow (Sandell 2007a) as two exhibitions employing this technique.

By bringing together different groups, I suggest, *pluralist displays* move away from the focus on individual *cultural* ‘communities’ that mark *multicultural exhibitions*.

However, they leave unchallenged the understanding of cultures as static and pure entities and of multiculturalism as a society formed by separated groups.

Intercultural exhibitions

In an attempt to produce more inclusive and democratic forms of representation of cultural diversity, some museums have embraced alternative

discourses about diversity. Museum practices have been influenced by the discourse and policy of interculturalism that have become preponderant in debates about the governance of diversity in the second half of the last decade in Europe.¹⁸

Interculturalism has been presented by its proponents (Alibhai-Brown 1999, 2000; Sandercock 2004) as an effective approach to address diversity in contemporary societies, which might surmount some of the limits of multiculturalism.

Interculturalism pays attention to the relationship between minority and majority groups and how they influence each other (Sze and Powell 2004); it also recognises 'that negotiation, conflict and mutual exchange exist between different groups' (Delgado 2010: 8).

Cultural policies that identify 'Intercultural Dialogue' as an instrument able to contribute to the governance of cultural diversity have gained momentum in Europe. The adoption of the Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue (Faro, October 2005) by the European Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs represented an important milestone towards the implementation of intercultural policies in the EU states. In 2006 the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union declared 2008 the *European Year of Intercultural Dialogue*, while the European Forum for Arts and Heritage (now Culture Action Europe) and European Cultural Foundation initiated the Platform for Intercultural Europe. In 2008 the Council of Europe published the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, which provided guidelines for the promotion of Intercultural

¹⁸ Recently UNESCO also (2009: 43) has stressed the importance to 'promote intercultural dialogue within each society, as well as at the international level, as the only enduring response to identity-based and racial tensions'.

Dialogue. The *White Paper* stressed the unique role that cultural institutions and museums can play in this context, and charged them with the responsibility of expressing cultural diversity of contemporary societies and acting as 'spaces for dialogue' (Council of Europe 2008: 33).

A few museums in Europe have attempted to reinterpret their role through an intercultural lens. They have sought to develop projects aimed at promoting intercultural learning opportunities and encouraging interaction between different groups. The variety of strategies implemented by museums seeking to promote intercultural dialogue was studied as part of the EU-sponsored project, 'Sharing Diversity' (ERICarts 2008; Bodo et al. 2007). The idea of using museums as vehicles for intercultural dialogue was central, for example, to the European Project MAP for ID (2007-2009), *Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue* (Bodo 2010), which sought to foster the role of museums as promoters of intercultural dialogue. Within the framework of the project thirty pilot projects were carried out that were inspired by and sought to implement the guidelines of good practices defined by the research group of the project. I have (2013) presented elsewhere one of the thirty projects, *Creatures of Earth and Sky* at the Natural History Museum in the University of Parma (Italy). Drawing on this project, I stressed museums' potential to act as 'sharing spaces for intercultural dialogue' by inviting members of the majority and minority groups to cross boundaries of belonging and participate in processes of renegotiation of cultural and national identities. *Tongue to Tongue* at Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the University of Turin, Italy, is an example of a temporary exhibition

entirely developed within the framework of MAP for ID (Bodo 2012; Pecci and Mangiapane 2010).

The application of the idea of intercultural dialogue to museological practices has transformed some museums into “third spaces” unfamiliar to both sides in which different groups can share a similar experience of discovery’ (Edgard quoted in Bodo 2010: 23). However, the weakness of intercultural museum work is that it reiterates, at least at a conceptual level, the idea of a clear separation between cultures that also characterises *multiculturalism exhibitions*. If interculturalism progressively attempts to bring together different people and create opportunity for mutual understanding, it problematically ‘drags along unchanged the premises of the traditional conception of culture. It still proceeds from a conception of cultures as islands or spheres’ (Welsch 1999: 196).

Cross-cultural exhibitions

In an effort to move away from dominant forms of representation, a number of pioneer museums have recently produced exhibitions - which I name *cross-cultural exhibitions* - that seek to represent cultural diversity by focusing on processes of cultural change and adaptation. *Cross-cultural exhibitions* look at the ‘interpenetration of cultures’ (Griffin 2000), and the formation of new and fluid identities (Pieterse 2000). They present cross-cultural connections and cultural hybrids produced by migration and globalisation, and explore how cultures intermingle, change, and sometimes conflict. Pieterse (2005: 173) refers to cross-cultural mixing as ‘a subject

matter of exhibitions, but also an exhibiting strategy. As a strategy...it is concerned with showing the melange of cultures over time, the emergence of crossover cultural forms'. Goodnow (2008b: 243) instead refers to an exhibition form highlighting 'hybridity, transnationalism and change' that 'may bring together similarities and differences and ... also take account of change as a constant'. *Cross-cultural exhibitions* overcome ideas of close connections between cultures and notions of nationality, ethnicity, religion or 'race', the 'proxies' to which cultural diversity is often reduced (UNESCO, 2009: 4). They treat nationality, ethnicity and religion as only some of the factors defining peoples' cultures and identities, which they approach as fluid and constantly changing entities. *Cross-cultural exhibitions* attempt to overcome static notions of multiculturalism, while treating it 'as a field of interspersed and crossover culture and the formation of new, mixed identities' (Pieterse 2005: 168).

Museums producing *cross-cultural exhibitions* have often been influenced by notions of *hybridity* and *transculturality* developed in postcolonial theory, cultural studies and anthropology.¹⁹ The idea of *hybridity* developed by postcolonial and cultural theorists has played a crucial role in thinking beyond exclusionary, fixed notions of identity based on ideas of cultural, racial and national purity.²⁰

Shelton (2001) stresses the virtues of the application of the perspective of hybridity to museum practices. He maintains that hybridity enables museums to engage with differences in ways that avoid essentialisation and move beyond interpreting the

¹⁹For example, Poovaya Smith (1998).

²⁰ However, some critics such as Werbner (1997) suggest that, similarly to interculturalism, the notion of hybridity problematically stems from the assumption of the existence of pre-existing pure cultures.

relationship between cultures-in-differences from a monological governing position. By employing a perspective of hybridity museums can interpret objects not as strictly connected to specific cultures, but as continuously in motion. Kreps (2003: 14) refers to cultural hybridization as a useful concept 'for understanding the forms museums and museological practices take...' Pieterse (2005: 173) argues that hybridity as an approach breaks 'with inward-looking cultural nationalism', while foregrounding 'the openness and fluidity of identities'. Sandell and I (forthcoming 2013) suggest that the concept of hybridity can support museums' 'ongoing attempts to resist established dichotomies of self and other' and enable them to develop interpretive strategies that help rethink collective identities and cultures in more plural terms.

An example of a pioneer *cross-cultural exhibition* that, I suggest, employed the notion of cultural *hybridity* is *Black British Style* (2005) at the V&A,²¹ which explored the profound impact that the dress and the style of Black people have had on British culture. The V&A sought to present the fusional fashion and dress style that the encounter of Black style with English clothing labels generated since the migration of people from Africa and the Caribbean to the UK in the post-war period. However, the exhibition's employment of the notion of 'race' (Littler 2005) problematically favoured a racialised notion of difference. It reproduced the racialised category of 'Black, Minority and Ethnic' (BME) employed in UK policy and national census classifications,

²¹ The exhibition was inspired by *Nails, Weaves and Naturals: Hairstyles and Nail Art of Black Britain – A Day of Record*, an event hosted by the V&A in 2001 (Tulloch 2005).

which give a clear indication of ‘the different ways in which difference is categorized’ (UNESCO 2009: 42).²²

In recent years the concept of *transculturality*²³ has also gained momentum. One of its advocates, Welsch (1999), suggests that transculturality may be the most appropriate way to think of contemporary cultures. He argues ‘transculturality is...a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures...Cultures today are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other’ (Welsch 1999: 197). Welsh stresses that contemporary cultures include a variety of increasingly interconnected ways of life transcending national borders. At individual level cultural identities are not exclusively determined by people’s nationality but integrate several factors of differing cultural origins.

Some museums have produced *cross-cultural exhibitions* attempting to articulate transcultural identities, such as the *Transcultural Galleries* at Cartwright Hall (Bradford, UK), an exhibition presenting the Indo-Pakistani art collection held by the museum that opened in 1997. Drawing on her analysis of the *Transcultural Galleries*, Macdonald (2003: 10) maintains that museum exhibitions have the potential to disrupt homogenous, bounded identity articulations and represent postnational, transcultural identities. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that articulating transcultural identities is more challenging for certain institutions, such as national or history museums, as it requires them to go “‘against the grain” of expectations of such museums and their

²² In the 1970s and 1980s the term Black was employed in the UK as self-selected political category (Fisher 2006).

²³ It was introduced in the 1940 by Fernando Ortiz, a Cuban scholar, who coined the term transculturation.

subject matter'. Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh (2011: 30) suggest that interpreting cultures as transcultural creates challenges but also opportunities for curatorial practices. Drawing on their analysis of *Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual culture*,²⁴ they argue that the notion of transculturality enables museums to overcome some of the limits of multiculturalism. It moves the attention from migration and settlement to mobility. They propose a new way of conceiving British culture as transcultural and suggest that transculturality 'understands cultural value as being constantly in movement as people move across boundaries of all kinds', such as, intellectual, cultural and spatial boundaries (ibid).

Some museums have recently experimented with a particular type of *cross-cultural exhibition* that focuses on themes cutting across cultural and ethnic lines and attempting to incorporate different and, apparently, incompatible perspectives. I have earlier referred to this type of exhibition as thematic exhibitions. When discussing migrant and refugee exhibitions, Goodnow (2008b) mentions thematic exhibitions as a more effective exhibition form employed by museums seeking to overcome traditional representations of cultural diversity. She maintains that thematic exhibitions attempt to move 'beyond separateness' (that is, the representation of separate identities and on distinct 'communities') by cutting across cultural and ethnic boundaries. Thematic exhibitions seek 'to avoid promoting divisive lines of difference and, for museums, an endless line of groups with each seeking its own museum space' (ibid). She refers to the Migration Museum of Adelaide (Australia) as a pioneer museum that has organised

²⁴ Tate Encounters was a three-year research project (2007-2010) that explored the 'encounters' between students at London South Bank University with migrant backgrounds and Tate Britain.

a number of thematic exhibitions, including *Strictly Black* (exploring the different reasons and meanings why people wear black clothes).²⁵

Witcomb (2009: 64) also refers to the production of exhibitions focusing on themes as an effective strategy to bring together a variety of experiences within the same exhibition space, paying attention to both shared and dissimilar experiences. She argues:

Diversity in this scenario is not something that is outside the mainstream, but is something within it. In other words, normative narratives within a nation's historiography can be opened from the inside out. All one has to do is look at how people have rubbed shoulders with one another, to look at everyday life and how it is experienced. Attention to the differing experiences of class, race, gender and location would continue; but rather than using these categories separately, they would be in dialogue with one another by virtue of their place within a shared historiographical theme or geographical location.

Thematic exhibitions and, more broadly, *cross-cultural exhibitions* propose a more sophisticated understanding of the notion of plural or multicultural society by interpreting it as a society composed by people 'different if only in age, experience, background and preferences' (Ashworth et al 2007: 8) and with dissimilar life experiences. However, they are imagined as having the ability 'to understand one another' (Karp and Wilson 1996: 260) and to produce new, hybrid cultural expressions

²⁵ See Szekeres (2002).

through their cohabitation. By constructing an interpretative framework in which forms of personal and collective identifications can multiply and fragment, thematic exhibitions seem to hold the potential to challenge monolithic constructions of (cultural) identities. They allow museums to interpret difference in a non-separatist framework, and create the conditions for visitors to experience the foreigner in ourselves (Kristeva 1994).

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have presented an overview of the ways in which, during the last three decades, museums have sought to represent the cultural diversity of their contemporary plural societies, taking as a point of entry national policies on diversity. In concluding this chapter, I wish to stress that the examples above are by no means exhaustive. My intention was to present a schematic account of the main exhibition forms that museums have embraced in an attempt to respond to the multicultural challenge. Regardless of the specific form they might take, I have suggested, *multicultural exhibitions* have in common that they represent separately collectivities defined in terms of ethnicity, race and religion. Although the production of *multicultural exhibitions* was a crucial, initial step in the journey towards museums' transformation into more democratic and inclusive institutions, I have argued that those exhibition forms problematically employ simplistic, often ethnicised and racialised, understandings of difference. *Multicultural exhibitions* favour static,

reductive interpretations of cultures and problematically reproduce ideas of monocultural, homogenous majority culture.

During the last decade, I have argued, some museums have introduced new exhibition forms (alternatives to the *multicultural exhibition*) that are informed by and present more sophisticated interpretation of cultures and what it means to live in a multicultural society. Amongst these alternative exhibition forms, I discussed in particular thematic exhibitions that seem to hold the potential to destabilise the assumed isomorphism of places and cultures, and confront 'the problem' or 'the uncanny' of cultural difference, which museums seeking to respond to the multicultural challenge have usually ignored. Bhabha (1989 quoted in Gupta and Ferguson 1992:19) argues:

...cultural difference becomes a problem not when you can point to the Hottentot Venus, or the punk whose hair is six feet up in the air; it does not have that kind of fixable visibility. It is the strangeness of the familiar that it becomes more problematic, both politically and conceptually ... when the problem of cultural difference is ourselves-as-others, others-as-ourselves, that borderline.

During my research I came to regard thematic exhibitions as holding the potential to explore this borderline and confront the political and conceptual challenges of looking 'at ourselves-as-others and others-as-ourselves'. In doing so, thematic exhibitions might contribute to expand contemporary societies' sense of pluralism and play an active role in the redefinition of ideas about national identities and cultures in more plural, fluid and inclusive terms. They might challenge what Karp regards as one of the

'comfortable fantasies' on which contemporary societies are based: 'we are a society which is becoming multicultural, as if there were such a thing as a monocultural society' (Karp and Wilson 1996: 260). Thematic exhibitions appear to be a promising alternative exhibition form to *multicultural exhibitions*. Yet, they might represent contemporary multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious polities as those in which, as Karp powerfully explains, 'we not only have many cultures, but in which it is possible to be part of more than one culture' (Karp and Wilson 1996: 267), thus moving from multiculturalism towards a society based on cultural pluralism. For this reason, I decided to explore the production of semi-permanent thematic exhibitions particularly in the context of ethnographic museums, where the application of a thematic strategy deserves particular attention. The production of thematic exhibitions might enable ethnographic museums not only to overcome the limitations of *multicultural exhibitions* (particularly community exhibitions), but also to move beyond a geographic exhibiting strategy, which these institutions have favoured. In the next chapter I turn my attention back to the museum of ethnography and present my first case study, the Tropenmuseum, and discuss the reasons behind this museum's decision to experiment with a thematic strategy.

4. The Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam

This chapter takes the reader to Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands, and introduces the Tropenmuseum, drawing on data generated during fieldwork (particularly interviews) as well as published material and policy papers. The Tropenmuseum (figure 4.1) is one of the leading European ethnographic museums in Europe. It is part of a bigger organization, the *Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen* (KIT) or Royal Tropical Institute, ‘a centre of knowledge and expertise in the areas of international and intercultural cooperation’ (Iervolino and Sandell forthcoming 2013). The Institute is formed by seven departments, that is Biomedical Research, Development, Policy & Practice, Intercultural Management and Communication, Information & Library Services, Tropenmuseum (with its special branch – Tropenmuseum Junior), Tropentheater and Publishers.

The chapter attempts to present the Tropenmuseum’s broader ideological position and discourses on cultural diversity that encouraged experimentations with a thematic strategy. It begins by presenting the museum’s history and, focusing particularly on the last decade, describes how the institution has attempted to step away from tradition and respond to the increasing diversity brought by migration and globalisation to Dutch society.



4.1 Exterior of the KIT, Tropenmuseum's entrance.

Drawing on Macdonald's (2002) ethnography of the exhibition *Food for Thought* at the Science Museum, the chapter attempts to situate the study in place and time by locating the Tropenmuseum in the historical, socio-political and cultural context in which it operates. It also presents a brief account of patterns of migration to the Netherlands, describing how they have changed the composition of Dutch society, and discusses recent shifts within governmental policies on diversity as well as critical events that marked the history of the country during the last decade. It attempts to illustrate how those factors have shaped the Tropenmuseum's philosophies, practices

and products (particularly exhibition formats), and discusses how the institution has in turn sought to inform broader societal discourses regarding cultural diversity.

I now begin by going back to 1864, when the Colonial Museum - the first ancestor of the Tropenmuseum - was established in Haarlem, a city in the Northern part of the Netherlands. Following Legêne (2009), I present the most crucial five phases in which the museum's history¹ can be divided (particularly focusing on the last period) and discuss some of the most important socio-political events that marked these phases.

The history of the Tropenmuseum

As its original name (Colonial Museum) suggests, the origins of the Tropenmuseum lay in the colonial history of the Netherlands. Yet, the institution was established during the rise of Dutch imperialism and sought to fulfil colonial aims. During the first phase (1864-1910) the museum presented colonial products to the Dutch public and sought to promote commercial activities in the colonies.

During the second period (1910-1945) the museum moved to Amsterdam (exactly in 1919) and became part of the Royal Tropical Institute (then Colonial Institute). The museum opened its doors in its present-day magnificent, colonial-style building (figure 4.2) in Amsterdam in 1926. During this phase the institution was an expression of the *Ethische Politiek* (Ethical Policy), a colonial 'modernisation' policy applied by the

¹ The history of the museum has already been presented in previous publications, including Kreps 1988a, 1988b, 2011; Iervolino and Sandell forthcoming 2013; Legêne 2009; van Brakel and Legêne 2008; van Dartel 2008.

Netherlands in its colonies (Legêne 2009). The Ethical Policy was a sort of ‘enlightened colonialism’ (Legêne 2007: 221), which progressively turned into repressive and conservative actions.



4.2 Tropenmuseum's floors and Light Hall.

The third period (1945-70s) was marked by the end of the Second World War and the acceleration of processes of decolonisation worldwide. Similarly to other European imperial powers, the Netherlands progressively lost its colonies, which generated a profound crisis in Dutch national identity. As Kreps (2011) notes, the museum itself embarked upon a process of decolonisation that, I would argue, has not been completed as yet and might never be completed in an institution such as the Tropenmuseum whose history lies in the Dutch imperial project. In this political climate neither the museum nor the Institute could maintain ‘the emotionally-charged

term “colonial” (van Brakel and Legêne 2009: 9) and changed their names twice. In 1945 the Colonial Museum became the East Indies Museum, while the Institute adopted the name Royal East Institute. In 1950 the museum and the Institute were renamed the Tropenmuseum and Royal Tropical Institute (or KIT) respectively, denominations that continue to be in use nowadays.² I would suggest that a change of denomination and a conspicuous re-orientation of the museum’s focus may have become once again imperative in current post/colonial, global, plural times. Political events that took place during this period, especially those connected to the acquisition of independence by the Dutch colonies, influenced the museum’s strategies. The unilateral declaration of independence by the Republic of Indonesia on 17 August 1945 and the bilateral agreements on the sovereignty of Indonesia in 1949, which formalised the independency of the country, urged the Tropenmuseum to review its practices. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Second World War the first migrants arrived in the Netherlands from the former Dutch East Indies. In addition, after the independence of Indonesia (1949) and New Guinea (1958), ‘almost 300,000 Dutch citizens returned to the “motherland”’ (Vink 2007: 339). In 1951 the Netherlands also received Moluccan soldiers of the Dutch colonial army (the Royal Dutch East Indies Army) and their families, who were temporarily housed in camps where they lived in barracks, in uncomfortable conditions and isolated from the rest of Dutch society.³ Their life was not easy and, not surprisingly, they developed strong

² Those changes were not merely linguistic but reflected transformations in the focus of both the museum and the institute. Whilst the name chosen in 1945 manifested the museum’s intention to create a sort of ‘Commonwealth institute for the East and West Indies’ (van Brakel and Legêne 2008: 9), the denomination selected in 1950 sought to reflect a move of focus from the former colonies to the ‘tropical and sub-tropical regions in their entirety’ (ibid). Northern Africa, the Middle-East, Latin America, India and Pakistan progressively became areas of museum’s interest.

³ The Moluccan islands came under the influence of the Dutch empire in the 17th century through the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC). When the Company was dissolved in 1799 the Moluccan islands

feelings of discontentment, if not hostility towards Dutch society. In December 1957 Indonesia declared 40,000 Dutch nationals living in the archipelago undesirable aliens. This group, which included both Dutch people as well as people of mixed descent (Indo-Europeans), was forced to move to the Netherlands (Iervolino and Sandell forthcoming 2013). In the 1960s and still in the 1970s (although at slower pace) supposedly temporary guest-workers were recruited from Mediterranean countries (primarily Italy, Spain, Morocco, Turkey and Yugoslavia). The arrival of guest-workers and post/colonial migrants changed the demographic structure of Dutch society and transformed the Netherlands into a multicultural society (Shatanawi 2011). These changes generated concrete challenges for the Tropenmuseum as the 'people who were represented in the museum as colonial subjects in the past were now members of Dutch society' (Kreps 2011: 73).

During the fourth period (1970-1990) the museum strengthened its ties with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Development Cooperation that became its main funding body.⁴ Following the invitation of the then-Minister of Development Cooperation, B. J. Udink, the Tropenmuseum committed itself to the idea of development cooperation, reformulating its policies and strategies accordingly. The institution started looking at

became part of the Dutch East Indies, a Dutch colony under administration of the Netherlands. A large number of Moluccas served as professional soldiers for the colonial army (the Royal Dutch East Indies Army), which was disbanded only during the Indonesian War of Independence (1945-1949). Moluccan soldiers were given the choice of being demobilised or joining the army of the Republic of Indonesia. Some of the Moluccan soldiers were brought with their family to the Netherlands, where it was thought they would have stayed temporarily, until repatriation to the Moluccan islands (Steijlen 2010).

⁴ Until 2012 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided fifty percent of the museum's funding, which placed the museum in a unique position in comparison to other ethnographic museums (van Brakel 2011). The ministerial funding was arranged 'in an "output finance" structure' (van Beurden 2005) as the Tropenmuseum was required to use it to deliver 'products' to the Ministry, primarily international projects. The remaining half of the funding was generated through entrance fees and so forth.

the differences and the interdependencies between the developed and developing worlds (Kreps 1988), exploring how these relationships were affecting the lives of people in the Tropics and Sub-Tropics (van Brakel and Legêne 2008). In 1975 the museum closed for renovation, reopening in 1979. The new exhibitions ‘took on an “emancipatory” and consciousness raising approach’ (Kreps 2011: 74) focusing on difficult ‘contemporary social themes’ in the ‘non-Western’ world (van Dartel 2008: 33) such as poverty. This period was marked by increasing migration from Dutch overseas territories (ter Wal 2007). The independence of Suriname in 1975 brought to the Netherlands about 180,000 migrants, while since the 1980s migrants arrived from the Dutch Caribbean islands of Aruba and Netherlands Antilles (Vink 2007).

At the end of the 1970s the Netherlands witnessed the first tensions due to violent protests of second-generation Moluccan migrants expressing frustration about the ways they and their parents had been treated in the Netherlands. These protests culminated with the infamous train hijack of 1977 during which two hostages and six hijackers lost their lives (Prins and Saharso 2009). The necessity to develop relevant policies to manage the delicate situation became manifest.

The last phase

The last period (1990s-present day) is particularly interesting in the context of this study. The approach taken by the museum during this period together with changes in Dutch society as well as critical events that marked the history of the Netherlands represents the main reasons behind the selection of the Tropenmuseum as a case study for the project.

After the 1990s immigration has occurred at a faster pace than ever before in the Netherlands and the composition of the Dutch population has noticeably changed. It became self-evident that the guest workers arrived during the previous decades 'were here to stay' (van Stipriaan 2009: 60) and the proportion of 'ethnic' Dutch people⁵ increased (Schnabel 2008).⁶ At the end of last decade Amsterdammers had more than 110 different nationalities and about half of the Amsterdam's schoolchildren were of non-Dutch background (Faber 2009). Since the 1990s the museum has increasingly talked about 'globalization and the rise of cultural diversity within Dutch society' (Legêne 2009: 14), focusing on processes of exchange activated by (contemporary and historical) cultural encounters. The Tropenmuseum has enlarged its focus of interest, including more and more European and Dutch society in its displays. I shall expand on this point in chapter six when presenting the exhibitions *Travelling Tales* (also known as *Kartini* as I shall name it hereafter) and *World of Music*. The museum has sought to respond to the post-colonial critique and the 'developments in museological theory and museum ethnography' (van Dartel 2008: 33) by committing itself to the application of a reflexive approach. In an attempt to achieve this goal in 1995 the Tropenmuseum initiated a large project of refurbishment of its permanent exhibitions. As the museum chose to remain open, the renovation was undertaken on a gallery by gallery basis. The refurbishment was concluded in 2008, taking more than a decade to be completed.⁷ If the long time-span enabled the Tropenmuseum to respond to international changes in museological discourses, design conventions and

⁵ According to Dutch law, the expression refers to people who have at least one parent born in a 'non-Western' country.

⁶ By 2003 the six largest ethnic minority groups living in the Netherlands included, in order, Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, Netherlands Antillean and Aruban, Indonesian and Former-Yugoslavian people (ter Wal 2007).

⁷ The renovation started with the *South East Asia* department in 1995 and ended with *World of Music* in 2009.

technological developments, the format chosen for the project was not without consequences, as I shall highlight in the concluding chapter.

Jowa Imre Kis-Jovak (2010), *Director of Architectenbureau Jowa*, the company that designed all the new galleries apart from one (*Kartini*), highlights the effects of changes in display strategies on the refurbishment process. He suggests that these changes become evident by following the renovation process and analysing the revamped galleries in chronological order.⁸ Kis-Jovak implicitly refers to three design strategies applied during the renovation, which could be defined *object-centred*, *contextual*, and *free-association* approaches. He states that the first department *South East Asia* was produced at a time when

...you wanted it [the design] to be isolated looking at objects...It was not transparent; you had to walk through it [the gallery] and had to concentrate on every object [and each object was] very dramatically illuminated...Later you had to see the object in a certain context ...[Today] it was more about [the] transparency...you can walk through it [the gallery] and you can see it all and...you can make your own choice where you want to stop.

When referring to the process of renovation, Legêne (2010) also highlights the role played by technological developments. She refers to the digitalisation of the collections that, she suggests, made the process of searching the collection easier but also 'influenced the complexity of the story being told in the semi-permanent

⁸ Although this is beyond the scope of my investigation, an 'archaeology' of the semi-permanent exhibitions would shed new light on how ideological changes within the institution as well as developments in technology and design conventions altered exhibitionary practices.

exhibitions. The first ones...are rather simple stories and they become more multilayered with more information about relationships between objects and collectors, or between historical and modern objects...' She highlights the central role played by technological developments in enabling museums to produce multilayered exhibitions that provide visitors who wish to do so with opportunities to delve into the subject. In chapter seven I shall further discuss how the implementation of new technological infrastructures of collection access and management is altering processes of exhibition-making.

Tropenmuseum for a change

In order to mark the completion of the refurbishment and the beginning of the 'next phase' of the institution, the museum organized a two-day international Symposium, 'Tropenmuseum for a change', that took place on the 11th and 12th of December 2008 (van Dartel 2009). Being aware that 'a museum cannot think about its future without taking its past into consideration' (Faber and van Dartel 2009: 7), the Tropenmuseum decided to begin the search for new directions by inviting international experts to critically analyse the completed process of renovation. The new exhibitions and the entire institution were put under scrutiny. The Symposium aimed to open up a debate about the dilemmas that the Tropenmuseum and, more broadly, ethnographic museums are grappling with in contemporary society, which were briefly discussed in chapter two. During the Symposium the contemporary social relevance of ethnographic museums and the role they can play in today's multicultural society were discussed (ibid). Alex van Stipriaan (2010), *Curator of Latin America and*

the Caribbean, who led the discussion on this theme, argues that he was surprised by the opinions expressed by relatively numerous professionals from other Dutch museums or cultural institutions. One of the participants even suggested that the Tropenmuseum should 'become a colonial museum again and not to try to be multicultural or...modern and hippie' (ibid). Some argued that the museum should stick with its *core business*, that is, 'colonial culture' (ibid). According to van Stipriaan, more than anything else, these opinions manifest a certain discontent towards what might have been perceived as the Tropenmuseum's attempt to enter "'their" slice of market'. He argues 'other museums and institutions want to do that [be multicultural] and they fear us entering "their" market.' He suggests that may be useful 'to have an adversary to have an institution in society which they can still call "colonial" and point at...' He argues that in the museological context of Amsterdam museums position themselves strategically in contraposition with one other.⁹ Although disagreeing with these criticisms, Van Stipriaan admits that, despite its effort to be 'multicultural' and more relevant, the Tropenmuseum will never entirely eradicate the colonial roots of its collections. Now I turn my attention to the complex socio-political context in which the Tropenmuseum has operated in the last decade during which the museum has increasingly faced the challenge of seeking to be 'an inclusive museum in an exclusionist environment' (Shatanawi 2011).

⁹ As we shall see, Grinell (2010a) makes a similar suggestion (chapter 5) when arguing that decisions about exhibition strategies and themes also depend on the museological context in which museums are located.

The political and social context

The most recent phase of the Tropenmuseum's history (1990s-present) has been marked by (international and national) events that have impacted upon the socio-political climate of virtually every society around the world, including Dutch society. Here, I refer to events such as 9/11 and the subsequent bombings, briefly discussed in the introduction. As I argued, these incidents and the events that followed, particularly the 'war on terror' formally waged by the 'Western' world against al-Qaeda exacerbated an already existing division between the 'West' and the 'Rest'. The compatibility between 'Western' values and Islam and the presence of Muslims in the 'West' became a major political and media concern (Cesari 2010).

However, long before 9/11, harsh anti-immigration statements were made in the Netherlands in the 1990s by former right-wing leader Frits Bolkestein (1991) who argued 'the integration of minorities should be handled with guts'. During 1998-2002 media debates increasingly focused on Islam's reactionary positions about homosexuality, the wearing of headscarves, and radicalism among Muslim youth. Nevertheless, these debates intensified after 9/11 and hate crimes were registered against Muslims (ter Walk 2007). Two events took place at the beginning of the twenty-first century that would have further complicated the situation and left Dutch society in a state of profound shock: the murder of politician Pim Fortuyn (2002) and the assassination of film director Theo Van Gogh (2004). Hereafter, I briefly describe these assassinations as they strongly affected the socio-political context of the Netherlands. Those events, it could be argued, induced the Netherlands to move away

from the application of a multicultural approach but also indirectly impacted upon cultural institutions, including the Tropenmuseum.

Pim Fortuyn's and Theo van Gogh's assassinations

Former university professor, political columnist and gay activist, Pim Fortuyn entered politics in 2001 as the leader of Leefbaar Nederland. Fortuyn embraced the genre of new realism, restating old populist slogans and presenting himself as the champion of ordinary people. He insisted on the importance of preserving Dutch national sovereignty, opposed the EU and championed freedom of speech. He became popular for his critical views on Dutch multiculturalism and immigration and his opposition to Islam that he called a 'backward culture', whose values he considered at odds with Dutch liberal values such as tolerance, equality and freedom. He argued for the need of obstructing Muslim immigration to prevent what he referred to as the imminent Islamization of Dutch society. Fortuyn's future political career was prematurely interrupted when on 6 May 2001, just before the parliamentary elections of the 15th, he was killed by Volkert van der Graaf, a Dutch animal rights' activist who 'was distressed by Fortuyn's promise to lift restrictions on fur farming' (Carle 2006: 72). However, apparently der Graaf also motivated the assassination as an attempt to prevent Fortuyn from exploiting Muslims as scapegoats in seeking to achieve political power. The assassination impacted on the result of the upcoming elections, which saw Fortuyn's party obtaining a record victory (Vink 2007).

Filmmaker and cultural commentator Theo van Gogh was also overtly critical of Islam. He directed *Submission*, a controversial short movie written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Dutch-Somali politician¹⁰ well-known in the Netherlands for her strong criticism of Islam. *Submission* presents the condition of Muslim women against whom violence is perpetuated in the name of Islam. The release of *Submission* raised strong debates in the Netherlands. Dutch Muslims expressed outrage when in August 2004 it was broadcasted on Dutch television (Prins and Saharso 2009), strongly lamenting its blasphemous character. *Submission* presents practices against women that might be still applied by Muslim believers that follow conservative, fundamentalist forms of Islam teachings. I would argue, however, that *Submission* tends to homogenise an entire religion by presenting a monolithic, essentialized representation of Islam as a religion petrified in history, incapable of self-criticism and change, necessarily misogynist and indulging in acts of violence against women. Furthermore, *Submission* represents Islam in a way that privileges a dichotomous way of thinking that creates ‘an insurmountable boundary between modern and pre-modern, between secularism and Islam’ (Cesari 2010: 1). *Submission* does not give justice to the liberal and democratic thinking that has recently been developing in contemporary and more dynamic branches of Islam. Soon after the release, van Gogh began to receive death threats and on 2nd November 2004 he was slaughtered while riding his bike to work just ‘around the corner’ from the Tropenmuseum, as van Dartel (2010), *Collection Researcher*, states. The killer, Mohammad Bouyeri, a Muslim with dual Dutch and Moroccan nationalities, was a member of the *Hofstadgroep* (Hofstad Network)

¹⁰ Ali was brought up as a Muslim in Somalia. In 1992 she escaped to the Netherlands where she obtained asylum. First Ali worked as a cleaner and then as a translator, before studying political science at Leiden University and becoming actively involved in Dutch politics.

(Buruma 2006).¹¹ As Legêne (2005) also suggests ‘...the majority of Dutch (especially Amsterdam) population...was completely shocked’ by the assassination.

Before carrying out fieldwork at the Tropenmuseum, I held the expectation that the proximity to the scene of the crime might have induced the institution to play a central role in the complex post-murder atmosphere. Instead, Legêne (2010) maintains that the murder did not particularly impact upon the Tropenmuseum. However, she softens by adding

...maybe we thought that we had to work harder but it did not lead to other [policy approaches]...In my view the Tropenmuseum has always tried to lead discussions about what it means to be a multicultural society, and to respect people and to give them a voice...(Legêne 2010).

Legêne is correct as the museum did not develop a new policy approach in response to the event. However, I wish to suggest that van Gogh’s assassination as well as events such as 9/11 had a certain resonance in the museum’s activities. They induced the Tropenmuseum to initiate exhibitions seeking to contribute to the debates that were inflaming the Dutch political and media discourse. The exhibition *Urban Islam* can be regarded as an example of this trend. As Legêne (2005) has acknowledged tragic events like van Gogh’s murder offer ‘museums a chance and a responsibility to reach out and to play an active role in the strengthening of what Paul Gilroy...has described as conviviality in society.’ *Urban Islam* (December 2003 - September 2004) was produced during a period when Islam was constantly presented in Dutch media in a

¹¹ Hofstad Network is an Islamist group of mostly young Dutch Muslims of mainly Moroccan ancestry.

negative way (Shatanawi 2004). It sought to contribute to the debate about the place of Islam in contemporary Dutch society and its (in)compatibility with 'Western' values. Mirjam Shatanawi and Deniz Ünsal, the exhibition's curators, argue (2004: 44) that they were faced with the challenge of 'how to present a new perspective on Muslim religious life when public opinion and common knowledge of Islam were quite limitedly and negatively defined.' It can be argued that with *Urban Islam*, which I briefly present hereafter, the Tropenmuseum sought to play an active role in creating a convivial society.

Urban Islam

Urban Islam (figure 4.3) attempted to depict Islam as a 'modern' religion that constantly transforms itself according to a multiplicity of geographical, social and political factors (Shatanawi 2004). Particularly, it sought to stress the role played by factors such as globalization, urbanisation, local traditions, and political contexts.

Urban Islam attempted to portray Muslim believers as constructing their identities under the influence of those circumstances. It presented Islam through the personal stories of five young Muslims living in Paramaribo, Marrakech, Dakar, Istanbul as well as in Amsterdam. The multivocal exhibition showed a variety of viewpoints on Islam, seeking to act as a platform where different interpretations of Islam could be harmoniously presented side-by-side.



4.3 *Urban Islam*, Tropenmuseum.

The exhibition was constructed around a central tower where classical objects from the collection were displayed, grouped around themes representing the basic principles of Islam. The displays surrounding the tower focused on the five cities and presented the stories of the young Muslims; they included personal objects, films and so forth obtained during fieldwork carried out by the museum curators. Reflecting upon the process of acquisition of some of the objects displayed in *Urban Islam* in the permanent collections of the Tropenmuseum (briefly introduced in chapter two), Shatanawi (2008: 372-4) argues that the objects chosen were ‘contemporary pieces by Middle Eastern artists whose works represent a continuation of classical Islamic arts.’ She argues that the museum regarded them as complementing the Islam collection, which primarily includes the traditional heritage of the Muslim world. Conversely, the objects connected to the life of the five Muslims were regarded as ‘too casual, too

informal, too personal to be eternally kept' (ibid). It is interesting to note that although *Urban Islam* intended to present Islam as a modern, ever-changing, dynamic religion, the objects that the Tropenmuseum decided to acquire favoured instead an interpretation of it as a static religion 'trapped by its heritage and engaged in a perpetual struggle between tradition and modernity' (ibid). Shatanawi's reflection is critical as it clearly expresses the challenges that ethnographic museums face when attempting to move away from tradition, especially in relation to collecting practices. Her analysis suggests that ethnographic museums wishing to renew might even succeed in producing post/colonial exhibitions, but might struggle in changing their collecting practices and altering their approach to the study, preservation and classification of their collections. It seems evident that, in order to become truly postcolonial institutions, ethnographic museums need to decolonise their collecting practices and identify new approaches to the collection, categorisation and study of their objects. As Muñoz (2012) highlights when writing about the collections at the Museum of World Culture, these strategies strongly influence the process of construction of knowledge in museums and, consequently, its presentation in exhibitions. Hereafter, I return to the Dutch socio-political context and describe how the Dutch political murders and other global events impacted upon the Dutch multicultural approach.

Moving away from a multicultural approach?

In the complex context that followed international terroristic events and national incidents, an increasing anxiety started spreading in the Netherlands

concerning themes such as cultural diversity and migration. The general attitudes towards cultural diversity changed and the status of Dutch multicultural policies suffered from a 'strong backlash' (Prins and Saharso 2010). Since the 1980s the Netherlands had developed a national official policy for the integration of migrants and minority groups, which has been defined as a liberal multiculturalist policy. It supported 'the right of different cultural and ethnic groups to retain their distinctive cultural identities' (Vink 2007: 337), while seeking to combat their 'socio-economic marginalization' (Koopmans 2006).¹² Since the beginning of the new millennium Dutch integration policies progressively have moved away from a multicultural ideology and embraced a more restrictive, if not assimilationist approach.¹³ The country's tradition of tolerance was abandoned and integration policies became more demanding on the side of the newcomers. In the wake of Fortuyn's and van Gogh's murders it was argued that multiculturalism was 'a hopelessly outmoded and politically disastrous ideology' (Prins and Saharso 2010: 78). The Netherlands - long being regarded as one of the 'most totemic experiments in European multiculturalism' (Harrington 2008: 7) - were considered the 'prodigal son of multiculturalism' (Vink 2007: 337).

In the country the multiculturalism period was followed by two phases: new realism (2002-6) and civic integration (since 2007) (ibid). Populist politicians such as Pim Fortuyn (whose political approach I described earlier), Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders played a central role in the first phase. Rita Verdonk served as Minister for Integration

¹² Koopmans (2006) suggests, however, that multiculturalist policies are even counterproductive in the Netherlands and other countries with strong welfare state. He demonstrates that the Netherlands performs worse in relation to socio-economic indicators such as education, labour, and crime in comparison to other European countries applying a more restrictive integration approach.

¹³ Some suggest, however, that the multicultural policy 'was never accepted and practiced as fully as suggested' (Vink 2007: 339). Scheffer (2000) and Schnabel (1999), for instance, argue that Dutch multiculturalism had lost support long before these events took place.

and Immigration between 2003 and 2007. She acquired a reputation for her outspoken approach and for introducing restrictive immigration policies, which made her acquire the name of 'iron Rita'. Wilders is another controversial figure in the Dutch political scene. In 2005 he started his extreme-right 'Party for freedom' and became popular for his outspoken approach. A strong Euro-sceptic, supporter of free-market liberalism and the superiority of 'Western' values, and a harsh critic of censorship, Wilders presents himself as champion of the ordinary people. He robustly advocates a stop on migration, especially Muslim migration. He has been made (in)famously popular both in the Netherlands and abroad by his short movie *Fitna*¹⁴, which 'portrays Islam as a force seeking to destroy the West' (Iervolino and Sandell forthcoming 2013). Wilders' Party received large support during both the November 2006 and June 2010 elections. He gained large support playing on Dutch people's increasing fears about the supposed negative effects of immigration and its impact on working opportunities, welfare state and health system.

The phase of civic integration started in 2007, which strongly emphasises the importance of social cohesion and civic duties, and urged migrants to assimilate. Integration has become 'the watchword to define the national approach to immigration and inclusion' (Tahir 2008: 43). Migrants are not only given rights but are charged with duties and required to integrate into Dutch society and embrace Dutch culture and values. Rights are regarded as something that migrants should earn through individual efforts and achievements (Borevi 2010). Both new-comers and old-comers are asked to attend a civic integration course. In order to obtain Dutch

¹⁴ The movie shows several incidents connected to Islam extremism accompanied by quotes from the Koran.

citizenship, they are required to pass a civic integration exam, thus demonstrating an understanding of Dutch language, culture, knowledge and values. I now turn my attention back to the Tropenmuseum and discuss the exhibiting strategies the museum applied to its last refurbishment.

Exhibiting strategies

For about 100 years the internal structure of the Tropenmuseum has been substantially built around regional divisions (corresponding to geopolitical areas) with only a few thematic departments (specifically, textile and ethnomusicology). This structure follows the museum's concept of knowledge, which is 'based on a combination of "regional" and "thematic" knowledge' (van Brakel and Legêne 2008: 36). As van Dartel (2008: 37) suggests, at the end of the last decade the Tropenmuseum started 'pondering its main concept of geographical departments according to which the museum has been organised for almost 100 years now.' Van Brakel and Legêne (2008: 37) argue in the last collection policies paper:

The museum is aware...that the idea of 'regions' with a recognisable and representable essence is outdated and has been sharply criticised for the political ramifications of stereotyping, imposed constructions of identity and a disregard for issues around migration and cultural interaction. The concept of separate regional and thematic specialisations (or apparently encyclopaedic orientation to them) is outdated.

Whilst specifically referring to the internal organization of the Tropenmuseum, here van Barkel and Legêne clearly illuminate the deficiencies of a regional approach. Their viewpoints can be easily extended, I content, to the weaknesses of a geographic exhibitionary praxis. As I stressed earlier, up until recently ethnographic museums have usually classified, studied and displayed their collections according to geographical or geopolitical areas. The organisation of exhibitions according to geographical or geopolitical areas can be regarded as one of the present-day legacies of European colonialism that still mark contemporary ethnographic museums in Europe and elsewhere.

During the discussions that took place at the Symposium 'Tropenmuseum for a change' Ciraj Rassool, for instance, argued that 'what remains as the basis of the display of the colonial categories is the way the world has been mapped through colonial authority' (quoted in Colunge 2009: 26). One of the delegates envisaged the possibility of reorganising 'the whole exhibit according to themes and not regions' (Colugne 2009: 29), which raised a heated discussion. Henrietta Lidchi, for example, highlighted the potential risk of a thematic approach to create, what she calls, a 'multicultural soup' and to lose 'the right kind of cultural texture' (Colugne 2008: 29). Jyotindra Jain pointed to the risk of 'generalizing too much and obliterating "*cultural specificities*"' and of writing a 'general history of the man' (ibid). While not discounting the idea of doing away with a geographical arrangement, the curator and art critic Okwui Enwezor took a stand against the idea of writing a history of the man (ibid). Drawing on those discussions, Colugne (ibid) argues that a regional approach is problematic as it creates the false impression of the existence of a direct equation between geographic (or

ethnic) unities and cultural identities. She also suggests that this approach favours the attachment of particular labels to each region and creates certain expectations in the museum's public, which 'don't always seem to be fulfilled for the visitors "coming from" or closely relate to these geographical regions' (ibid: 26).

It should be said that the Tropenmuseum has often applied a thematic strategy to its temporary exhibitions. However, during the last refurbishment the museum has started experimenting with a thematic strategy in its permanent exhibitions as well. Currently, the museum has eight permanent galleries, five of which are structured around geographic or geopolitical areas - *Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Netherlands East Indies, New Guinea, Round and about India, Southeast Asia*, and *West Asia & North Africa*.¹⁵ The other three permanent galleries - *Kartini, World of Music, Man and the environment* - follow a thematic strategy.¹⁶

Apart from exploring the museum's experimentation with a thematic strategy in its semi-permanent exhibitions, I was interested in understanding to what extent the institution was considering to fully embrace a thematic strategy. In this respect van Barkel (2010) argues: 'That's to certain degree...because we still have curators positioned geographically...but [during] the last five years or so we did make some

¹⁵ The last gallery is a clear example of an exhibition constructed around a geopolitical, 'Western' construction. As van Dartel (2010) states, 'it's the Arabic region that is geo-politically put together as one region, whereas this region is truly...an invention of Western people'. She argues: 'This is quite arbitrary division of geographical areas put together to...show something mostly on Islam. Arabic is made identical to Islam'. Interestingly, Van Dartel acknowledges that Mirijam Shatanawi, current curator of that department who was hired after the gallery was opened, is strongly critical of the use of the term Western-Asia and North-Africa.

¹⁶ *Man and the environment* was the first exhibition to open in the 90s of those currently on display, before the refurbishment process was formally initiated, while *Travelling Tales* and *World of Music* are the last two.

thematic exhibitions...’ He refers to temporary exhibitions, such as *Red* (November 2010 - July 2011), a temporary exhibition that was in process of preparation in January 2010, as an example of this trend. He explains the reason behind the museum’s application of a thematic strategy by arguing: ‘...nowadays, in this global world, it is strange to pin-point people only to certain regions and to compare regions with other regions...It is thinking in differences and not...in sameness’. Here he implicitly argues that a geographical approach can be regarded as an exoticizing strategy, as Karp (1991b) would define it, which has the potential of stressing differences between different continents or other geographical areas. When asked the reason why, even regarding a geographical approach as outdated, the museum substantially still embraces this approach, van Barkel (ibid) responds:

We started fifteen years ago changing the whole museum...At that moment we were still thinking along these lines. It is only [during] the last few years that we were trying to think along other lines and not...regions... But we still have these curators...so...you have to discuss it with the curators...Then a curator of textiles or a curator of Africa...has to think along other lines.

He explains the challenges involved in inviting regional curators to think along different lines by referring to a discussion that had recently taken place at the Tropenmuseum, when a curator had forcefully maintained that exhibition-authors have to be *specialists* on the subject. Van Barkel reports the curator’s argumentation, who had suggested ‘if you want to make an exhibition on...people from Nigeria, you need an Africa curator’ (ibid). Van Brakel, *Head of Collections*, challenges this idea saying: ‘I don’t know if

that's all. An Africa curator is not familiar, I think, with Africa as a continent. That's nonsense'. However, Van Brakel (ibid) acknowledges that there is not easy solution:

...it is an ongoing discussion and...I am not sure where we will end but I am pretty sure that we will not do again exhibitions as we do...now, along regional lines, because how will you display popular art or modern art...along these regional lines? An artist from South-Africa, I think most artists, do not say I come from South Africa or I come from Yemen or I come from the Netherlands. They say, I'm an artist and I make art. And my background is important, it will contribute to my work or not but I am not a Nigerian artist, I am an artist.¹⁷

Van Brakel explains that for a long time the Tropenmuseum has had two thematic curators, textile and ethnomusicology, whose expertise is not defined according to a geographic area. He reports the museum's intention to hire another curator whose expertise is not defined in relation to a particular geographic area, that is a curator of contemporary art.¹⁸ Van Barkel also recognises '...our curator of textile is mainly dealing with textile from Indonesia, because that's our best collection and that's a point of focus...she is a *specialist* on Indonesia textile but not on textile from Africa or Latin-America.' Interestingly, van Brakel himself implicitly refers to the idea of being a *specialist* in a particular subject, a concept he had previously challenged when referring to the discussion with the curator mentioned above. He acknowledges that

¹⁷ Here van Brakel refers to a complex issue. His statement could be contested as he speaks for artists making a generalisation that might apply or not, depending on the artist. Indeed, today many artists self-identify based on ethnicity or nationality. For instance, El Anatsui represents an emblematic example of an internationally known contemporary artist from Ghana for whom his Ghanaian background is crucial to his art practice as well as to his identity as an artist. It follows that museums should strive to leave artists speaking for themselves on how they want to be identified and labelled.

¹⁸ It should be said that after my fieldwork the museum eventually hired Anke Bangma as curator of contemporary art.

the main challenge for the museum is to identify relevant themes or disciplines around which to define curatorial expertise. Simultaneously, he recognises the needs to have 'experts' on the regions from which the collections originate: 'I do not think you [can] have a curator of festivities or...masks'. He admits: '...To a certain extent you shall...have "experts" and this expertise will stem from certain regions and they always have their network related to certain regions. I think this is not something you can dispose of.' I concur with Van Barkel when he argues that ethnographic museums need staff members that are knowledgeable about their collections and, to a certain extent, the specific cultural contexts from which they originate. If I agree that it is definitely challenging to identify alternative expertise, I suggest that this is not impossible. Conversely, I wish to argue that ethnographic museums might take advantages from hiring staff members educated in disciplines without direct connections with the museum's collections. As I shall argue in chapter seven and the conclusive chapter, these staff members might be able to look at the museum's collections with a fresh eye. I now turn my attention to the temporary exhibition *Rhythm, a dance in time* (hereafter *Rhythm*) that Legêne (2010) mentioned when reflecting upon the Tropenmuseum's experimentations with a thematic strategy.

Rhythm, a dance in time

Legêne (2010) considers *Rhythm*¹⁹ as a significant step towards the museum's application of a thematic strategy. She argues that its process of production was a crucial learning experience for the Tropenmuseum, which became more aware of the

¹⁹ The exhibition opened at the Tropenmuseum on 15 December 1999 and lasted for thirteen months. For more information see der Otter (2001).

strong impact that the museum's expertises have on processes of exhibition-making. She argues: '[it] made us aware of how strongly organising the expertise is. It is really organising the museum!' Legêne stresses that the theme rhythm was chosen as it was regarded as a cross-cultural topic with which 'everybody has the same relation'. The exhibition team sought to investigate 'what rhythm does with people and what people do with rhythm' (Legêne 2000: 31). She reveals that the museum held the expectation that the focus on a cross-cultural theme would have altered the process of exhibition-making. Yet, the focus on theme was expected to prompt 'a new way of collaboration between curators and other experts, and a new approach of the Tropenmuseum collections' (ibid). The main goal behind the selection of the cross-cultural topic rhythm was to initiate new collaborations between curators as well as between curators and external experts. Legêne (2010) acknowledges that such a goal was not achieved and the final result was somehow unsatisfactory. Each curator was responsible for one of the seven sections that formed the exhibition, which they produced drawing on 'their' collection and 'their' specialist knowledge. Legêne (ibid) states:

We had seven entrances in the topic of rhythm...it was a beautiful exhibition but the textile curator had made rhythm and textile, the music curator had made rhythm and music, the Oceania curator had made rhythm and bird. So it was conceptually crossing through all the sections [of the museum] and in the end it was completely following how the expertise in the museum was organised....in a way it was [a] deception for everyone because we had been working so hard and we could not come to something else than just a kind of plus, plus, plus is the total...

Whilst the Tropenmuseum intended to produce a cross-cultural thematic exhibition to which every visitor could relate, it did not succeed in identifying an effective strategy that would enable curators to actively collaborate and create a dialogue between the institution's expertise and, consequently, between its collections. Drawing on this experience Legêne suggests that the solution for ethnographic museums is not simply to apply a thematic approach, as I explain hereafter.

Challenging the canon

When asked her personal perspective on the subject geographic versus thematic exhibitions, Legêne (2010) argues that it is necessary to challenge the 'different art-historical discourse connected to the various regions and the collecting practices behind it.' She also maintains that it is the *canon* in ethnographic displays that needs to be challenged. She states that the museum chose to apply a thematic approach in an attempt to challenge this canon. However, Legêne (ibid) notes:

If you really want to challenge that *canon* - because in fact it is a cultural *canon* of cultures - then you have to find ways to... 'go against the grain'. And leaving the regional approach and employing a thematic approach is one way to do so, because you have to go cross-region[ally]. But the problem is that the expertise is organized according to regions. So an Africanist talks as an Africanist and an Indonesian archaeologist talks as an Indonesian archaeologist. So it is very difficult to do so. And because it is such a challenge, it makes the museum vulnerable and susceptible to change.

Legêne refers to what can be regarded as the main challenges that ethnographic museums face when seeking to move to a thematic approach. Her reflection suggests that a museum whose expertise and internal structure remains organised according to geographic or geopolitical areas might struggle with the application of a thematic strategy, suffering from a sort of incompatibility between the institution's and the exhibitions' organising principles. My investigation of the museum's application of a thematic strategy suggests that the organisation of the internal expertise and knowledge according to geographical departments complicates the application of a thematic approach. In chapter seven I will discuss some of the ways in which the structure and internal expertise of the Tropenmuseum and the MWC are impacting upon their experimentations with a thematic approach and are obstructing their processes of institutional change. In the conclusive chapter I shall argue that if museums want to effectively change their strategies of representation, they need to rethink their internal organisation of expertise and knowledge. A change of exhibiting strategy that is not accompanied by a parallel rethinking of the museum's expertise and knowledge might even create further difficulties to the institution and make ineffective its attempt 'to go against the grain'.

When I conducted my research, discussions about the future of the organisation and the next process of refurbishment were taking place within the institution. Van Brakel (2010) acknowledges that the museum is indecisive about which shape it should give to its next refurbishment. 'How we will do a total new refurbishment of the museum? Do we still go along the line of regions? Will we choose themes? We are in the discussion on that subject at the moment.' He stresses that the museum needs to

move the discussion forward and envision new futures. In the context of this project the Tropenmuseum's search for new exhibiting approaches made the museum a particularly interesting institution to investigate. Although not completely disregarding the application of a thematic approach, the museum was unsure that such an approach represents the ultimate solution to problems of representation. It was exactly the museum's critical perspective on a thematic approach and its uncertainty of whether or not to organise next refurbishment along thematic lines that made the institution a particularly interesting site for this study. I now turn my attention to the second case study I investigated for this research, the MWC in Gothenburg, which has instead confidently embraced a thematic strategy.

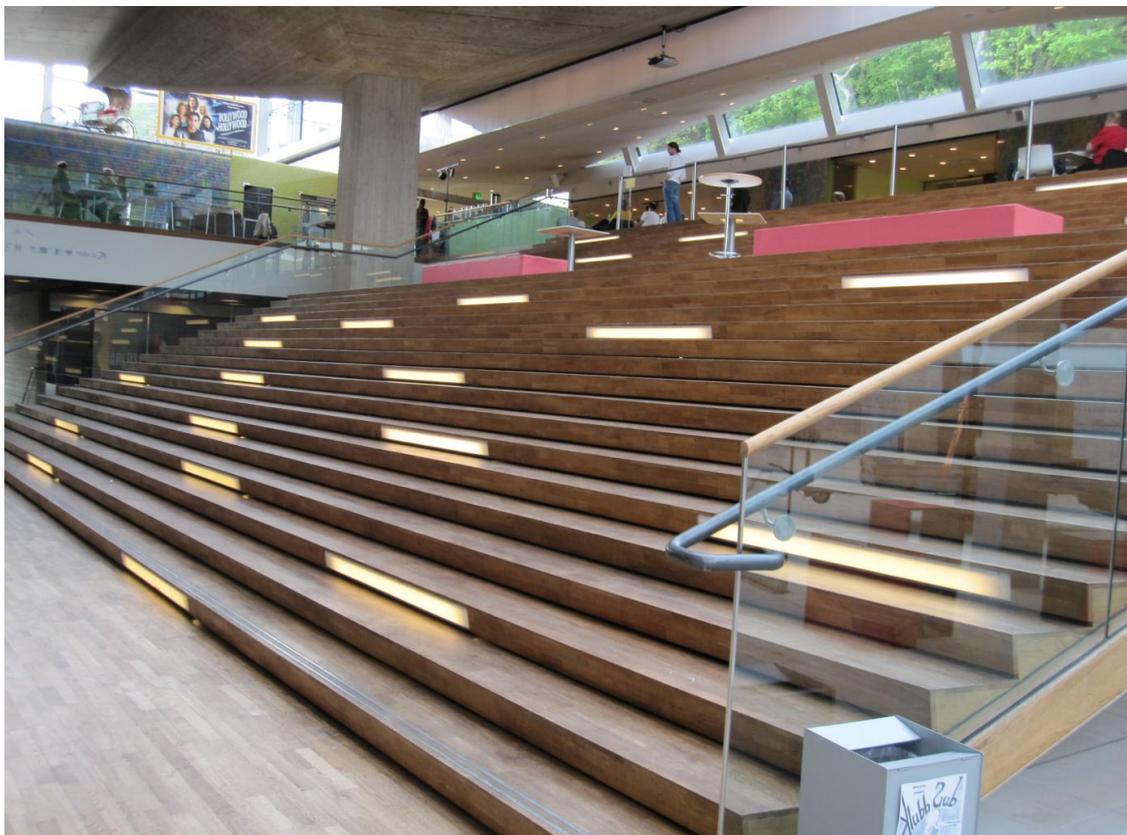
5. Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg

This chapter takes the reader to Sweden, to Gothenburg, the second largest Swedish city situated on the West coast of the country, where I went in May 2010 to carry out fieldwork at the Världskulturmuseet or Museum of World Culture (MWC). The museum was established in the late 1990s as part of a large initiative of the then social-democratic government. The museum building (figure 5.1) was designed by the London-based firm Brisac-Gonzalez Architects in 1998 (Guiney 2001) and opened to the public in December 2004.



5.1 Front façade, MWC.

Critics have suggested that its architecture, which rejects monumentalism, manifests the museum's intention to offer a more visitor-focused experience (O'Neill 2006). Yet, the museum places the public at the heart of its building by offering several spaces devoted to public engagement such as multifunctional rooms, performance spaces and a colossal internal staircase (figure 5.2), which is often transformed into an amphitheatre.



5.2 Colossal internal staircase, MWC.

By following the structure of chapter four, I hereby present the MWC attempting to situate it in the 'politically charged locality' (Shelton 2007: 395) in which it operates. The chapter weaves together the museum's history with socio-political events that took place in recent decades in Sweden. Particularly, it attempts to explore the extent

to which patterns of migration to Sweden and governmental policies on diversity informed the establishment of the MWC and shaped its broader ideological position on cultural diversity, which legitimated the museum's experimentations with a thematic strategy. I begin, however, by going back to the late 19th century when the *Göteborgs Museum*, the MWC's first ancestor, started receiving its first ethnographic materials.

The history of the MWC

It was in 1913 that the *Göteborgs Museum* began to develop a reputation as leading collector of ethnographic objects (particularly from the Americas), which were placed in the Ethnographic Department. In 1946 the Department was made an independent ethnographic museum; it was located in the East India Building, a building constructed in the 18th century to house the Swedish East India Company, founded in Gothenburg in 1731. The creation of the Company manifests Sweden's efforts to pursue trade with the 'Far East', following the success of the Dutch and British East India Companies.¹ Suffering from lack of space at the East India Building, in 1993 the museum moved into the building emptied out by the Industrial Museum whose storehouse was, however, too small for the institution's collections; most of the objects remained therefore unpacked. Lacking appropriate funding, the museum was under threat of closure.

¹ The creations of Companies devoted to trade with the 'Far East' represented the first step of these countries towards the establishment of an empire.

In December 1996 the Parliament passed a bill envisioning the creation of a new museum in Gothenburg, which was followed by a long debate in the political and media spheres; several proposals were put forward. Meanwhile, a governmental commission including a group of international experts was formed to analyse the status of the ethnographic and archaeological museums in Sweden. The Gothenburg Museum of Ethnography and other three ethnographic and archaeological museums in Stockholm - the Museum of Ethnography, the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities, and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities - went under investigation.² In 1998 the commission produced a report that stressed the inadequacy of staff, resources and facilities at the four institutions and urged the initiation of a process of modernization. On 1 January 1999 the formal decision to build a *national* Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg was taken (Lagerkvist 2008), which would have housed the collections previously held by the Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum (about 100,000 archaeological and ethnographical objects). The MWC would have been connected to the three Stockholm-based museums through an appositely created state-museum agency, the *National Museums of World Culture*. The four institutions were joined together as being regarded as holding the potential to fight against the challenges created by the increasing migration and the resulting cultural diversity in Sweden, drawing on their collections from 'other' parts of the world.³

² One of the proposals turned down was to merge the Stockholm Ethnographic Museum and the Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum; another was to close the Stockholm museums and move their collections to Gothenburg.

³ Majority of the objects comes from South America, while the rest originates from Central and West Africa, South-East Asia and Oceania.

Karl Magnusson, *Head of International Cooperation at the National Museums of World Culture*⁴ summarises the process of creation of the museum-agency (where he has worked since its establishment) stating:

This organization is the result of a very deliberate and...contested political decision...The Minister of Culture thought something must be done for the ethnographic museums in the country; they are quite obsolete. They need to mirror more the contemporary world...This is in the middle 1990s. Let's create a new museum, a Museum of World Culture that could cover...contemporary global issues, the changes in the world and so on...They put the proposal on the table in the Parliament, which was very [heavily] debated because there are strong traditional forces within the museum world...Finally, it was decided to create this organisation, to build a new museum in Gothenburg, take the collections from the Gothenburg City Ethnographic Museum and bring them to a state museum; and to place the three museums in Stockholm in one organization, head office in Gothenburg, the second city of the country, [decision] that was also very much debated...(Magnusson 2010).

The mission of the national museum-agency is 'to contribute to the use of cultural heritage as a positive force in the promotion of global sustainable development.'⁵

Cajsa Lagerkvist, *Head of Exhibitions and Knowledge Development* at the MWC, refers (2005: 56) to the creation of the government museum-authority as 'the biggest financial investment regarding multiculturalism and museums during last decade.' The initiative 'aimed at adapting the collections of historical and ethnographic museums to

⁴ In January 2013 Karl Magnusson was appointed new Director of the Museum of World Culture with the official title of *Director of Museum Environment/Exhibitions Gothenburg*.

⁵ See <http://www.smvk.se/smvk/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=148> (Accessed 19/09/2011).

the globalisation process, as well as to accelerating intercontinental migration and multicultural societies' (ibid).⁶ The national government played a central role in the creation of the museum-agency and the MWC's establishment. The museum-agency greatly influences the life of the MWC and the three Stockholm museums; it depends upon the Swedish Ministry of Culture and Education but is located in Gothenburg in the same building housing the MWC. Golding (2009: 81) argues that 'the left wing Swedish government of the time is to be congratulated for recognising the potential of the museum...for progressing intercultural understanding between diverse communities.' I have elsewhere stressed (Iervolino 2013) the central role that cultural policies, including EU cultural policies, can play in transforming museums into more socially responsible institutions by favouring their engagement with societal diversity. The central role played by the national government in the creation of the museum-agency and the MWC further emphasise this point.

Referring to the MWC's establishment Catherine Bergil, *Deputy Director* of the MWC at the time of the research,⁷ maintained (2010) that the governmental decision was influenced by the UNESCO Stockholm Inter-governmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development⁸ during which 'Swedish politicians realised that we were part of a larger global context, that Sweden had become a multicultural society, whatever that means.' She problematises the concept by arguing 'you can always translate

⁶ See <http://www.varldskulturmuseet.se/smvk/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=869&a=3503> (Accessed 11/09/2011).

⁷ When Margareta Alin (*Museum Director* between 2008 and 2010) retired, Bergil filled in as Deputy Director, temporarily leaving her position (since 2002) as *Head of Programmes*. At the time of my fieldwork the institution was waiting for the new director, Mats Widbom, to leave the House of Sweden (Washington) that he then directed; Widbom took on his role in October 2010. In April 2012 he left the MWC and became the Director of the Swedish Institute in Paris.

⁸ The Conference aimed to transform the ideas contained in the document *Our Creative Diversity* (1996) into policy and practice.

multiculturalism in different ways...If you would like to take that literally you could say...you should deal with Bolivians, Africans from the Horn of Africa and so on. I don't think anybody of us ever did that kind of direct translation'. Bergil (2010) acknowledges that there is a tendency to

...think of multiculturalism as being about ethnic minorities, while Jette Sandahl, our first director,⁹ was not interested in that categorisation. She tried to...define world culture in a different way...Otherwise, we would have categorised people again, which Swedish people tend to like doing .

Since its opening the MWC has not focused exclusively on ethnically marked differences connected to migration patterns.¹⁰ Whilst still directing the museum, Sandahl (2008) argued that 'ethnicity is one – and only one – among many other dimensions of diversity, and these dimensions are and should always be treated as whole, in a richly intertwined, interdependent and interrelated totality.' The museum approaches diversity and multiculturalism in a broad way seeking to engage with people that are diverse not only in terms of ethnicity but also age, class, gender, education and so forth. It considers its audiences as formed by 'people who define themselves more through multiple cultural belongings than as immigrants of one specific ethnicity or nationality, but for whom cultural diversity and the relationship

⁹ Sandahl, a feminist and trained academic psychologist, was the museum's founding director (Golding 2009). Her idea strongly influenced the definition of the museum's missions, narratives and working practices. She championed a focus on contemporary subjects of global concern and advocated the application of a cross-disciplinary approach (Heywood 2003).

¹⁰ Such an approach guided, for instance, the project Advantage Göteborg with which the museum worked with twenty-four Swedish citizens living in Gothenburg whose origins lay in the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea). The project showed that forms of racism can find expression even in initiatives purposefully designed to challenge forms of discrimination (Lagerkvist 2006).

between majority culture and minority cultures are nevertheless central' (ibid). I shall return to this point later in the chapter.

Referring to the government's original mandate to employ the 'non-Western' collections of the four museums to explore ethnically marked differences and work with migrant and minority groups, Magnusson even talks of a misinterpretation of the potential of the collections. He states:

That was perhaps a misinterpretation but when the government decided to create this organisation, they decided to bring together the four museums in Sweden with collections from basically outside Europe. But they did not really 'get it' because within our organisation we have the Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities whose main collections are from Greece, Rome, and...Italy and Cyprus, which are, of course, European...They saw that Sweden has become an immigrant country due to migration...from the mid-60s and thought that this organisation [the *National Museums of World Culture*] shall work closely to the immigrant communities, having some ideas that the collections would correspond with the immigrant communities, which they...don't often (Magnusson 2010).

Magnusson acknowledges that the Stockholm Museum of Ethnography and the MWC hold non-European objects, particularly from South America, Africa, Congo, and Indonesia. He argues, however, that those collections are seldom directly connected to the immigrant groups living in Sweden. 'We do not have many immigrants from Congo...we have objects from Indonesia but not many immigrants are from Indonesia. Therefore, there is not this direct link between collections and immigrant communities'. His argument demonstrates that the government's original assignment

urging the museums to focus on ethnic differences using the collections was unrealistic. However, Magnusson (ibid) adds that, although the countries of origin of the two museums' collections were not under Swedish colonial rule, these objects carry a sort of 'colonial guilt' as they were primarily assembled in 'non-Western' countries during the heydays of European colonialism, often with a Eurocentric, colonialist, sometimes racist mindset.

Furthermore, it could be argued that a myopic and discriminatory thinking underpins the idea that migrants can *only* relate to material culture from 'their' country. This approach reveals the tendency of Swedish museums and, more broadly, 'Western' museums to focus on national and ethnic identity when working with people with migrant backgrounds. As I stressed in chapter two, museums usually approach migrants as part of national or ethnic 'communities' rather than singular individuals with their personal viewpoints and preferences. This approach disregards the powerful disruptive effects of migration on people's cultural identities and points to ideas of cultures as static and homogenous. It is based on the prejudiced and unacceptable assumption that migrants lack of human curiosity. Shatanawi (2011: 4) suggests that this approach also marks the Dutch heritage sector, which reproduces 'a public discourse which fosters exclusion rather than inclusion – willingly or not.'¹¹ Hereafter, I temporarily leave the MWC and briefly describe patterns of migration to Sweden.

¹¹ Shatanawi makes this consideration when discussing 'City and Language' a project launched by the Amsterdam municipality in 2006 aiming to teach Dutch language, culture and history to non-EU migrants.

Patterns of migration to Sweden

During the period of decolonisation Sweden did not receive large groups of post/colonial migrants from former colonies. Although briefly practicing colonisation in overseas territories, Sweden did not establish a large overseas colonial empire in the late modern period.¹² Sweden built, however, a large empire in Europe. During the period between 1561 and 1721 known as *Stormaktstiden* (the Great Power Era) the Kingdom of Sweden included territories nowadays belonging to other Scandinavian countries (Finland and part of Norway), and migration took place within the Kingdom (Westin 2006).¹³ Sweden was long regarded as a country of emigration rather than immigration (Benito 2007). In the period between 1860 and 1910 several bad harvests together with cold weather caused a famine that induced many Swedes to migrate to North America, mainly United States and Canada (Westin 2006). After 1938 the trend began to change and Sweden started receiving migrants.

The modern era of immigration to Sweden can be divided in four phases (ibid): 1938-1948 marked by the arrival of refugees, particularly Jews from Nazi Germany and people from neighbouring countries (Denmark, Norway, Estonia and Lithuania); 1949-1971 was characterised by the arrival of labour migrants from Finland (whose movement was facilitated by the establishment of a common labour market between the Nordic countries in 1953) but also Southern Europe, particularly Yugoslavia and Greece; 1972-1989, asylum seekers followed by their families started arriving from

¹² Sweden's largest overseas colonies were the Swedish Gold Coast, present-day Ghana (1650-1663), and New Sweden in North-America (1638-1655).

¹³ People were either allowed or obliged to move from one area to the other. For instance, Finnish people were relocated to regions of central Sweden.

outside Europe, particularly Ugandan Asians and refugees from Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, and 'Middle East' (Kurds, Iranians, and Iraqis); 1990-present, more asylum seekers from Eastern and South-eastern Europe (following the collapse of the former Soviet Union and wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo), the 'Middle East', Africa and Asia, as well as citizens from other EU countries (following the implementation of the Schengen Agreements).

The governance of diversity in Sweden

In the 1950s and early 1960s Sweden did not introduce any official integration policy. Migrants came from other Scandinavian countries; they were considered culturally similar and expected to assimilate. In the late 1960s the country started developing a specific integration policy and in 1968 formally introduced a regulation of immigration guided by a 'principle of equality' (Borevi 2010: 10). Migrants were granted access to equal rights as Swedish nationals and provided on equal terms with support in areas such as housing, social care, employment. Koopmans (2006: 6) suggests that Sweden is the European country that, after the Netherlands, has 'invested most in multicultural policies.' It likewise championed the application of multiculturalism as an integration policy, regarding as crucial to the governmental intervention to provide migrants and minorities with instruments to achieve socio-economic equality and facilitate their integration in Swedish society.¹⁴

¹⁴ The policies of multiculturalism of two countries worked in conjunction with their strong welfare state (Koopmas 2006).

In mid-1970s the Swedish government formally introduced 'a radical multicultural policy' (Borevi 2010: 11), which sought to support migrants' 'ethnic' affiliations and treated them as minorities needful of compensatory rights (such as retaining 'their' languages or practicing 'their' cultural activities). Immigrants were attributed the same status and given equal rights as national minorities.

In the late 1970s the character of migration to Sweden started changing, which influenced the politics of migration. The country received a large number of 'non-Western' refugees that entered on the basis of international conventions and human rights principles. In this context the idea of maintaining migrants' ethnic identities started being regarded as inappropriate, if their integration had to be achieved. In 1986 the multicultural policy went under retreat and Sweden started embracing a position of civic integration. Migrants were no longer equalised to national or linguistic minority groups whose 'ethnic' affiliations had to be supported (Borevi 2010). In 1997 the government passed a bill that officially marked the retreat from multicultural policies and, taking a similar approach to the Netherlands, initiated a new civic integration policy. The bill stated that 'ethnic' categorisations had negative consequences as they 'worked in a stigmatizing manner, thereby reinforcing the notions of "us" and "them"' (13). The policy of civic integration conceives rights as rewards that migrants can obtain by achieving certain integration goals, such as attending mandatory integration programmes. These programmes are targeted to refugees and their families that have the right (as they are offered free of charge) but also the *duty* to take part into them. In order to be granted Swedish citizenship or residency, however, migrants are not obliged to have participated or have passed

integration courses or language texts. Although placing more emphasis on duties, it could be argued that the new integration policy continues to stress the importance of granting rights to migrants, especially in relation to citizenship and residence.

An increasing sense of crisis

The movement towards a civic integration approach in Sweden can be regarded as part of a general trend that has been prevalent across Europe during the last decade in response to events connected to international terrorism and a period of major financial recession that has affected all Europe. Bergil (2010) suggests that the MWC's activities were informed by those events when stating: 'if 9/11 had never occurred, we wouldn't have been addressed by young Muslim people who wanted to celebrate Eid-Al-Firt, the end of Ramadan', an event that the museum currently organises every year. The two young Muslims she refers to are Zana Muhamad and Ashar Kalin, two Swedish citizens with Kurdish and Pakistani backgrounds respectively. According to Bergil, they felt the urge of initiating the event as 'they have their feet in "two grounds", both "traditional" Muslim society and "modern" society, and have the will and the power to change [Swedish society]'. She stresses the MWC's genuine wish to 'be part of that change.' In May 2010 Muhamad and Kalin were at the MWC leading a project (founded by an external institution), which sought to identify new approaches to collaborations with external groups. The project sought to identify ways to enable the museum (and other cultural institutions) to avoid one-off engagements with its stakeholders.

The beginning of the twenty-first century has been marked by an increasing sense of crisis in Swedish society. Progressively, the political construction of Sweden as a country free from problems such as racism, discrimination and class distinction has slowly fallen apart. Events such as the 2001 riots that took place in Gothenburg during the EU Summit started shattering the hegemonic representation of Sweden as a peaceful society. Although the riots are part of a supra-national anti-globalisation movement, they can also be understood in relation to the national socio-political context.

In the aftermath of the event a report was published exploring the situation of the disenfranchised immigrant youth from the Gothenburg suburbs that actively took part in the riots. The report stressed that the events had dissolved the image of Gothenburg and Sweden as societies in peace with themselves (Muller 2004).

In Gothenburg migrants tend to live in the suburbs, specifically Angered, Hammarkullen and Bergsjön, which were created by the Swedish Government as part of the Miljonprogrammet (Swedish for the Million Programme), a project initiated in 1965 with the aim to create a million of new homes within ten years. Nowadays these suburbs are considered as synonymous with immigration, crime, and unemployment. When talking of Hammarkullen, one of the Gothenburg suburbs where the MWC recently recorded a film, Muñoz (2010) refers to those suburbs as 'real ghettos'. She explains that migrants concentrate in these suburbs, where they are offered a house by the social system when not having financial resources. Drawing on her personal experience, she adds that it is, however, sufficient not to have a Swedish surname for being offered apartments *exclusively* in those suburbs by letting agencies. She recalls

the difficulties she faced, because of her Argentinean surname, when looking for a house. She argues:

I had only offers in the 'ghetto' [by letting agencies]. At the end the Director of the Ethnographical Museum wrote a reference for me and...helped me to put an announcement in the newspaper Göteborgs-Posten. After this I had three opportunities [outside the 'ghettos']. I had a 'frame of acceptance'. In the newspaper [there] was the museum's name, which was my reference. Otherwise, I only had five opportunities for apartments in the 'ghetto' (Muñoz 2010).

Muñoz highlights the importance of having a mainstream frame of acceptance (provided by the museum) for her to 'get away' from the suburbs.

Muhamad (2010) - who lived elsewhere but spent a lot of time in the suburbs (where his friends lived) during his youth - describes them as 'multinational, intercultural suburbs, where Turks, Somali, whatever...nationality they come from, live there.' He recognises that, if it is true that, by placing migrants in these isolated suburbs, the government promotes their social exclusion, they often 'want to go there because it is...easier, because they don't know Swedish.' In his view the real problem is the suburbs' physical detachment from the rest of Gothenburg: 'they don't have any social network with the rest of society. And the rest of society doesn't have any social links to those neighbourhoods or social contexts.'

Returning to the Gothenburg riots, they could be regarded as a violent expression of a deeper discontent that had been developing in Swedish society about its 'structural

contradictions' (Muller 2004: 146). Being asked how and if the riots influenced the MWC, Magnusson (2010) argues: 'it is hard to say. Possibly, ideas about different exhibition themes...have been the result of that.' He refers to *Take Action* (January 2008 - April 2009), an exhibition focusing on 'people's wish to change their situations' including sections about 'the suffragettes in the UK for women's political rights, South-Africa...and the riots in Gothenburg' and in Copenhagen.¹⁵ Although not intending to condone the use of physical violence, *Take Action* included these riots as examples of ways in which people's anger and frustration can find expression. The exhibition presented people's wish to change or oppose the 'system', stressing its existence both 'on the individual and collective level' (ibid). Magnusson (2010) refers to *Destination X* (chapter six) as an exhibition that applies a similar approach by showing that 'we have the travel for tourism and the forced travel of refugees...' In his view, the two exhibitions manifestly apply a multi-vocal approach, which explores a concept trying 'to show that there are different perspectives on it and different experiences...' Hereafter, I turn my attention to the MWC's institutional identity.

From Museum of Ethnography to Museum of World Culture

As I argued in chapter one, the MWC is one of those European museums holding ethnographic collections that during the last decade sought to do away with their identity as museums of ethnography. Lagerkvist (2008) argues that this decision was influenced by previous attempts of other European ethnographic museums to

¹⁵ The Copenhagen riot (December 2006) was linked to the fate of an alternative left-wing social centre, Ungdomshuset. It broke out when a black bloke demonstration in support of the centre was blocked by the police.

respond to the post-colonial critique by transforming themselves into World Art or Cultural-History museums. She (2008: 91) maintains that the term 'world culture' is a political construct created following 'the concepts of "World Music" or "World Art"'. Lagerkvist (2006: 65) also acknowledges that the decision of how to translate the world *Världskultur* into English (as either world culture or world cultures) sparked heated debates. It was initially feared that the singular form would not have expressed the museum's intention to present the plurality of cultural expressions that find manifestation in the contemporary world. However, the expression was eventually preferred to 'world cultures', which was considered to be reminiscent of ethnographic museums' conventional focus on separate cultures approached as distinct units (ibid). In this context these debates are interesting as they manifest the museum's commitment to move beyond the representation of cultures as static entities. In an attempt to achieve this goal, the museum has intensively worked with theory and has adopted a strong postcolonial theoretical perspective. Yet, postcolonial theory has been employed to reflect upon the constructed idea of ethnography and critically rethink the conventional practices of ethnographic museums.¹⁶ Referring to *Sisters of Dreams – People and Myths of the Orinoco*, one of the five opening exhibitions which sought to challenge European rationalism and established approaches to knowledge-production, Muñoz, *Curator of Collections*, (2010) states:

I was working with the constructed idea of ethnography; because we were an ethnographic museum and became a museum of world culture...All the [opening] exhibitions were based on the construct what ethnography is, and [sought] to present people not as entities, static in

¹⁶ See Muñoz (2012) for a discussion of how the museum's activities and praxes have changed.

time and space, but [as] living people today with their dynamic inside; and to show how ethnography 'controls' people...It was very deconstructivist...[it attempted] to deconstruct the idea of ethnography and to present people in a more holistic way and in interaction. For example, you have not a group called Yanomami but it is an interaction of people, and 'ethnically' it is defined not only from inside but also from outside.

In chapter six I shall return to this point when discussing how *Destination X* overcomes static representation of cultures. I turn now to the exhibiting strategy that the MWC applies.

The exhibiting strategy

In order to overcome an essentialist presentation of cultures and avoid compartmentalising them into separate 'pigeon-holes' existing within themselves, the MWC has decided to hold back from approaching, studying and presenting cultures according to the geographical areas where its collections were first assembled. Yet, the collections are not displayed according to geographical (or geopolitical) areas. The museum has instead embraced a thematic strategy; it produces idea-driven exhibitions that explore themes seeking to address the concept of 'world culture' and the complexity of contemporary world and its global problems. The museum presents in its exhibitions objects from other institutions as well as visual art, photography, new media, installations and sound. The MWC's collections are *only* displayed if they illustrate aspects or sub-themes within the exhibitions' overall theme rather than, as

Bergil (2010) states, 'bringing out the poetry and stories in the objects themselves'. It follows that the museum makes a very different use of its collections from the Tropenmuseum, which instead displays its objects in order to bring out their stories. In van Dartel's words (2010) the Tropenmuseum believes that 'the stories behind [the museum's] objects are what we are about.'¹⁷ It should be said that the MWC has been criticised for its use of the collections (Choya 2009). Bergil (2010) acknowledges that critics have lamented that the museum does not use its collections effectively: 'we use them for our thematic exhibitions as opposed to look at the collections and see what is in them for us to use.' In an effort to respond to these criticisms the MWC has recently sought to employ its collections more extensively in the exhibitions, as it was the case in *Destination X*.¹⁸

The tendency to make limited use of the collections could be interpreted as the manifestation of some uncertainty about *how* ethnographic objects can be used to make post/colonial arguments,¹⁹ or even of the MWC's apprehension to fall, although unwillingly, into the old trap of representing cultural 'others'. Bergil (ibid) has no doubts that 'in order to play a role in society, we need to define the contemporary themes first...if you want to make something public, you need to have an overall theme.' She recognises that the alternative would be to undertake extensive collection-research and initiate larger collaborations with external stakeholders.

Although she stresses that these collaborations should be carried out 'to a higher

¹⁷ Recently, the Tropenmuseum run an advertisement campaign whose slogan was 'there is a story behind everything' (van Dartel 2009).

¹⁸ If about 200 objects from the MWC's collections are normally displayed in the exhibitions, in *Destination X* the intention was to employ around 1,200 objects, which were purposefully moved from the museum's storage to the main 'house'. However, not all those objects were included in the exhibition eventually, which generated an avoidable waste of resources in the Collections Department (Bagherzadeh and Javér 2010).

¹⁹ See Muñoz (2012) for a discussion about this point.

extent that we have been doing', she is convinced that, in order to be relevant, the museum has to deal with contemporary themes so that themes have to 'come first'. Nevertheless, Bergil states that the MWC welcomes criticisms on how it uses its collections because they encourage the institution to 'be a museum as opposed to cultural house'. However, surely the museum's will to represent themes that reflect contemporary issues make the employment of its 'non-Western' collections not straightforward.

The practice of displaying the museum's collections only if congruent with the exhibition's theme could be regarded as problematic, if not unethical. Critics would suggest that ethnographic museums should prioritise their collections, and present them with appropriate contextualisation expressing the meanings and values they carry for their source communities. Most of museum's objects are certainly problematic as they were assembled in contexts of unequal power relationships between indigenous people and Europeans, when the museum's employees sought to present 'exotic' cultures. Some of the museum's collections were even collected in controversial circumstances, such as the Niño Korin collection that is thought to have been found in the grave of a medicine man²⁰ and to have been purchased in the seventies in ambiguous manners (Muñoz 2009). I shall briefly return to this collection in the conclusive chapter.

Because of the problematic nature of ethnographica (sometimes connected to their religious or spiritual connotations), their colonial character, and controversies

²⁰ The collection was found in Niño Korin, Tiwanaku, a Pre-Columbian archaeological site in contemporary Bolivia. It dates back to the middle of Tiwanaku period (approx. 400-1200AD) and is formed by 77 objects associated with the use of psychotropic drugs. In 2007 it became the focus of strong repatriation claims by the Bolivian Embassy.

connected to their acquisition, they require to be treated sensitively. However, I wish to argue that presenting ethnographic objects exclusively according to the meanings originally attributed to them by their source communities is not the only strategy that ensures their sensible treatment. As any other object, ethnographica hold different meanings not only for their producers but also for the variety of people that exchanged and used them during the hand-over they went through during their 'social life' (Appadurari 1986). Before entering the museum's walls and starting their life as ethnographic artefacts, objects usually come into possession of many people for whom they may carry different meanings and have different values. As a result, ethnographica should be approached as shifting entities, whose meaning and usage change during their 'social lives' and whose interpretation keeps changing within the museum, according to the person/s who interpret them. Yet, objects 'can always adjust to new questions and tell you new things' (Sandahl quoted in Greaves 2003: 26). Moreover, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991: 387) has famously argued, 'ethnographic objects...are artefacts created by ethnographers.' They are never 'ethnographic' *at birth* but become 'ethnographic', that is objects of ethnography, when they are collected and classified as such by the 'Western' ethnographer and displayed in 'Western' museums. From my perspective, if ethnographers and museums can *classify* objects as 'ethnographic', those can be *reclassified* according to alternative parameters and interpreted in new ways so as to express new messages, different from the meaning of their producers and the ways in which they have been interpreted in ethnographic museums, without being necessarily unethical. However, museums' freedom of interpretation is not unrestrained; they need to critically consider whether alternative interpretation might offend someone, and restrain from taking this

approach. I shall expand on this in the concluding chapter. I now further discuss the rationale behind the production of thematic, semi-permanent exhibitions.

Thematic, semi-permanent exhibitions

The MWC refuses to present its collections through the customary combination of permanent and temporary exhibitions. Each museum's floor is devoted to a semi-permanent exhibition whose length varies from a few months up to three years. According to Grinell, *Curator*, (2010a) the idea behind having semi-permanent exhibitions is that 'the world is changing' and many themes are relevant in this shifting context. He stresses that the MWC is constantly 'hunting for' new themes to explore in its exhibitions. However, the decision to apply a thematic approach implies, as O'Neill (2006) suggests, complex decisions about 'which themes should be given priority and which perspectives will yield the most penetrating insights.'

The museum has developed a reputation for presenting 'difficult subject matters' in its exhibitions (Bonnell and Simon 2007) such as HIV/Aids and human trafficking. However, Bergil (2010) notes that, in order to be relevant, a theme does not 'necessarily have to be difficult.' Yet, the MWC has recently focused on less difficult subjects, producing 'feel good exhibitions', as Anna Mighetto, *Head of the Marketing and Communication Department*, names them (Choya 2009), that is, exhibitions where visitors can have fun and enjoy themselves. Bergil (2010) refers to the exhibitions *Bollywood* or *Kimono Fusion* as examples of such a new trend when stating:

After we had had a series of exhibitions on...problematic issues like HIV/aids and trafficking, we felt the need to balance with, for example, *Bollywood* exhibition...With *Kimono Fusion*, I think, we are now facing the risk of becoming too popular. It would be quite easy to...avoid more serious matters and [be] just tongue-in-cheek and make people come. But that would be unfair to the institution itself. I hope we can maintain the in-depth knowledge, while attracting people.

Bergil recognises the importance of presenting a diversified exhibition *repertoire* that has 'light components'. She stresses that the MWC regards its exhibitions as in constant dialogue with each other as well as with those previously displayed, thus implicitly referring to, what Legêne (2008) calls, 'inter-exhibitional discourse'. Grinell (2010a) likewise states that the MWC intends to engage with many themes that do 'not stay in the same arena.' He argues 'you should try to move around...After five years we have covered some ground and we have to think about what has been taken up in different exhibitions, what themes we are still lacking. That also gives some direction'. He maintains that the selection of relevant themes is a particularly critical task for the institution. Grinell stresses that the themes that the museum favours deal with the concept of world culture understood 'as the world being interconnected'. He adds that the themes chosen 'are not only local; they should be maybe "glocal" and focus on the specific setting but...should be connected to what everyone is engaged with...' Lagerkvist (2008: 91) also refers to the concept of 'glocality' when describing the museum's exhibiting strategy and recites 'think global, act local' as the institution's potential motto. Yet, the MWC attempts to represent diversity globally focusing on contemporary world and its complexity, while also engaging with the many culturally diverse groups living in Gothenburg and including their different voices. However,

Grinell (2010a) recognises that the exhibitions can include 'strong historical parts, for instance, a historical example.' He refers to *A Stolen World* (September 2006 - January 2011) as an example of an exhibition that, although presenting historical objects (specifically the museum's collection of paracas textiles), effectively makes 'contemporary the history surrounding them.'

Grinell (ibid) also acknowledges that audience's size is a factor that has informed the museum's decision to opt for semi-permanent exhibitions. He argues:

We are in Gothenburg, which is a rather small city for European standards, the second in Sweden. So our audience is not that broad. That's another argument for not having semi-permanent exhibitions. It's different from being...like in the capital of the country...You do not count on re-visits in the same way. Here, after two years the interested audience, either they have come or they won't come. There is a need to change because even if we add new layers to a permanent exhibition that wouldn't change visitors' view of the world very strongly. Then it is more effective to have new themes.

He highlights the need of taking into account the specific 'locality' where the museum is based before deciding between permanent and semi-permanent/semi-temporary exhibitions. He adds 'if I would be working in Paris or London maybe I would argue more for a permanent exhibition, because the exhibition is permanent but the audience is constantly changing.' Nevertheless, he acknowledges the conceptual problem of permanent exhibitions is that they fail to respond to and express the shifting character of contemporary cultures. As a possible solution to this challenge, he

suggests the possibility to 'have a semi-fixed structure because...it takes a lot of effort and resources to change [exhibitions] completely. So ideally if you have a fixed structure...you could change the examples and so on'. He envisions, for instance, a semi-changing exhibition on the theme of intercultural exchange but approached from a historical perspective. This exhibition would show

...that globalization is something that has a *longue durée*. There are very long ties...The world system has been built brick by brick for thousands of years...that is one part of understanding contemporary flux. Maybe the pace is...different, maybe the actors involved are different but...there is a legacy and a genealogy. And if you...focus more on that, it could be more permanent (Grinell 2010a).

Grinell (2010a) also acknowledges that if the MWC was to produce permanent exhibitions, it could create *more* layered displays that invite visitors to explore more deeply the exhibitions' themes, if they wish to do so. It should be said, however, that since its opening the MWC has applied a multi-vocal approach to its exhibitions, which always strive to present multiple viewpoints so to highlight that people have different worldviews and/or experiences about the same theme. This is also evident in Bergil's words when she discusses the museum's mission.²¹ She explains 'to be a meeting place that makes people feel at home across borders and build trust in a world in constant change.' Interestingly, Bergil (ibid) clarifies:

²¹ The official mission of the museum is: 'In dialogue with others, the Museum of World Culture is a forum for emotional and intellectual encounters that help people feel at home wherever they are, trust each other and accept joint responsibility for the planets constantly changing future.'

The museum works along these sentences on a daily-basis. This approach is...rooted in our collections and within certain exhibition themes always aiming to have dialogue, multiple voices within this building, which is the meeting place - literally and philosophically... it could also be a meeting place virtually, on the web, or through choosing topics that people talk about and can relate to...²²

For Grinell another factor that affects museums' decision when opting for permanent or semi-permanent/semi-temporary exhibitions is their strategic position in the museological landscape both locally and in the European context.

How many museums exist in the city? What are they doing? What are [their] strategic positions? We are *one* of the institutions that should bring reflections to communities at large. We should work as jointly as possible, both in cooperation but also strategically positioning ourselves towards each other...for some parts in [the] European museum context but particularly in our city (Grinell 2010a).

If the MWC had opted for permanent exhibitions, it would have had to undertake extensive collection-research, which would have required the investment of copious resources. However, the museum has chosen not to make such an investment. Bergil (2010) even talks of the 'risk of making a permanent exhibition, if you put all that effort in "plunging into" the collections.' Although she recognises the importance of such a work, she notes that it is time and energy consuming. She asks 'is this really a place for permanent exhibitions? I do not think so...because world culture cannot be a

²² Bergil (2010) adds the museum attempts to 'play an active part...in issues that are important in the general debate, to be "there" where important things are being said. That's where we need to be, this is our social role...'

fixed thing. World culture has to be dynamic; it has to be more in gear with society...'

However, she acknowledges that opting for temporary exhibitions has its cost. Yet, it is extremely difficult to produce semi-permanent high-quality exhibitions with a fast turn-over. Bergil (ibid) stresses that the search for a balance between quality and pace is one of the greatest challenges for the MWC. She refers to the production of *Destination X* as a clear example of such a challenge when stating: '...many people thought that *Destination X* was a nightmare because...there was so much more to be said and developed...and the time was so short, the money was so little.' Magnusson (2010) also refers to the complications connected to the production of short-term exhibitions, admitting that the MWC is struggling with the concept. He acknowledges that the museum's original aim 'was continuous flow and change of exhibitions.'

However, he adds:

[This] turned out to be too expensive when it comes to real pocket money but also when it comes to staff. Because it was too challenging and tiring, you can't expect people to work in that way. Still the aim is...to shift exhibitions regularly, but when does an exhibition becomes permanent? I think that *A Stolen World* has been open for...almost three years now and *Bollywood* for one and half, coming up to two...Of course, they are not permanent but they are quite longer lasting, longer than a temporary...semi-temporary or semi-permanent (2010).

He refers to the three museums in Stockholm that primarily produce permanent exhibitions but are increasingly exploring new strategies. He refers to the exhibition *Bringing the World Home* displayed at the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm that

presents the story of the collections by focusing on Swedish travellers or researchers who assembled the objects in the nineteenth century. Rather than changing the entire exhibition, the Stockholm museum has chosen to alter parts of it and add new sections. For instance, one section has been developed in response to debates connected to human remains and repatriation. According to Magnusson, this approach enables the museum to renew the exhibitions by shifting their content; he adds: 'it is also quite efficient when it comes to resources.' In his view the decision of the MWC to move away from permanent exhibitions, although conceptually lying on the institution's intention to express fluidity of cultures, is also linked to the museum's aspiration 'to move more towards a...thematic way of working; it also comes from the wish to enlarge our audiences and become more attractive towards different target groups.' Presenting cultures in exhibitions that remain open for long period is problematic, he suggests, as permanent exhibitions cannot express the shifting character of contemporary cultures.

By producing only semi-permanent exhibitions, the MWC indirectly makes a statement that no static culture - isolated in time and place - exists. Rather, the institution approaches cultures as evolving, living systems in a global context. As Sandahl, the MWC's *Funding Director*, clearly explains (cited in Heywood 2002: 21), 'as soon as you start doing permanent galleries you get into the concept of definite, different and well-defined cultures that have lives of their own. You immediately start thinking in terms of geography, nationality or ethnicity.' The MWC instead recognises that even within the same nation or ethnic group, extraordinary differences may exist between the ways people interpret and express their identity. As I shall highlight in chapter six,

when presenting and interpreting cultures, the museum takes into account other parameters (apart from nationality, ethnicity and geography), including age, gender, education and profession. In addition, the museum does not present different cultures in isolation but looks, as (Sandahl 2008) states, at 'where they meet, merge, overlap, hybridize, and to contemporary global cultures defined through shared hopes and interests, shared lifestyles or political positions.' By questioning fixed and static notions of cultures and identities, the MWC is attempting to play an important social role in contemporary plural Swedish society by seeking to contribute to processes of creation and re-negotiation of individual and collective identities.

In concluding this chapter, I now turn my attention to the inclusion of new disciplines and its application to processes of exhibition-making at the MWC, which emerged as an unanticipated finding of this study.

The inclusion of alternative disciplines

It was somewhat surprising to find that in recent years the MWC has started including alternative disciplines and expertise in its permanent structure. Before closely exploring this point in chapter seven, here I wish to briefly reflect upon the inclusion of new *curatorial* expertise. As Magnusson (2010) stresses 'by tradition curatorial expertise had been geographically arranged...curator for African collections, curator for Asia, Latin-America and so on.' However, he adds: 'now we have a curator of globalization as well. And I think that is a good example and a sign that we are moving into this global field.' Here he refers to Klas Grinell that was hired by the MWC in April 2008 with the formal title of *Curator of Contemporary Global Issues*.

Interestingly, Grinell is neither an anthropologist nor an art historian. He received a PhD from the University of Gothenburg in the discipline of History of Ideas with a thesis entitled *To sell the world: Images of the Other in Swedish tourism abroad* where he explores the employment of stereotypes in Swedish tourism advertisements. He (2010a) describes his contribution to the MWC's work as *Curator of Contemporary Global Issues* in these terms:

There is a lot...of theoretical debate and research going on about how the world is connected and what are the main structures of that connectedness, what are the genealogies of globalization and so on. I think it is important to have that glocalization, you might say. We need the local knowledge, the understanding of the collections that the museum holds; the setting, the local history, the local practices, the ethnography, you may say. But we also need the understanding of how globalization is shifting through that local experience... So I can bring [this] and I think most museums could gain from having one position of more overarching or theoretical understanding of globalization theory or whatever shape you have...

His statement highlights the positive contribution that staff members whose expertise is not directly linked to the museum's collections can make to the work of (ethnographic) museums.

When I asked Magnusson if the inclusion of curators with expertise in new disciplines, such as history of idea or globalization theory, had created concrete challenges in any of the four museums under the *National Museums of World Culture*, he admits: 'It has been difficult.' However, he stresses that this has been less problematic at the MWC -

an institution that was already in process of change and willing to face its connected challenges - than at the Stockholm Museum of Ethnography, for instance. I was particularly interested in understanding whether regional curators had struggled to work with new curators whose expertise is not connected to geographical areas, and even more if they showed some resistance towards the implementation of alternative lines of work and working practices. Magnusson (2010) comments: 'It also comes down...boils down to practical day to day work'. He refers to how the employment of a new, young curator of globalization had been received at the Stockholm Museum of Ethnography. He stresses that many of the curators had been working at the institution for about twenty-five years and some of them 'are very open-minded and... some are, of course, quite resistant'. Apparently, a few curators showed a certain degree of antagonism towards the arrival of the new curator of globalization. Magnusson intrinsically highlights how changes in the internal structure and, in particular, the inclusion of new expertise and the introduction of new professional figures can be received with some resistance by staff members previously working in the organisation. This may be because they perceive these changes as threatening and as somehow undermining their power and challenging their established working practices. When looking at the processes of production of the three selected exhibitions in chapter seven, I shall return to issues linked to alternative expertise and (resistance to) change.

Magnusson also voices the need to employ new knowledges and expertise not only in the process of exhibition-making but also in collection practices. He (ibid) argues:

We are also very much in the process of digitizing the collections and there is an opportunity there to divide the collections along different lines, not geographically. For me we could have a curator coming from gender studies, for instance, and try to cut the collections in a completely different way... So in the future I hope that we move away from geography, so to speak.

He points to gender theory as a possible discipline that ethnographic museums could fruitfully apply to the study, categorisation and interpretation of their collections. In the conclusive chapter I shall envisage other disciplines or knowledges that ethnographic museums might benefit from, and might enable these institutions to engage with the diversity of the society in which they operate.

I now turn my attention to three selected exhibitions and explore to what extent and how the application of a thematic strategy enables the MWC and the Tropenmuseum to move beyond static ideas of cultures and prevailing understanding of cultural diversity.

6. The exhibitions: beyond static ideas of cultures and identities

This chapter focuses on the three exhibitions I closely investigated at the two case study museums: *Destination X* at the Museum of World Culture, and *Travelling Tales* and *Music World* at the Tropenmuseum. Rather than focusing on ‘out-of-the-way locals that anthropology mostly study’ (Werbner 2008: 1) and presenting spatio-temporally distant cultures, the exhibitions address themes cutting across geographical, cultural, ethnic and national distinctions. I used the exhibitions as lens through which I explored how, by employing a thematic exhibitionary praxis, the MWC and the Tropenmuseum articulate ideas about cultural diversity and construct politics of belonging (discussed in this chapter), and alter exhibition-making processes, expertise, and internal structures (examined in the next chapter). The chapter investigates the extent to which the application of a thematic strategy challenges static notions of cultures and prevailing understandings of cultural diversity, and moves beyond simplistic notions of national, ethnic and racial collectivities. Nira Yuval-Davis (2011: 84) suggests that these collectivities are inherently not dissimilar as ‘they are constructed around boundaries that divide the world between “us” and “them”, usually around myths of common origin and/or common destiny.’

I first discuss how the three exhibitions engage with and present ideas of cultural differences. In order to achieve this goal I employ the concept of intersectionality (Hill Collins 2010; McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2011) and the idea of hybridity (Bhabha 1994),

which I identified as effective critical analytical tools that could support my analysis. Drawing on Yuval-Davis's (2011) notions of politics of belonging, I then introduce the political projects of belonging that, I argue, the three thematic exhibitions construct.

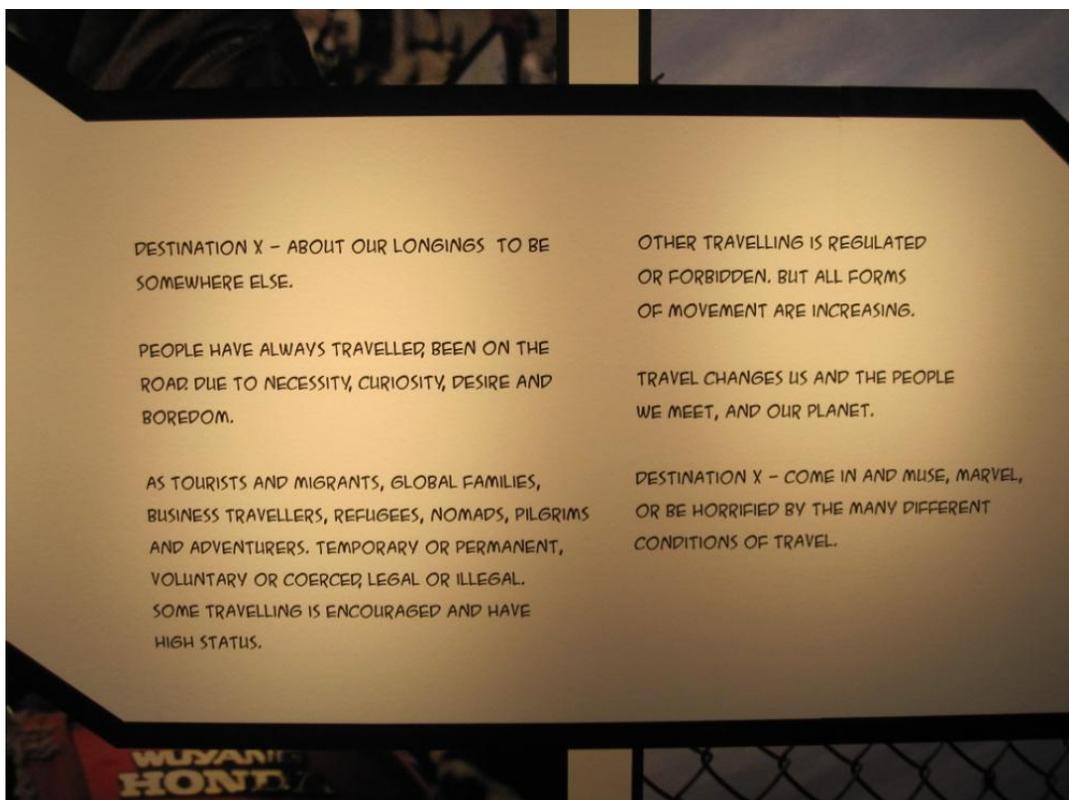
By closely analysing the three exhibitions, the chapter attempts to elucidate whether the application of a thematic approach to (semi-permanent) exhibitions enables the two museums to represent contemporary shifting post/colonial identities (Hoffmann and Peeren 2010), and to change established ideas of what the paradigm 'ethnography' (or 'world culture') might be. It explores the extent to which *thematic* exhibitions move beyond ethnographic museums' traditional focus on 'otherness' and their conventional roles as representatives and interpreters of 'non-Western' cultures.

Beyond simplistic notions of collectivities

I now discuss how the three exhibitions articulate ideas of cultural differences and explore whether they overcome the inclination of ethnographic institutions to commodify cultures and carry out processes of representational essentializing or metonymic freezing, in which 'one part or aspect of people's lives come to epitomize them as whole' (Clifford 1997: 24). As I argued in chapter two, the representational strategies of ethnographic museums have been criticised for producing processes of metonymic freezing. I focus on the MWC first and present examples from *Destination X*; then I turn my attention to the Tropenmuseum and introduce examples from *Kartini* and *World of Music*.

Destination X

*Destination X*¹ takes a broad approach to the theme of human mobility, as evident in the exhibition's introductory panel (figure 6.1). It looks at the different facets that human mobility takes in contemporary world, such as voluntary/forced and legal/illegal migration, mobility due to leisure, vacation, research, and religion.



6.1 Introductory panel, *Destination X*, MWC.

Drawing on dramaturgical language, Grinell (2010a) suggests that *Destination X* can be divided in three 'acts'. The first 'act' (figure 6.2) presents mobility as a human aspect; in the second 'act' visitors are introduced to the different 'actors' of *Destination X*. The

¹ The exhibition was on display between April 2010 and December 2012.

third 'act' (figure 6.3) is where 'the drama is being played out' and the actors interact with several factors that either facilitate or limit their mobility.



6.2 First 'act', *Destination X*, MWC.

Although its main concern is the contemporary, *Destination X* also includes a historical perspective and acknowledges that the history of humanity has been marked by movements. It highlights the role that the development of transport has played in enabling transworld movements. It reminds visitors that, before becoming a receiving country after World War II, Sweden was a country of emigration and in the nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century Swedish people left for other countries.



6.3 Third 'act', *Destination X*, MWC.

I suggest that *Destination X* includes the experiences of mobility and travel not only of 'distant others' (in the tradition of ethnographic museums) but also 'close others' (post/colonial migrants and recent migrants) and 'ethnic' Swedish.² Here I employ the expression 'ethnic' Swedish to remind that 'everybody, not only racialised minorities, have "ethnicities" and that members...in hegemonic majorities, are not just "human beings" but are also gendered, classed, ethnocized, etc.' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 8).

Amongst 'distant others' featuring in the exhibition are refugees and migrants from and to other parts of the world (such as refugees to Malta, illegal migrants to Greece or Mexican migrants to the US) as well as tourists (to Cuba or the Hainan Island in

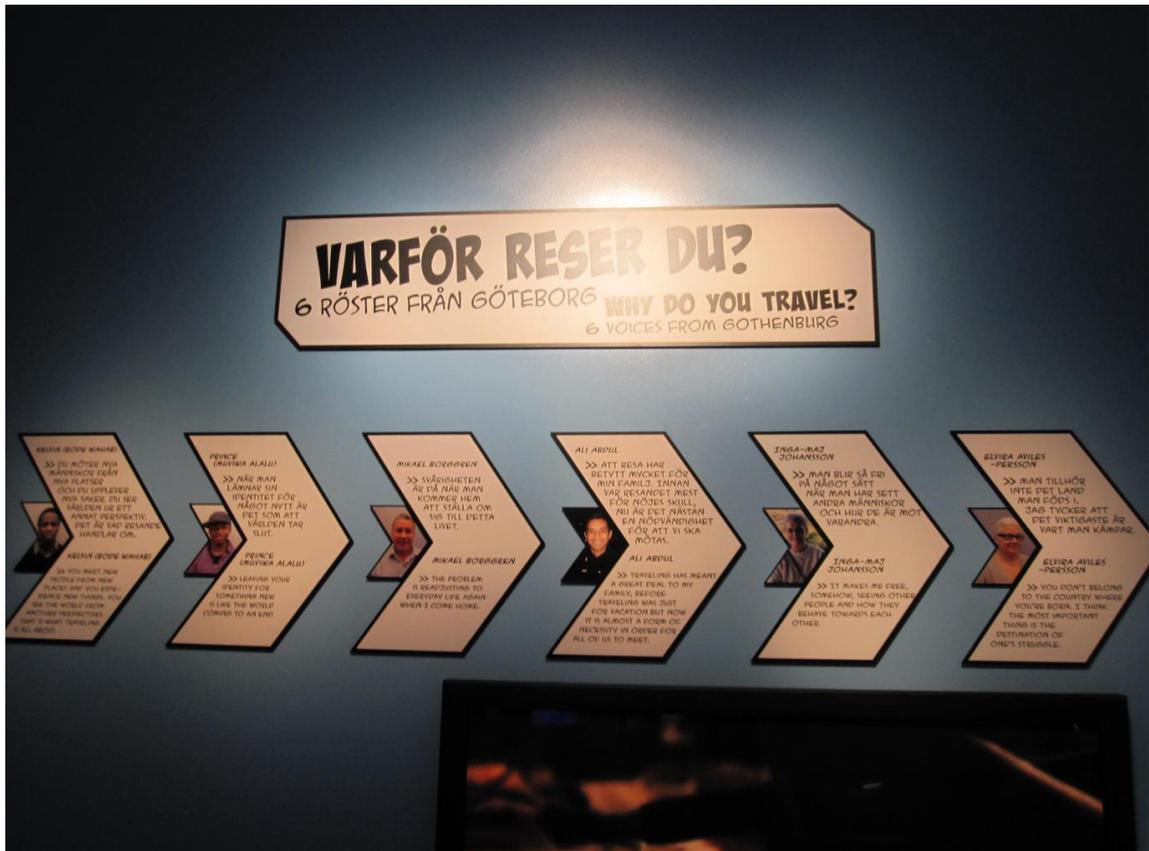
² Varutti (2011) employs the expressions 'distant Others', 'close Others' and 'ethnic' Norwegians when discussing how museums are representing culture differences that mark contemporary Norway.

South China). *Destination X* also deals 'with "the difference within"' (Bhabha 2004: xv) and presents the experience of mobility of 'close others' and 'ethnic' Swedes.

I now focus my attention on a few displays and explore whether, by including different forms of mobility, the museum challenges prevailing understanding of differences and presents cultural diversity not as something located elsewhere, in foreign lands, but also characterising Sweden. I firstly look at the display 'Why do we travel? 6 voices from Gothenburg' (figure 6.4), which presents the experiences of movement of six individuals through a screen showing interviews where they verbally construct their identity narratives. Yuval-Davis argues that personal identities are 'narratives, stories that people tell themselves and others about who they are, and who they are not...' (2010: 266). The display presents the experiences of both 'closer others', that is migrants to Sweden such as Kevin (Bode Wahab) and Prince (Muyiwa Alalu) from Nigeria and Ali Abduli from Kenya, and 'ethnic' Swedes (Mikael Borggren and Inga-Maj-Johansson).

Kevin and Prince are transnationals, first generation migrants caught between their country of origin, Nigeria, and Sweden. Werber (1997: 12) describes transnationals as 'people who move, often in great swarms, in order to create collective "homes" around them wherever they happen to land.' Kevin and Prince describe the painful experience of leaving Nigeria as well as the enriching opportunities that mixing with people of different backgrounds provided them with. They talk about their feeling of belonging to both Nigeria and Sweden and state they have adopted aspects of 'mainstream' Swedish culture, while maintaining elements of Nigerian culture. Kevin

says ‘when I go to Nigeria I have the Swedish mentality with me, so I will try to be Swedish. When I am in Sweden I see I [am] of Nigerian culture so it is like being of two different worlds but you stay in one place at the time.’



6.4 Display: ‘Why do we travel? 6 voices from Gothenburg’, *Destination X*, MWC.

Abduli is a cosmopolitan, a global nomad originally from Kenya that has lived in several countries for reasons of study and travel. He follows within the demography of diversity that states embracing multicultural policies tend to prefer: educated economic migrants that, as Bhabha (2004: xiv) argues, contribute to the production of ‘healthy profit margins within metropolitan societies’. Werbner (1997: 10) describes cosmopolitans as ‘multilingual gourmet tasters who travel among global cultures, savouring cultural differences as they flit with consummate ease between social

worlds.’ By employing the contestable expression ‘multilingual gourmet tasters’, Werbner highlights the striking differences existing between cosmopolitans like Abduli and transnationals like Kevin and Prince. Although acknowledging that they are both cultural hybrids, Werbner (ibid) highlights that cosmopolitans do not face the same ‘incredible social and economic hardships’ or do not have to ‘construct “community” to shield them from racist rejections.’ Cosmopolitans do not occupy the same ‘quasi-colonial status’ (Du Bois quoted in Bhabha 2004: xxv) often ‘reserved’ to transnationals, that include ‘laborers who are settled in the slums of great cities; groups...who are segregated physically and discriminated spiritually in law and custom.’ Despite being somewhat privileged, cosmopolitans are not totally immune from the limitations and predatory effects on rights of their migratory condition. Abduli highlights the role that citizenship plays in limiting the freedom to move of cosmopolitans when stating ‘to be a Kenyan citizen does not permit you to travel easily, you need to have a visa to go pretty much everywhere.’

The experience of mobility of two ‘ethnic’ Swedes is also presented. Mikael Borggren, a United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) civilian policeman, talks of the opportunities of travelling that he has had because of his job. He highlights the downsides of living a life on the move, including ‘readjusting to everyday life again when I come home.’ Inga-Maj-Johansson, a disabled woman, talks about her love for travelling. She argues that, despite having to face challenges due to her disability, travelling makes her feel free; it enables her to see ‘other people and how they behave towards each other.’ She talks of her trip to Cuba and describes some challenges she faced because of the existence of structural barriers in the transport system.



6.5 Column: 'Global Nomads', Destination X, MWC.

In other sections *Destination X* focuses on human movements through which the museum refers to transversal (often global) social groupings or collectivities constructed around categories of signification, which have relevance *beyond* national

borders such as shared interests or lifestyles. For instance, the colon 'global nomads' (figure 6.5) refers to a transversal collectivity formed by a variety of people living a nomadic lifestyle, including Tibetan nomads, Tuareg, Romani people, global cosmopolitans and third culture kids (3CK).³

Destination X also refers to collectivities constructed around religious belief formed by pilgrims travelling to attend religious festivities. For example, a photograph of the World Youth Day (WYD) that took place in Cologne in 2005 is displayed (figure 6.6).

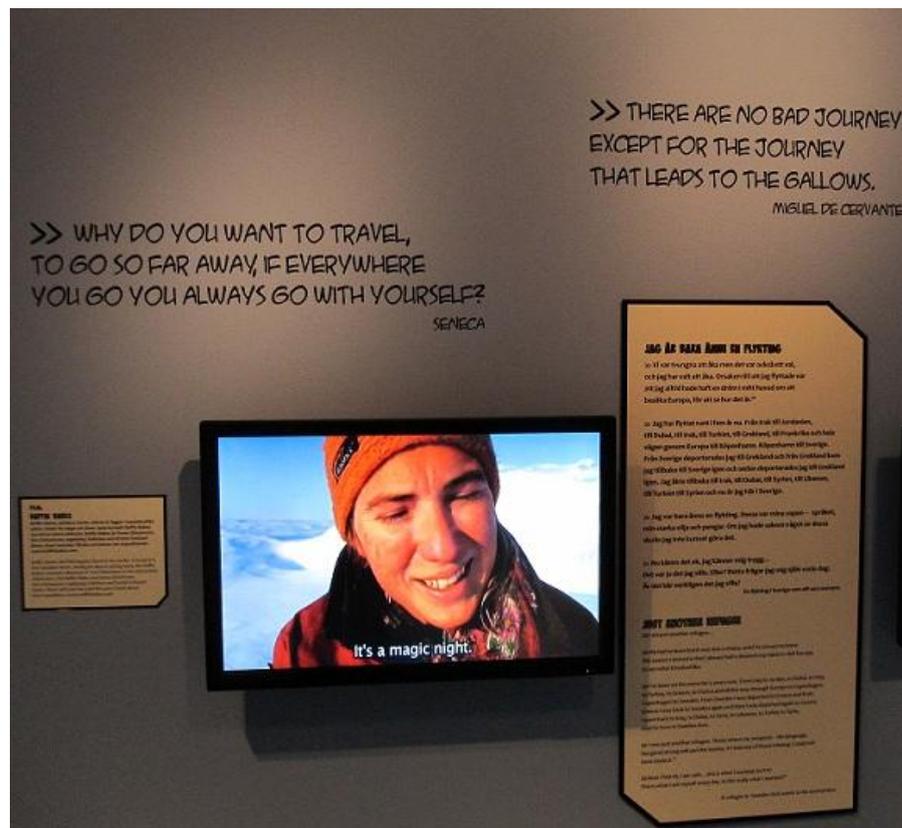


6.6 'World Youth Day', *Destination X*, MWC.

³ 3CK are children that grew up in different parts of the world following their parents' movements for reason of work.

The selection of the WYD is significant as, although being specifically designed for Catholics, the festival can be considered a multi-faith international celebration of youth as it attracts young people of other faiths. Its attendees are identified more by factors such as age and lifestyle than by religious belief.

Destination X also refers to professional collectivities formed by researchers engaged in expeditions (for instance, Henry Wassén, a Swedish anthropologist who carried out an expedition to Colombia and Panama in 1947) as well as to transversal collectivities, such as backpackers, CouchSurfers⁴, or contemporary explorers, for instance the Baffin Babes.



6.7 Film: 'Baffin Babes', *Destination X*, MWC.

⁴ CouchSurfing is a social network whose members offer free of charge hospitality to other members looking for an accommodation in their cities.

The Baffin Babes are four women, two Swedish (the sisters Vera and Emma Simonsson) and two Norwegians (Ingebjørg Tollefsen and Kristin Folsland Olsen), that in 2009 undertook a 1200 km sky tour across the arctic pack-ice on the Canadian Baffin Island over 80 days. A film showing key moments of their adventure is displayed (figure 6.7).

The examples above are only some that could be used to give the reader a taste of how *Destination X* engages with many forms of differences marking contemporary societies. Using the concept of intersectionality as discussed by Yuval-Davis (2011), hereafter I discuss whether the application of a thematic strategy enables *Destination X* to overcome the limitations of essentialistic and racialised understandings of cultural diversity, which nationalist and even multicultural political projects of belonging have favoured.

Employing Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a feminist sociological theory that is interested not only in the positioning of social agents but also in 'how the differential situatedness of different social agents affects the ways they affect and are affected by different social, economic and political projects' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 4). The concept of intersectionality was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a prominent figure in critical race theory. Crenshaw maintains that the concept was accidentally developed.

...[Intersectionality] grew out of trying to conceptualize the way the law responded to issues where both race and gender discrimination were involved...Intersectionality simply came from the idea that if you are standing in the path of multiple forms of exclusion, you are likely to get hit by both (Thomas 2004).

The use of intersectionality theory has progressively expanded and currently is increasingly applied to the study of many forms of intersecting differences, not only race and gender. Intersectionality can be defined as a theory that examines how a variety of social and cultural categories intertwine and their intersection define people's diverse (and sometimes marginalised) positions. Knudsen (2007: 61) suggests that 'gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class and nationality are categories that may enhance the complexity of intersectionality, and point towards identities in transition.' I embrace this interpretation of the concept of intersectionality and employ it to critically explore *Destination X* and look at how the exhibition handles the complexities that marks contemporary post/colonial world. As the examples above demonstrate, the exhibition does not pay attention only to differences marked by ethnic, racial and national factors, which are quite static and not permeable social locations (Yuval-Davis 2011: 21). I now return to the examples above and highlight which determinants of difference they refer to.

In the case of Kevin and Prince it could be suggested that although nationality remains a significant marker of difference, it intersects with other definers of difference such as stage in the life-cycle and personal interest (for music). Kevin and Prince are presented as living in-between their countries of origin (of which they hold nationality and

citizenship) and their 'hosting' country. They embody the struggle between the two dimensions of acculturation (Geschke et al. 2010), that is cultural *maintenance* (of 'their' culture of origin) and cultural *adoption* (of local mainstream culture) in which first generation migrants are normally caught.

In the case of Abduli determinants like education, work and citizenship (which corresponds to his nationality and identifies him as belonging to Kenya) play a key role in marking his difference. Abduli stresses how his citizenship limits his entitlement to the right of free movements. As Yuval-Davis (2011: 75) argues 'specific passports – and specific visas attached to them – will entitle people to enter, stay, reside or work in other states.' Abduli discusses the paradoxical difference existing between his right of free movements and that of other members of his family that carry passports of different countries. He states

...When we travel we have to present different passports. I have a sister who is now French, and my other sister who lives in Holland, she has a Dutch passport. And I present my Kenyan passport, along with my parents. Whenever we travel we have to go in different lines, it is very fun.

He implicitly refers to the international system of stratification of passports and connected belongings (to different nation-states) that characterises the contemporary world since the use of passports became common post WW I. At the top of international system of stratification 'Western' passports are placed, 'which can almost always guarantee their carriers the right of free international movements...', and at the

bottom... are those who have no right to carry any passport at all' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 75).

Determinants such as profession and personal interests for travelling are the most important markers of difference for Mikael Borggren, the Swedish UNPROFOR civilian policeman, while his nationality does not represent a crucial category of location. On the other hand his identity as father represents an important marker, inducing Mikael to renounce to a life on the move and take up a more sedentary lifestyle in Sweden.

In the case of Inga-Maj-Johansson, her physical disability and personal interest for travelling represent the two most important determinants that mark her difference, before factors such as gender and nationality. Her disability seems the factor that more strongly impact upon her capacity to be mobile, but also represents the main reason behind her urge to travel in order to 'feel free'. Here *Destination X* implicitly refers to a transnational collectivity formed by people with disability that increasingly operates at international level to promote the integration of disabled people and reduce barriers existing in the world.

The most relevant determinants of difference for the Baffin Babes seem to be gender and personal interest in outdoor activities, while nationality does not play any role.

Neither the film, nor the accompanying label, mentions the nationality of the Baffin Babes. The intersection between gender and personal interest plays, I would argue, a central role in challenging gender stereotypes. Their adventure could be regarded as an extreme activity that requires *male* traits such as courage and physical strength.

They are presented while pushing their limits, facing rigid temperatures and other challenges, or gaining kilos to prepare for the expedition thus scarifying their bodily image, still considered an important *female* attribute. However, their *female* traits such as emotionality and sensitivity are not denied; the Babes are presented while engaging in activities like dancing and doing aerobic exercise.

Destination X also refers to other supranational, transversal collectivities constructed around categories of signification existing beyond borders of nation-states such as global nomads (constructed around nomadism as a lifestyle) and modern travellers like couchSurfers (built around a particular way of travelling). I focus here on the category of global nomad and the column 'Global Nomads', which is specifically devoted to this collectivity. It includes groups characterised by a nomadic lifestyle and defined by ethnicity such as Tuareg people or Roma. Their inclusion could be interpreted as a restoration of the idea of a close connection between 'culture' and 'ethnicity' as if, although rejected in principle, this idea should always 'creep in' through the 'back door'. This argument would not take into account that these groups were selected because of their nomadic lifestyle that challenges the role of borders in constructing 'national boundaries of the "us" against the outside "them"' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 96). It stresses the fictionality of the holy trinity 'people, state and territory' (85) usually sanctified in nationalistic discourse. I would argue that *Destination X* presents these global nomads in a way that challenges stereotypical images and essentialist constructions of culture and identity, while stressing their hybrid character.⁵ For example, a photo of a Tuareg sitting on a camel in the desert is juxtaposed to a picture

⁵ Hybridity could be employed as a useful theoretical framework to conceptualise how the column presents ideas of differences.

of Tuareg on a motorbike in a metropolitan landscape. Pictures and CDs of a band of Tuareg musicians, the Tinariwen (the 2012 Grammy Award winner) are also on display. Their selection is interesting as the band was formed in the late 1970s in military training camps in Lybia, where its original members met. Their songs sought to spread the message of the Tuareg rebel movement seeking 'to promote the rights of nomadic people suffering under the arbitrary policies of repressive and distant central governments.'⁶ The band created a new genre of music, known as Tameshek guitar or Assouf, resulting from a mix of influences, including 'traditional' Touareg music, Malian guitar music, Moroccan chaabi, Sahraoui guitar music, Berber & Kabyle music, but also 'Western' rock musicians such as Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, Santana. Today their songs explore people's struggle for cultural and psychological survival. Their inclusion in *Destination X* effectively questions the idea that 'ethnic' collectivities (and other minority groups) are only 'about the recognition of difference and the specificity of culture and tradition' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 85). It shows that they are not isolated and static, but are also touched by processes of cultural change and cultural hybridity.

Although not denying the role that ethnic, racial and national factors continue to play as markers of difference in contemporary societies of postcolonial Europe, *Destination X* also refers to other intersectional categories of location cross-cutting with national, racial and ethnical factors. These factors include gender, sexuality, religion, language, education, profession, disability, age, political and social affiliations, personal interests which, intersecting in different ways, define people's position in society. When

⁶ See <http://www.tinariwen.com/biography/> (Accessed 12/04/12)

reflecting on another exhibition at the MWC, *Jerusalem*,⁷ Grinell (2011: 233) also employs the concept of intersectionality. He argues that several factors should be taken into account when determining the ways in which a person is oppressed, including 'categories like gender, sexuality, race, religion, generation and class' (ibid). I wish to expand on his approach and suggest that intersectionality represents a useful analytical perspective to explore how exhibitions construct the variety of differences that characterise social agents in contemporary plural societies. Yuval-Davis (2010) maintains that not only members of minority groups, but also of the hegemonic majority are differently situated in relation to the ways several determinants that mark their difference intersect. I propose that *Destination X* employs an intersectional approach to challenge reductive polarities, such as local/global, center/periphery, majority/minority, and citizen/foreigner. It does not refer to one specific 'community' but to many different collectivities or social groupings defined by the intersection of several factors. The exhibition avoids falling into the trap of elevating specific categories of belonging prescribed at birth such as nationality and 'race'.

Although the rejection of essentialist ideas of difference and constructions of culture and identity represents a move forward, I suggest that exhibitions employing an intersectional perspective are not entirely free of faults. By focusing on the intersecting particularities of multiple identity positions, *Destination X* seems to imagine a universal community across cultural, social, economic and geographical distinctions that shares analogous experiences of movement and travel. However, the exhibition tends to obscure real inequalities of power existing in specific social

⁷ *Jerusalem* (November 2010) featured pictures of LGBTQ people living in Israel/Palestine.

contexts (especially at local level, in Gothenburg, and at national level, in Sweden). It does not pay sufficient attention to the intercultural tensions that accompany human movements, social communications and exchanges between people occupying different identity position. I shall further expand on this in the conclusive chapter. Hereafter I turn my attention to the Tropenmuseum and explore the ideas of differences and the discourse of diversity that *Kartini* and *World of Music* construct.

***Kartini* and *World of Music*, Tropenmuseum**

At the Tropenmuseum I concentrated my investigation on *Kartini* and *Music World* as they were originally thought to form one exhibition looking simultaneously at world stories and world music. As Legêne (2010) states the museum's intention was 'to put intangible heritage on display⁸ and to have the combination of music and stories' in the same exhibition. As a space where to produce this exhibition could not be identified, it was decided to have two separate exhibitions: *Music World* presenting world music⁹ and *Kartini* focusing on world stories.

Kartini (figure 6.8) focuses on the theme of travelling stories and presents a selection of world stories 'that know no frontiers'. By focusing on stories from other parts of the world, critics might suggest that *Kartini* maintains unchallenged the conventional focus

⁸ The two exhibitions (particularly *Kartini*) have been described as displays 'devoted to intangible heritage' (Boonstra 2009: 28). My interviewees acknowledged that the exhibitions attempt to problematise the notion of intangible heritage as presented by the 2003 Unesco Convention of Intangible Heritage. Here I am unable to expand upon how the concept of intangible heritage was employed during the process of exhibition-making or to comment upon the fictional character of the division tangible/intangible heritage engrained in UNESCO's discourse, whose flaws were evident in the struggle of the exhibition team to agree upon *Kartini's* content and format.

⁹ Legêne argues that this decision resulted opportune because of the Tropenmuseum's strong ethnomusicological tradition.

of ethnographic museums on the representation and interpretation of distant cultures. However, the stories featuring in the exhibition arrived in the Netherlands following processes of human migration and slowly became part of the Dutch cultural scene. They were selected thinking of ‘the cultures that are present in Dutch society, which was an important aspect from the beginning of this project’ (van Dartel 2010). The story of Layla and Majnum was brought to the Netherlands by migrants from the Middle-East, while Kantjil, Anansi, and Ramayana stories arrived with postcolonial migrants from former Dutch colonies, especially Suriname and Indonesia.¹⁰ Nowadays these stories are known not only by ‘close others’ but also by ‘ethnic’ Dutch.



6.8 *Kartini*, Tropenmuseum.

¹⁰ See van Dartel (2009c).

Hereafter I explore to what extent, by focusing on the theme of travelling stories, *Kartini* challenges simplistic notions of collectivities' boundaries (homogenously constructed around notions of nationality, ethnicity and race) and overcomes regressive and monolithic constructions of culture. In order to develop my argument I focus my attention on the Anansi story and the display 'Unbounded-NL'.

It is interesting to note that the story of the spider Anansi was included in *Kartini* even though the Tropenmuseum does not hold Anansi objects in its collections. However, the team believed that 'when you talk of storytelling and you think of people that are in Dutch society, Anansi must be there. It is a very important part of Surinamese and Antillean culture' (Van Dartel 2010). They decided to design a 'spider-like' story-telling unit (figure 6.9), as van Dartel (2009c: 348) names it, and to include a video titled 'Stories of the Spider' on which I focus my attention here.



6.9 Unit: Anansi story-telling, *Kartini*, Tropenmuseum.

The video follows the journey of the Anansi stories from Ghana, to Suriname, to Aruba and to the Netherlands.¹¹ It was realised in collaboration with Vista far Researching Visuals, an institution specialised in video productions focusing on cultural diversity and communication education.¹²

At each leg of the journey 'distant others' (in the tradition of ethnographic museums), 'close others' and an 'ethnic' Dutch' talk about and/or perform Anansi stories. The journey begins in the Netherlands with Paul Middellijn (a Suriname writer and musician that moved to the Netherlands in 1969)¹³ that introduces the Anansi stories as a tradition that originates in Ghana. The visitor is taken to Ghana where Nana Ampadu, a Ghanaian musician,¹⁴ describes the Ghanaian tradition of Anansi story; after that two Ghanaians, Nestor Kojo Anim and Christiana Anaman, perform Anansi storytelling. The journey continues in Suriname and Aruba where Wijnand Stomp, a Dutch stand-up comedian and writer born in Curacao (Netherlands Antilles) who moved to the Netherlands when he was twelve, performs Anansi storytelling. He is followed by Farida Stellaard who also performs Anansi storytelling, and Dolfi Belén and Kock Marchena that talk about the tradition of Anansi story in Curacao, Bonaire and Aruba.¹⁵ Finally, the video returns to the Netherlands, exactly to Rotterdam, where

¹¹ Anansi stories are believed to have been first developed in West Africa, in particular by the Ashanti people in Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Liberia. During the years of slavery they travelled from Africa to the Caribbean, the Dutch Antilles, Suriname, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Trinidad as the intangible heritage of African slaves.

¹² The video was produced drawing on 'Anansi Masters', a project seeking to collect Anansi stories in Holland and elsewhere and to create a digital database containing video registrations of performances of Anansi stories. The project also sought to produce a variety of activities, including exhibitions and educational programmes for schools.

¹³ Middellijn soon became very well-known in Rotterdam. His poems often describe the problems faced by Surinamese people in the Netherlands.

¹⁴ Ampadu is known for forming the African Brothers Band in Accra in 1963.

¹⁵ Curacao, Bonaire and Aruba, also known as the Dutch Caribbean ABC islands, are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Aruba and Curaçao are autonomous, self-governing member states of the Kingdom

Esther de Jong, an 'ethnic' Dutch storyteller, performs Anansi storytelling. In my view the video presents Anansi storytelling not simply as an oral tradition of 'distant others' living in faraway lands (for instance Ghana and Suriname) but as an integral part of Dutch cultural heritage. It includes 'close others', that is post/colonial migrants from Suriname and the Dutch Antilles, and an 'ethnic' Dutch'; it highlights how the mingling of people of different cultures is changing the collective 'self', and modifying Dutch mainstream culture.

The display 'Unbounded-NL' (figure 6.10) takes a similar approach but focuses more strongly on *here* and *now* by looking at contemporary Dutch society. Babazadeh (2010) argues that with the display the team aimed to 'see who we have here, which kinds of stories. Because the world is there, you can go to the world, but at the same time the world is around us'. His statement challenges the traditional role of ethnographic museums as representatives of 'non-Western' cultures, while envisaging new possibilities for these institutions. It highlights their potential to engage with and reflect upon the cultural diversity that characterises contemporary plural societies of post/colonial Europe.

'Unbounded-NL' is a circular unit formed by two semi-circular cases where nine objects are shown,¹⁶ accompanied by nine short films 'about troubadours, musicians and

of the Netherlands, while Bonaire is a special municipality of the Netherlands. Here Anansi stories are told in Papiamentu, the Creole most spoken language.

¹⁶ Eight objects belong to the museum collection. Interestingly, all but one was collected in post/colonial times (late 20th century).

storytellers'.¹⁷ Here the team started from the museum's collection and looked for about ten objects currently used in the Netherlands to perform storytelling. Once the nine objects had been selected, the team searched for artists living in the Netherlands whose origins lie in the countries where these objects had been assembled who, in Legêne's words, could perform 'contemporary Dutch storytelling for the exhibition' (Legêne 2009: 20).



6.10 Display: 'Unbounded-NL', *Kartini*, Tropenmuseum.

By following this approach the team sought to make these objects 'contemporary' (Babazadeh 2010) and to highlight their cultural significance in contemporary Dutch cultural scene. For two of the objects, however, the museum could not identify artists that respected the above parameters and invited 'ethnic' Dutch people to contribute

¹⁷ In each semi-circular case a screen is located that shows the short films in a loop. One screen is equipped with Dutch subtitles, while the other with English subtitles. The decision to include both Dutch and English subtitles was linked to the different level of fluency in Dutch of the interviewees.

to the exhibition. Hereafter I focus on three objects and their accompanying films: ceremonial staffs from Iran, a saz from Turkey, and Jan Klassen and Katrijn hand puppets from the Netherlands.

Sahand Sahebdivani, a second generation migrant from Iran, introduces the ceremonial staffs (figure 6.11). He is shown while performing Iranian storytelling at the Mezrab Teahouse that his parents opened when they moved to Amsterdam. His audience appears to include people with a variety of cultural backgrounds, including Turkish migrants. Sahand explains that Iranian travelling storytellers (the Dervishes or Sufis) traditionally used these staffs when performing storytelling, while today they can be found displayed in tea houses in Iran 'to remind people of old stories'.



6.11 Ceremonial staffs and the saz, 'Unbounded-NL', *Kartini*, Tropenmuseum.

Behsat Úvez, a singer and instrumentalist from Turkey who moved to the Netherlands in 1989,¹⁸ introduces the saz (figure 6.11). He explains that the saz was played by the ashiks (travelling storytellers) to accompany their storytelling. Nowadays it is also employed in different genres of music (including jazz), while being still used by contemporary ashiks to perform Iranian storytelling also in the Netherlands, such as Omer Kadan (a second generation migrant from Turkey) who is shown when playing the saz in Amsterdam. As Kadan states, he sings ‘in Dutch, of course’ his songs that focus on immigration problems. Then he appears while performing with Herman Finkers, a Dutch comedian at the Muziekcentrum Enschede (Music Centre Enschede).¹⁹

They sing:

...the Jehovah’s witnesses gather next door to the mosque, and across the road from the coffee house you can take the bus to Enschede. Some of us read the Koran, others follow the pope, but our fathers worked side by side in the textile factory...

Wim Kerkhove, an ‘ethnic’ Dutch street puppeteer, presents Jan Klassen²⁰ and Katrijn hand puppets. He explains that when he started his career there was not a tradition of street theatre in Holland. He took inspiration from ‘Turkish shadow plays, English Punch and Judy shows, Guignol plays from France, Kasper plays in Germany, and a lot

¹⁸ When living in Turkey Behsat played ‘traditional’ Turkish music. After moving to the Netherlands he progressively turned to ‘modern’ music. Together with Steven Kamperman, a Dutch reed player, he initiated the Baraná, a musical cross-over style bringing together Dutch and Turkish ingredients.

¹⁹ Enschede is a city located in the Eastern Netherlands that was famous for its textile production. In the 60s its flourishing textile industries employed large numbers of foreign unskilled workers, especially guest-workers from Turkey and Marocco, who remained largely unemployed after the decline of the textile industry of the 1970s (Muskens 1997).

²⁰ Jan Klassen is the main character of traditional Dutch folk puppet theatre. He impersonates an Amsterdam working-class, down-to-heart man.

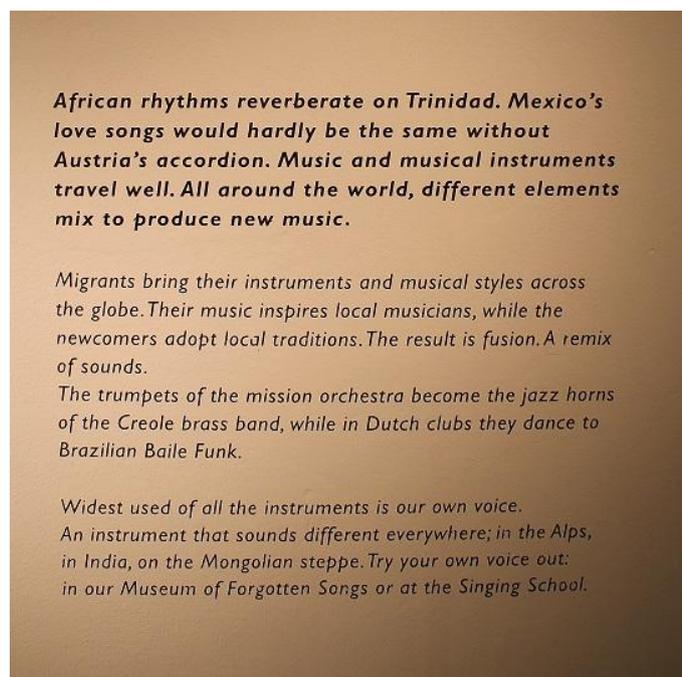
from Pulcinella plays of Italy, especially Naples...’ He modified the characters of his shows to respond to the increasing diversity of Dutch society brought by migration. As ‘the puppet show did not reflect society any longer’, he introduced new characters such as the Surinamese neighbour (Mrs Pingel) and the cousin from Turkey (Karagöz). His shows sought to challenge popular misconceptions, such as the belief that tulips come from the Netherlands rather than from Turkey, which ‘wasn’t what people wanted to hear in Holland.’



6.12 Hand puppets, ‘Unbounded-NL’, *Kartini*, Tropenmuseum.

In my view 'Unbounded-NL' does more than demonstrating that 'migrant from around the world contribute to Dutch culture', as the text panel suggests. Working with both 'close others' and 'ethnic' Dutch, 'Unbounded-NL' challenges binary dichotomies such as us/them, majority/minorities, and nationals/migrants, and explores the diversity of the collective 'self' (namely, us).

I now move my attention to *World of Music* and discuss how the exhibition approaches ideas of differences and cultures. By focusing on the theme of travelling music, the gallery tells a story about human mobility and explores its impact on music styles. The exhibition looks at the dynamics of cultural contacts and, as Fontaine states (2010), it presents 'world culture, fusion, and mixture'. It shows that 'music - as stories do, as in general culture does - travel the world, adapts, loses and gains new aspects' (van Dartel 2010). This is also expressed in the exhibition's main panel (figure 6.13).



6.13 Main panel: *World of Music*, Tropenmuseum.

For *World of Music* (figure 6.14) the team started from the museum's collections and selected musical instruments for their aesthetic qualities and the central role they played in developing music genres.



6.14 *World of Music*, Tropenmuseum.

A certain contradiction could be identified between the exhibition's idea and the (ethnographic) *art-type* approach chosen to display the objects. However, the exhibition does not simply show beautiful musical instruments from faraway lands. It attempts to overcome the museum's traditional ethno character by representing "the all world, not just the 'non-Western' world" (Van Dartel 2010). Yet, the Tropenmuseum acquired musical instruments that did not feature in its collections but have played a central role in the development of music genres (such as the electric

guitar).²¹ Moreover, the instruments are not displayed according to their places of origin but rather to the organological categories to which they belong.

As the team sought to create a participatory show where visitors are invited to act, two immersive environments - the 'Singing School' and the 'Museum of Forgotten Songs' - were created, where visitors are encouraged to use the human voice, the musical instrument most human beings naturally possess.

Here I focus my attention on the accordion, the trumpet and the ukulele, the three musical instruments that play a central role in the exhibition. They are displayed together with three short documentaries that were produced in collaboration with Mirandas Filmproducties. Fontaine (2010) maintains that the three objects were chosen for their potential to tell a story of human migration. Following human movements, they travelled the world and contributed to the development of a variety of musical styles.

The accordion (figure 6.15) is presented as a European invention of the beginning of the 17th century that accompanied seamen and migrants during their travels and, adapted to local traditions, 'found its place all over the world', including Madagascar, Mexico, Louisiana, Serbia, and the Netherlands.

²¹ A few instruments were borrowed from other institutions such as the Wilhelm Hack Museum.



6.15 The accordion, *World of Music*, Tropenmuseum.

The film also acknowledges that the accordion has played a central role in the development of several musical genres such as tango in Argentina, Cajun music and zydeco in Louisiana, and also Tex-Mex in the US. The Dutch band Rowwen Hèze from Limburg is shown while playing in Texas with Flaco Jimenez, a Tejano accordionist. The film states that the band added a Limburg dressing to the Tex-Mex, bringing ‘the polka back to Europe’.

The film describing the ukulele (figure 6.16), as Fontaine (2010) suggests, tells ‘a story of migration’. The film explains that the instrument, initially known as machete, was brought by Portuguese seamen to the colonies in the fifteenth century, including Indonesia. Here Dutch, Indonesians, Chinese traders and African slaves lived side-by-

side; the Kroncong music (played with a ukulele-type instrument, the Kroncong) was born out of this melting pot.



6.16 Ukuleles, *World of Music*, Tropenmuseum.

After Indonesia's independence migrants brought the kroncong with them to New Guinea, Suriname, and the Netherlands. However, in 1879 the machetes had already been brought by Madeirans migrants to the Hawaii, where they migrated to work in sugar cane fields. The ukulele became famous following the success of Hawaiian music in the 20s and 30s. After a period of decline, in the 50s the ukulele regained popularity thanks to the film and the record industries and to the success of Hawaiian music bands in the Netherlands such as Kilima Hawaiians. However, it was the introduction of a cheap plastic model in the US that made the ukulele hugely popular in the 1960s, when the instrument was also adopted by members of the hippie movement.

According to Fontaine (2010), the trumpet (figure 6.17) tells a story about 'colonisation and European superiority'. The film explains that (wind) instruments were brought to the 'new world' by European colonisers, who 'used them to convince the locals of European superiority', and by missionaries that employed them to convert people. If initially local musicians 'learnt to play European marches and hymns', soon they started using wind instruments to play 'their own music and mixes using the influences of European culture', as it happened in India, in Minahassa Peninsula (Indonesia) and Bolivia. The film ends in present-day Netherlands where a parade of musicians is shown while playing wind instruments in the Netherlands.



6.17 The trumpet (right side), *World of Music*, Tropenmuseum.

Employing Hybridity

The intersectional approach does not seem to represent a useful tool to explore how *Kartini* and *Music World* construct discourse of diversity. In the exhibitions nationality represents the most important marker of difference cross-cutting only with two 'social or economical locations', profession (artist/musician) and personal interest, while other intersectional categories of location are not included. From my perspective, the concept of hybridity is a more effective theoretical framework that can help understand how the exhibitions deal with ideas of differences. As I stressed in chapter one, hybridity is one of the most well-known concepts from postcolonial theory and has become a touchstone for debates over post/colonial identities. Mieke Bal (2002) mentions hybridity amongst those 'travelling concepts' in cultural analysis whose meaning and use have changed while moving between periods, disciplines, individual scholars, and academic communities. Hybridity represents a helpful paradigm to think beyond exclusionary, fixed, binary notions of cultures and identities based on ideas of cultural, racial and national purity. It helps to challenge narratives of originality and initial subjectivities, while focusing on those processes produced in the articulation of (cultural) differences. Recently hybridity has been applied to the exploration of the relations of power between dominant and minority groups in 'metropolitan centres in the North and South' (Bhabha 2004: xxii). Increasingly these in-between spaces where processes of intercultural negotiations and political resistance take place as a result of the proximity of different cultures have been explored (Moore-Gilbert 2005). In chapter three I argued that several critics have highlighted the virtues of hybridity as a regulative principle for museum practices.

I suggest that *Kartini* and *World of Music* displace the binary logic 'self'/'other', while presenting 'the fluid, hybrid cultural identities that grow out of processes of exchange, appropriation and translation between different cultures' (Iervolino and Sandell forthcoming 2013). Neither 'distant'/'close others' nor 'ethnic' Dutch are represented as fixed in their original cultural or group identity defined according to 'the rules of a deep cultural biology scripted...in the inaccessible interiority of the genome' (Gilroy 2004: 6). They are presented as living in-between cultures and actively engaging in processes of cultural change.

When presenting oral traditions of distant lands (for instance, Anansi storytelling in Aruba and Suriname), the exhibitions highlight they have resulted from processes of cultural exchanges activated by cultural contacts. When cultural traditions brought by migrants to the Netherlands such as Iranian or Turkish storytelling are shown, they are not portrayed in a celebratory or romanticised way, according to a logic of cultural maintenance as the authentic cultural expression of 'close others'. They are presented as being affected by processes of cultural change and as incorporating elements of local mainstream culture. 'Close others' do not appear as authentic members of particular (ethnic or national) collectivities, but as 'naturally free and self-determining individuals who wish to make their own choices' (Parekh 2005: 183). They appear as grounded in the social texture of Dutch society and actively contributing to its cultural life, which is simultaneously impacting on how they are *re*-interpreting their inherited cultural traditions. They are shown while performing a revised version of inherited traditions and appropriating the language of their hosting country. For example, Kadan

is shown while performing Turkish storytelling in the Netherlands, but singing in Dutch (the language of the majority) about the experience of displacement and migration problems.

World of Music and *Kartini* employ hybridity as their theoretical perspective and pay attention to processes of cultural hybridization activated by the presence of people with different cultural backgrounds in the Netherlands. Particularly *Kartini* highlights the (often neglected) effects on mainstream Dutch culture of contacts with 'other' cultures (located both *within* and *outside* the borders of the Netherlands), more evidently in the display 'Unbounded-NL'. The inclusion of the two main characters of traditional Dutch folk puppet theatre, Jan Klassen and Katrijn, in an exhibition presenting 'contemporary diversity of Dutch society' (Legêne 2009: 20) is intriguing. *Kartini* demonstrates that a 'multicultural society' is something more than just people from different cultures. It shows that even Dutch folk puppet street theatre, considered as a very Dutch custom, has developed as a result of dialogue between traditions of street theatres of different European countries, as well as in response to the arrival of migrants in the Netherlands. Similarly, in *World of Music* the film about the accordion refers to the impact of Tex-Mex on the music of the Dutch band Rowwen Hèze.

In my view the employment of the hybridity paradigm enables the exhibitions to resist binary thinking, while looking at the liminal space between identities. The exhibitions acknowledge the possibility of a cultural hybridity that, as Bhabha states (2004: 5), 'entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.' They approach the

representation of cultural differences as an 'on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities' (3). If engagements of cultural differences are always complex and can be both consensual and conflictual (ibid), I argue that the two exhibitions, however, prioritise the former, while overlooking the latter. Only Kadan points to conflictual engagements when stating 'our parents migrated to Holland forty years ago. Immigrations problems are subjects for my songs.' The hybridity paradigm therefore appears not to be completely immune from limitations. As Werbner argues (1997: 20), 'too much hybridity...leaves all the old problems of class exploitation and racial oppression unresolved. Far from being a radical project, hybridity turns out...to be a political cul-de-sac...' If hybridity succeeds in problematising 'the unity of the "us" and the otherness of the "other"' and questioning 'the radical separation between the two' (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 14), it can contribute to deny people's different locations in multiple fields of power and to downplay 'the problems of cultural translation and reflexivity, inter-ethnic communication and cross-cultural mobilisation, hybridity and creolisation' (Werbner 1997: 6). Despite of these weaknesses, by pointing out to consensual engagements and acknowledging the 'transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined community' (Bhabha 2004: 7), the two exhibitions help reshaping the notion of who belongs and who does not belong to the 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983). In this context it seems relevant to turn our attention to the ways in which the exhibitions construct collectivities of belonging. I now explore the extent to which the two exhibitions overcome essentialist ideas of belonging to imagined, homogenous (national) collectivities of belonging that - as I argued in chapter two - museums have tended to construct in their displays. Using the concepts of politics of belonging as discussed by Yuval-Davis (2010, 2011), I analyse

how the exhibitions construct notions of collectivities and where their boundaries pass. I suggest that not only *Kartini* and *World of Music* but also *Destination X* challenge hegemonic projects of belonging by rejecting a nationalistic political project of belonging. They propose politics of belonging constructed around alternative ideas, which I discuss hereafter.

Constructing alternative political projects of belonging

In the aftermath of 9/11 the concepts of belonging and politics of belonging have become the focus of heated debates in the political arena and in academia. The concept of belonging refers to rights and duties as well as to the emotions that the membership to any collectivity generates. Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Kofman (2005: 528) argue that belonging is ‘where the sociology of emotions interfaces with the sociology of power, where identification and participation collude in terms of aspiration and desire.’ In other words, belonging presents an important emotional, affective dimension. Yuval-Davis (2010: 266) states that the politics of belonging include different ‘political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very specific ways.’ These projects always construct particular boundaries that separate the world population into ‘us’ and ‘them’, thus defining the political community of belonging. As ‘belonging is always a dynamic process’ (Yuval-Davis 2011: 12), the politics of belonging are not static either;²² their boundaries are

²² Nationalist political projects of belonging have been constructed around different principles, including the myth of a common origin, emotional attachments, and the myth of a common destiny.

'multi-layered, shifting, contested and porous' (176). Any construction of boundaries of belonging always includes some people and excludes others. If the hegemonic forms of politics of belonging of the twentieth century were constructed around the notions of nationality and citizenship, new projects of belonging are increasingly being created around alternative notions (Yuval-Davis 2011). As I shall argue below, the three exhibitions construct their projects of belonging around two alternative notions: cosmopolitanism and critical multiculturalism.

Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is a political project of belonging that attempts to overcome the limitations of more bounded politics of belonging such as nationalism, and to respond to increasing globalization and mass migration. In my view *Destination X* and *Kartini* refer to a form of cosmopolitanism 'in which the national expands into the international and the transnational' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 147), seeing it 'as a participatory model in supra-national polity' (ibid).

When reflecting upon *Destination X*, Grinell (2010a) takes issues with the idea that migrants 'belong to our country'. He argues: 'people do not belong anywhere in that sense. People are mobile and they have always been, and must be allowed to be still.' He implicitly suggests that the exhibition challenges nationalist discourse of belonging, while putting forward a cosmopolitan politics of belonging. As I have suggested earlier, *Destination X* engages with 'the difference within' (Bhabha 2004: xv) that characterises Sweden but also looks beyond the borders of Sweden. I argue that the

exhibition constructs cosmopolitanism as a political project from both *above* and *below*. It alludes to diverse transnational bodies such as the United Nations and its discourses of human rights and human security, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and intergovernmental organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In doing so, *Destination X* refers to systems of governmentality existing beyond the borders of nation-states.²³ The exhibition also refers to social groupings transcending national, ethnic and racial borders or boundaries, for instance those defined around shared lifestyles, religious beliefs, and shared interests. These collectivities can be regarded as forms of globalisation from below and point to the existence of a supranational civic society.

World of Music and *Kartini* also seek to transcend bounded national boundaries of belonging. Legêne (2010) states that in its semi-permanent exhibitions (thus also in *World of Music* and *Kartini*) the Tropemuseum attempts to stress that alongside hegemonic forms of nationalism and (nation-state) citizenship, less bounded political projects of belonging exist. These projects first emerged during the years of European colonialism when transnational interdependences between the European empires and their colonies were created, and the idea of cosmopolitanism was first developed. Legêne (ibid) argues that the Tropemuseum tries 'to make people aware that there is a history in transnational citizenship connected to colonialism and to how

²³ However, these supra-national institutions of governance are not strictly cosmopolitan as they practically operate 'on the level of the state and state like clusters of interests' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 155).

people...lived in the world after second World War.'²⁴ By focusing on cultural contacts and processes of cultural hybridization activated by globalisation and its forefather, imperialism, and referring to transnational groupings of artists, *Kartini* and *World of Music* attempt to rethink the myths of national belonging. They put forward a cosmopolitan politics of belonging and implicitly refer to a transnational collectivity and a global culture existing across the borders of multiple nation-states. Pieterse (2000) suggests that globalisation has produced neither cultural uniformity nor 'clash of civilizations'; it is leading to a process of cultural hybridization or ongoing mixing: an increase of diversity, acceleration of creativity and innovation, cultural adaptation and, as a result, new cultures.

The notion of vernacular cosmopolitanism (Bhabha 1996) may be helpful here.²⁵ The protagonists of the three exhibitions appear to be 'vernacular cosmopolitans of a kind, moving in-between cultural traditions, and revealing hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language' (Bhabha 2004: xiii). However, they remain situated in specific locations and are connected to particular (cultural) contests and collectivities.

²⁴ According to Legêne (2010) the discourse about transnational or world citizenship has conflicting effects as 'in one way it broadens its perspective on the public but in another way it makes it more local.' She suggests that it induces museums to focus on their neighbourhood and reach new local audiences, while simultaneously increasing the international character of museum's audiences, for instance, by including tourists, creating digital opportunities for accessing collections and moving objects between institutions.

²⁵ Werbner (2006: 496) argues that vernacular cosmopolitanism is an oxymoron combining apparently contradictory 'notions of local specificity and universal enlightenment'. This concept recognises the possibility that rootedness is compatible with 'openness to cultural difference or the fostering of a universal civic consciousness and a sense of moral responsibility beyond the local' (497).

Critical multiculturalism

In the display 'Unbounded-NL' instead *Kartini* constructs, I suggest, a multicultural political project of belonging around the idea of 'critical multiculturalism' (Ang 2005: 227) which suggests that 'diversity must be affirmed within a politics of cultural criticism and a commitment to social justice' (McLaren 1994 quoted in Ang, 2005: 227).

In chapter three I argued that in recent years multiculturalism as a policy for the management of diversity has been criticised as essentialist. The display 'Unbounded-NL' constructs a critical multiculturalism that attempts to overcome the weaknesses of liberal multiculturalism or multicultural nationalism. Echoing Hage, Yuval-Davis (2011: 98) describes multicultural nationalism as a 'nationalist ideology which recognises the multicultural composition of contemporary nations', while imposing on this diversity the unifying 'umbrella' of national identity.

'Unbounded-NL' retains the positive aspects of multicultural nationalism by highlighting the heterogeneous composition of the national collectivity. However, it moves forward by proposing a new articulation of similarity and difference within the national boundaries. 'Unbounded-NL' overcomes conventional concepts of multiculturalism that simplistically propose a model of a coherent and monocultural majority enriched by the arrival of post/colonial or more recent migrants. Those 'close others' featuring in the display are not presented as authentic representatives of specific communities of belonging or as frozen in 'their' cultures. The display avoids constructing homogenous communities whose members are imagined as equally rooted in their own culture of origin. They are individual artists whose origins lie in other parts of the world that practice 'Dutch' storytelling. Legêne (2010) argues that

the choice of the topic 'travelling stories' (rather than travelling people) was informed by the Tropenmuseum's belief that 'people should not be approached according to their national passport, but to how they contribute to society.' I suggest that the display presents an idea of 'critical' multicultural political project of belonging that constructs a national collectivity of belonging whose boundaries are permeable and shifting. Its members are identified by their contribution to the cultural and social life of Dutch civic society (not by factors such as nationality or ethnicity). This multicultural collectivity appears to combine cultural diversity and civic order and to experience a 'conviviality of difference' (Gilroy 2004), an ability to live together despite of difference and learn from each other. Processes of crossing and re-crossing of cultural boundaries continuously take place within this multicultural collectivity and cultural value is being incessantly produced 'as people move across cultural boundaries of all kinds' (Dewdney et al. 2011: 30). The concept of transculturality, to which I referred in chapter three, seems useful to describe the processes of cultural exchange, of borrowing and lending, translating back and forward and the accompanying negotiations between various social groupings forming the national collectivity.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have focused my attention on the exhibitions and have sought to present how their application of a thematic strategy modified the discourse about differences of the Tropenmuseum and the MWC. I have elucidated how *Destination X*, *Kartini* and *World of Music* challenge prevailing, simplistic understandings of cultural

diversity and notions of essentialist collectivities, while proposing shifting, postnational ideas of cultures and identities. I have also discussed how the exhibitions articulate political projects of belonging constructed around the notions of cosmopolitanism and critical multiculturalism. My analysis has revealed that interpretations of a thematic strategy as totally immune from shortcomings and as the ultimate solution to problems of representation affecting ethnographic museums are limited *at best*. I have also alluded to some of the weaknesses of a thematic approach to which I return in the conclusive chapter. A cautious reader would be left with many unanswered questions. For example, do thematic exhibitions risk neutralising differences? By focusing on consensual engagements of cultural differences, can thematic exhibitions downplay the problems of diversity, inequality and exclusion that still exist in the globalising nations of Europe as well as between the 'West' and the 'Rest'? Could it be argued that thematic exhibitions have a tendency to overlook conflictual engagements of cultural differences that take place in plural states of post/colonial Europe? A focus on consensual engagements was probably less problematic in *World of Music*, with which the Tropenmuseum sought 'to do something with the musical department' (Fontaine 2010), and in *Kartini*, whose main target audience is families with children.²⁶ This approach was more problematic, I contend, in *Destination X* whose target audience is formed by 'young adults' (Mighetto 2010).²⁷

²⁶ With *Kartini* the Tropenmuseum attempted to create 'a place for the whole family' (Babazadeh 2010), people from 'zero to 100 years old, from babies to grandparents' (Ament 2010), with which the museum sought to fill a gap in its offer. Yet, before *Kartini* opened no gallery existed that was suitable for both adults and children under six years old. The Tropenmuseum Junior (a children's museum within the 'adult museum') exclusively targets children between six and thirteen years old.

²⁷ The category 'young adults' represents the MWC's main target group; it is formed by two sub-groups, 'one is around 16 to 29 and the other is around 29 to 36. The older group is more frequent as families with children' (Mighetto 2010).

We are also left to wonder how visitors to the three exhibitions might have interpreted the museums' messages on the specific themes and which meanings they produced during their visits. Yet, the museum's message is 'displayed, conveyed and converted into meaning by museum professionals' at the stage of production and by 'the audiences who view and review it' (Kaplan 1994) at the stage of reception. Research suggests that the various exhibition elements are combined in unpredictable ways by individual visitors who, drawing on their knowledge and background, become active participants in the meaning-making process. As Sandell (2007a) notes, they utilise, appropriate but also ignore, resist and challenge the various semiotic resources featuring in exhibitions in the process of making their own meaning. Steven Engelsman, Director of the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, posed me the question about visitor's interpretation of the museum's message when I presented a paper about *Kartini* at the Fourth Conference on the Inclusive Museum (Johannesburg, South Africa). I am aware that I closely analysed the exhibitions and made my own meanings, and these might be different from those visitors made. The interpretation of the cultural critic that carefully analyses and long reflects upon a specific cultural product is often different from that of the general visitor that spends a limited time in an exhibition. Although the issue of visitors' interpretation falls beyond the purposes of this research, this matter deserves further investigation.

Lastly, my account reveals that the three exhibitions are 'multimodal texts' (Pang 2004) in which different 'semiotic resources' - not only ethnographica but also photographs, contemporary objects, immersive environments, films and other digital

media - are displayed together to problematize a specific theme. It is evident that in thematic exhibitions the museums' collections lose their centrality and become only some of the possible 'semiotic resources', though not necessarily the privileged ones, qualified for display. If the collections still represent the point of departure of specific displays (for example, in 'Unbounded-NL'), in other instances the exhibitions' theme prevails. I have highlighted instances when the museums did not hold objects that could be employed to tell a particular story or to problematize particular aspects of a theme, such as the case of the Anansi story, and created, commissioned, bought or specifically collected objects, films (for instance, those shown in the display 'Why do we travel? 6 voices from Gothenburg'), and so forth. We are left to wonder to what extent (if at all) the application of a thematic strategy with its move away from collections might be changing the institutional identity and impacting upon the internal organisation. Before discussing some of these broader questions about the product in the conclusive chapter, I now turn my attention to the processes of exhibition-making and explore how the application of thematic approach impacted upon the institutions' expertise, museological practices and generated problems of power and resistance within the institutions.

7. Exhibitionary Processes: Changes of Expertise, Practices and Power Relationships

As I explained in chapter two, from the 1980s a large amount of material has been produced exploring the problems affecting museums' displays devoted to the representation of 'other' cultures, both 'non-Western' cultures and minority cultures within 'Western' societies. Research has tended to focus on two areas: the first explores how the discipline of anthropology and its practices have shaped forms of representations; the second examines processes of exhibition-making developed in collaborations with indigenous and other minority communities. The development of these research areas follows a trend, I contend, that has seen museums concentrating their efforts towards inclusion and democratisation on two areas of museum practices: *interpretation* and *participation*. Bouquet (2001: 179) maintains that processes taking place in the 'backstage' of ethnographic museums 'have been overshadowed...by the attention given to processes of consultation with indigenous people and issues of representation.' Little attention has as yet been paid to 'behind-the-scene-processes' (Ames 1992: 113) and their 'organizationally embedded procedures' (Kurin 1997: 22) that shape exhibitions. Museum's reluctance to critically examine and reshape their processes, practices, and procedures, I suggest, demonstrates their illusion that democratisation and inclusion can be achieved by *simply* altering their exhibitions and/or inviting minority and indigenous groups to contribute to their exhibitionary

processes, while leaving their 'backstage' (where representations are produced) substantially unchanged.

When I arrived at the Tropenmuseum to carry out fieldwork, I intended to follow the conventional path and concentrate my research primarily on the narratives of two selected thematic semi-permanent exhibitions. However, the more I talked to the staff, the more I became aware that behind-the-scene-processes, institutional structure, internal expertise and relationships involving power and status had played important roles and deserved further attention. I became particularly interested in exploring the extent to which the application of a thematic strategy had changed museological practices and altered centres of power.

After having explored the 'frontstage' of the Tropenmuseum and the Museum of World Culture in the previous chapter - where I presented my 'theoretically-informed critical readings' (Macdonald 2003: 9) of the exhibitions, in this chapter I turn my attention to the 'backstage' of the institutions.¹ I present the teams that produced *Kartini*, *World of Music* and *Destination X* and discuss their *modus operandi* and staffing. By focusing on the exhibition teams, my intention is to highlight *what* and *who* was controlling their 'structure of production'. I first discuss atypical professionals and expertise that were included in the teams. I then move my attention to the curator and explore how the application of a thematic strategy altered the role s/he played.

The chapter attempts to present a critical sociological portrait of power within the two institutions. In doing so, I seek to respond to Ames' (1992: 110) plea for 'more court jesters and canaries' willing to undertake a reflexive and critical anthropology of

¹ When employing the terms 'backstage' and 'frontstage', I draw on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective on social interactions.

museums that uncovers engrained assumptions and questions established values and practices.

The three project teams

If an exhibition can be considered an assemblage of 'things (and images, and words)', it is actually 'a mixture of actors: things and people at the same time' (Bouquet 2001: 195). Drawing on my interviews, I present the human actors (both museum staff and externally contracted personnel) that the museums regard as the exhibitions' authors. In my account I follow Bouquet's (2001) exploration of the process of production of a temporary exhibition at the University of Oslo's Ethnographic Museum.

Before introducing the teams, I wish to briefly reflect upon the application of a *team* strategy. In the early 1990s museums started moving away from the 'traditional curator-led system' (Miles 1992: 59) or 'single-author model' (Macdonald 2002: 110) and introduced a team strategy. In the 'traditional model' curators worked substantially alone, deciding which objects to display and how, and what to say about them. Nowadays, in virtually every museum exhibitions are produced by teams formed by several professionals (both staff members and external personnel) that 'interact and share creative responsibilities throughout the process' (Smithsonian Institution 2002: 13).

Since its opening the MWC has embraced a team strategy. Exhibitions are normally produced by multi-departmental teams, often in collaboration with external professionals. On the contrary, for a long time the Tropenmuseum followed the 'traditional method' and curators produced exhibitions substantially alone. Fontaine (2010) suggests that educators were brought into the process very late in an effort to make the exhibition 'more accessible to the audience' (ibid). Their contribution represented substantially an 'afterthought'. Similarly, designers were only involved in the production stage and mainly acted as 'window dressing'. Fontaine (2010) powerfully stresses the ineffectiveness of this system by stating: 'it was like... putting plaster on the wound, instead of helping surgery and that's what we do now.' Since the late 1990s the Tropenmuseum has embraced a team strategy. As Fontaine (2010) states, from the beginning of the process 'there is an educator, an exhibition maker, a curator, a team leader and we look at how to make the show successful and for which audience.'

The processes of production of the three exhibitions were particularly complex, lasting between two and four years. The *Kartini* project was initiated in June 2005 and the exhibition opened to the public on September 11 2008. The *World of Music* project was also initiated in 2005;² the exhibition, however, opened only in December 2009.³ *Destination X* project was initiated in 2008 and the exhibition opened on 29 April 2010. The three projects encountered several challenges at different points during their production, including difficulties with concept development, finances, and

² The *Kartini* and *World of Music* projects started simultaneously as the Tropenmuseum intended to produce a single exhibition covering travelling stories and music.

³ The formal opening took place only in February 2010.

construction. However, changes of team composition represented the biggest challenge as various team members were replaced and their responsibilities were transferred.

Drawing on my interviews, in Appendix Five I present every member of the three teams and provide information about their job title (if different from their role in the team), department, background, and their responsibility in the process. I also point to specific collaborations between members (and disciplines). If the three teams operated collectively and key decisions were taken during team-wide meetings, each member worked both individually and in sub-groups to complete specific tasks.

I now attempt to demonstrate how the teams operated and to what extent they moved away from the 'curator-led model', while embracing a more democratic *modus operandi* that altered traditional practices and internal relationships of status and power. My account seeks to illuminate the effects of experimentations with thematic strategies on the people involved in the processes and on the broader structural systems of the two organisations. It seeks to highlight how change affects professional identities and is intertwined with the workings of power and its processes of domination and resistance. My exploration is informed by recent research in the area of micro-politics of educational change (Achinstein 2002, Flessa 2009, Pillay 2000, Parsons and Priola 2012). Similarly to museums, academia is a particularly institutionalized environment based on a traditional, hierarchical and bureaucratic system where certain processes and practices are considered as elements *constitutive* of the system and left unchallenged. As museums and academia share the same tendency to maintain stability, when exploring museum changes and their effects on

museum practitioners, it is relevant to draw on research looking at processes of change in academia and other educational institutions. My account is also informed by the literature on organisational change (Burnes 2009, Senior and Swailes 1997, Jabri 2012), recent research on the working and spatiality of power (Hayward 2000, Sharp et al. 2000) and Michael Foucault's (1979a, 1979b, 1895, 1986) writings on power.

Although each exhibition project was unique, remarkable similarities could be identified in their *modus operandi*. Hereafter, I focus my discussion on four themes that emerged from the data that help elucidate how they operated, paying attention to both their strengths and weaknesses.

Horizontal

The three teams were characterised by a horizontal structure of production in which each member occupied an equal position and decisions were mainly taken consensually. As neither the curators nor the project leaders occupied a predominant position, the three teams practically lacked of a real leader that had the authority to guide the process of production. The curators worked collaboratively with the other team members towards the construction of knowledge and its translation into the exhibition design. If the horizontal structure enabled a more democratic production processes, it also generated procedural challenges, especially when agreements on specific matters could not be reached.

For instance, the curator/exhibition-maker of *Kartini*, Sadiah Boonstra, points to the difficulties that the search for consensus caused. Boonstra (2010) maintains that she was brought into the process because the team 'couldn't find one line that they all

wanted to follow in the concept so the process got stuck....Too many people wanted too many different things...' She highlights difficulties with decision-making and lack of leadership. Likewise Ament, *Kartini's* exhibition designer, stresses that lack of leadership complicated the decision-making process. He argues:

...it is the result of working with large teams; it is very difficult...to agree with each other. Especially when the hierarchy is not really there so everybody has an opinion that has its importance and it takes a long time before you take the decisions. That's a basic problem. There is not a structure to make harsh decisions and to say this is what we are going to do and this is what we are going to say (Ament 2010).

The difficulties caused by lack of leadership made me reflect upon the challenges created by democratic 'structures of production' and, more broadly, the 'limits' of democracy. Both Ament and Boonstra imply that there may be a need to 'constrain' democracy in order to facilitate decision-making processes. It should be noticed that the two members that voiced the challenges brought by flat structures were external personnel, which suggests that permanent staff might have been disinclined to voice structural problems.

Inclusive and collaborative

Virtually *all* team members were involved in the process since its outset; their skills and expertise were regarded as equally significant for the development of the project. Boonstra (2010) states 'the policy of the Tropenmuseum is like a matrix.

Everybody who is involved in...the exhibition actually takes part in the development of the concept.’ Similarly, Klas Grinell, one of the curators of *Destination X*, argues:

The curators have the biggest responsibilities in developing the abstract synopsis⁴ into some kind of manuscript but the project group meets regularly and have a say...We have discussion meetings where disparate opinions of the different departments and people come up. And the project is developed jointly...

If the participation of the entire team since the outset of the project attributed ‘symbolic power’ to all its members, it also created difficulties. Particularly, the participation of the designers of *Kartini* and *Destination X* was described as a factor that complicated the processes. Boonstra (2010) maintains that, if Ament’s participation to the concept development enhanced the final product (as he contributed with creative suggestions), it ‘didn’t make the process easier...since we had very short time and he has very strong opinions, as a lot of other people.’ In her view the difficulty was that ‘the struggle about different views on the concept hadn’t ended yet before he came in.’ Ament supports Boonstra’s viewpoint when stating:

I only want to work from the content, which can make the job very difficult because museums often hire the designer...while exhibition-makers or curators still have many unsolved questions and...do not know exactly what they want to say (Ament 2010).

⁴ The synopsis summarises the exhibition’s storyline.

The exhibition producer of *Destination X*, Lina Malm, likewise suggests that the difficulty with the contribution of the exhibition designer, Agneta Andrén, was that

[Andrén] started a little bit too early in the process and the organization did not really know what we asked for...Everything was still in process and changing...She wasn't used to working with a project group where everybody thinks different things. She tried to listen to everybody and...became stressed (Malm 2010).

Andrén expresses a deep sense of frustration with how *Destination X* developed: 'the more we had these meetings, meetings, meetings...I was feeling that the whole idea was in a deep mess.' In my view the real challenge was not so much the timing when Andrén joined the team but rather her unfamiliarity with museum practices and the chaotic nature of exhibitionary processes. Her inexperience transpires when she laments:

...we cannot do this because people can think this, we can't do this because people can think that...we cannot do anything! They were so frightened of what people would be thinking...everybody was so frightened of being different...outstanding. My feeling is that they were frightened of doing something that was not politically correct (Andrén 2010).

If the team might have been politically correct at times, I suggest that her discontent results from a misunderstanding between the institution and Andrén on the aims of *Destination X* and her role in the process. She held the expectation that the exhibition would have taken a more radical approach. However, it was Andrén's contribution as

an artist that was particularly problematic, causing a huge controversy. Andrén (2010) maintains that she was invited by the MWC to produce the gallery's 'scenography' and design as well as to create a series of paintings in response to the exhibition's theme. Yet, Andrén (ibid) was an old 'acquaintance' of the MWC as a few years earlier she had approached the institution with an exhibition proposal on the effects of capitalism on people's lives, which had been rejected as considered 'too radical'. A few weeks before the opening, however, the museum unilaterally decreed that the paintings she had purposefully created were *not* to be included. The reasons behind this decision are complex and not entirely clear to me. Further evidence would be needed to examine in details the controversy that followed this event. However, the point I wish to make is that the museum's handling of Andrén's contribution as an *artist* was clumsy and demonstrated the institution is still facing a steep learning curve about *how* to collaborate with people unfamiliar with museum practices and deal with the conflicting situations that might arise from those collaborations. Moreover, the MWC's decision to employ its *power of veto* suggests that the institution is still reluctant to relinquish its control over exhibition-making processes. I suggest that this example demonstrates that it is not sufficient for museums to invite external groups or individuals to contribute to exhibitionary processes to make them more inclusive and collaborative. Museums should ensure that their partners *truly* understand the processes they contribute to, thus becoming more able to affect them. They need to become more aware (and let it go) of their (more or less) overt use of institutional power that, as Lynch (2011a: 15) argues, '...clearly influence outcomes through inducement and persuasion based on the institution's authority.'

Flexible

The three teams presented a flexible structure as they demonstrated the ability to adapt to changes in their composition so to ensure that the projects were brought to a conclusion. However, these changes were not free from negative implications. Grinell (2010) states 'it is always difficult when people are transmitting responsibilities. There is always a risk of decisions being unclear...' Ament also states that 'the project group changed a lot and the ideas kept on changing...New people came in, other people left and new people wanted to "lay their eggs", to say'.

It should be said that flexibility was *not* an exclusive attribute of the *Destination X* project. Yet, flexibility characterises the MWC's broader structural system; often staff members take on roles falling beyond their official positions. The example of Malm, formally employed as a museum educator, who acted as *Destination X's* exhibition producer or as a curator for the exhibition *Earthlings* (whose exhibition producer was the conservator Anna Javér) is striking. Malm (2010) suggests this approach is possible because of the small size of the organization 'with very talented staff that are good in many ways.' She stresses that the MWC attempts to break its structure by working with project groups. As a result, members of different departments collaborate on diverse projects; each staff acquires 'a good view of how things work' in other departments and is able to cover several roles in processes of exhibition-making. However, Malm acknowledges that flexibility has its drawbacks as sometimes confusion arises 'as we don't really know who can take decisions, who "owns" these questions.' If she acknowledges that the MWC has to improve its capacity to work with

project groups, she also stresses that flexibility is one of the strengths of the museum's organisation. She hopes that the MWC will not embrace a rigid model as this would 'kill the creativity...if you start only looking at people as their position, you miss who they are and many people know a lot of things about different things.' As an example she refers to Roger Håkanson, the museum's technician, who contributes to *Destination X* and other projects 'coming up with very good solutions and ideas' drawing on his natural sense for aesthetics (Malm 2010). Here Malm echoes Fred Wilson that has recently argued 'for whatever reason, museums seem to lose a lot of this flexibility when they "professionalize"' (Marstine 2012: 39-40) and develop rigid working methods. Here, I wish to suggest that if museums would certainly take advantage from a flexible structural system in which staff members can cover several roles, they need to encourage risk-taking and endorse their staff's willingness to step outside their *comfort zone*. I shall expand on this point in the concluding chapter.

Interdisciplinary

The processes of production of the three exhibitions were based on interdisciplinary practices. Yet, they resulted from the collective efforts of their team members that represented different departments and disciplines. Each member brought into the process of production the insights of their own discipline and area of expertise and looked at the exhibition from different viewpoints. By bringing together different disciplines and viewpoints, I suggest, the museums attempted to overcome the limitations of exhibitionary processes based on one discipline (traditionally the curator's area of expertise). However, collaborations between disciplines remained at

the larval state of *task-driven* partnerships and no attempt was made to question the epistemological assumptions of each discipline and develop ‘a meta-disciplinary view’ (Dewdney et al. 2011: 55). This can be regarded as the main limitation of interdisciplinary that favours collaborations between different disciplines without demanding ‘experts’ to step outside the presuppositions of their discipline. I shall return to this in the conclusive chapter when envisioning new professionals and expertise that may contribute to exhibition-making processes in (ethnographic) museums.

Hereafter, I turn my attention to the staffing of the three teams and discuss both conventional and atypical professions and disciplines. I attempt to bring to surface the tensions that the ‘paring of different academic disciplines’ (Cannizzo 2001: 162) and the coexistence of dissimilar agendas and viewpoints generated in the project teams, as well as the role played by conventional structures and processes in obstructing change. My intention is to highlight how the production of thematic exhibitions further generated a shift of power *away* from established centres of powers (particularly curatorial and collection departments) to other departments and professionals, and how the two organisations and their human actors were responding to such a shift.

Atypical and conventional museum professionals

The three teams were staffed with both traditional professionals such as curators and educators as well as atypical personnel. In my view the incorporation of *atypical* professionals demonstrates the museums’ wish to alter their products and

challenge their established practices. It also highlights that the two institutions are starting to develop a new vision for the purpose of exhibitions. They are moving away from considering exhibitions as *products*, that is instruments through which the institution's knowledge 'is made to materialise at the museum' (Bouquet 2001: 180). They are considering exhibitions as *processes* that enable them to bring together different people (staff, external personnel and so forth) that collaborate to produce new knowledge. I focus on the Tropenmuseum first and briefly discuss the multimedia producer and the collection researcher.

Multimedia producer and collection researcher

The position of multimedia producer was created in 2002 when Susanne Ton was employed. She is a habitual member of *every* exhibition project, which demonstrates that the Tropenmuseum considers multimedia and interactive displays as usual components of its exhibitions. Legêne (2010) acknowledges that multimedia have become part of the museum's tradition since the refurbishment of the 1970s. Multimedia are not treated as interpretative materials (alternative to traditional text panels) but rather represent cultural products in their own right and equally contribute to exhibitions alongside objects, texts, artworks and so forth. Ton argues that her involvement in processes of exhibition-making was gradual, requiring the institution to adjust to her entrance *on the scene*: 'At first I had to "go out there" and say...I am here, I'm doing the multimedia production. Now everybody comes to me as well and I have a more natural part in making an exhibition.' Her statement demonstrates that

changes of 'structures of production', that is the inclusion of new expertise and disciplines, do not happen overnight but require the institutional efforts' to adjust.

The position of collection researcher was created in 2001 when Daan van Dartel was hired. It can be suggested that its creation was made possible by technological developments in the area of collection management and access (specifically the introduction of TMS, the Tropenmuseum's new collection database, in 1999). If the digitalisation of the collection with its use of a *thesaurus* system of classification of the objects improved the possibilities for searching through the collections (Beumer 2008), it also enabled the institution, I contend, to alter the 'structure of production' and shift curatorial responsibilities to other staff members (different from the curator). Not having a background subject expertise linked to a specific collection, van Dartel was employed to undertake research on *all* the Tropenmuseum's collections for exhibitions and other projects. She acts as a collection knowledge *generalist* (rather than specialist). In practice TMS changed the 'structure of production' and altered internal power positions by providing non-curators with a tool to undertake conventional curatorial activities.

Legêne (2010) acknowledges that technological changes produced power shifts within the organisation. She refers to the 'computerization of the collections and the handing over of knowledge about collections to...people who are sitting and typing but...know the *thesaurus* and... the categories that are being used...' She implicitly refers to jobs created within the Collection Department following the introduction of TMS, for instance Richard van Alphen's position as *Coordinator Application Collection*

Digitalisation whose work revolves around collections digitalisation for access, management and user support. I now turn my attention to the MWC and reflect upon three atypical professionals: marketer, programmes coordinator and technician.

Marketing, Programmes and Constructions

The *Destination X* team was formed by representatives of every department of the MWC (apart from conference), including those working with exhibitions primarily during the production and operational stage such as constructions and programmes. Their inclusion for the outset demonstrates that their skills are considered important contributors to the process of exhibition-making. It also shows that the museum is attempting to bring together and balance the often conflicting perspectives on exhibitions existing amongst different departments. This ensures that every department is informed about and has the opportunity to impact upon the exhibition development.

Malin Schiller (2010), *Acting Head of Programmes*, argues that when she takes part in processes of exhibition-making, if an undesirable proposal (in terms of her perspective) is made 'I can wave a flag and say...and what happens when we have our programmes?' However, she acknowledges 'it is up to them [curators] to decide', clearly expressing her expectation that the overall editorial control remains in the curatorial department. She laments: 'I am part of their process but they are not part of mine...when we [programme department] are making the programme, the project group is already dissolved...' Jenny Hultén (2010), *Programmes Coordinator*, also

stresses that when the project terminates, 'the public programmes and the pedagogues...still work on the exhibition.' Curators only contribute by making suggestions drawing on contacts or ideas gathered during the research. According to Schiller (2010) this is due to the institutional identity as a museum where 'exhibitions are the main thing.' She suggests that this builds on an undisputed internal *hierarchy* when arguing 'it is like everything else that is not the exhibition has a lower position.'

I suggest that Schiller has the confidence to voice the existence of this hierarchy as programmes represent (in theory) important cultural products of the MWC alongside exhibitions. A specific programme is developed in connection to each exhibition and includes several activities such as lectures, concerts and so forth that further problematise the exhibition's theme. The connection between exhibitions and events is made clear in the MWC's programme booklet and web-site that manifestly indicate, for instance, *all* the 'Destination X events'. Additional programmes explore other topics of public interests. Schiller (2010) argues that the work of the programmes as well as of the education and marketing departments would benefit from the collective 'feedback meetings' that accompany processes of exhibition-making. Schiller (2010) states 'it would be useful to see: how is the programme turning out? What kind of feedback do they pedagogues get from the audience? What is working? What kind of marketing lifts more?' Interestingly, she draws attention to the common misconception that considers the project completed once the exhibition opens, while 'actually the project finishes when it closes.' She adds: 'I think it is a general mistake in the way we have built the system at the museum.' Coming from the arts sector and being relatively new to the museum world, I suggest, Schiller casts a critical eye upon the museum and its established practices. She shows an ability to look at processes

and focus on 'structures of production' (the project team and its operations) and consider the exhibition as *only* one of the project's outcomes. Her remarks suggest that the MWC has still more to learn if it wants to apply a collaborative working ethics to those activities that fall *beyond* traditional museological practices. I now turn my attention to team members with a background and/or experience in theatre.

Theatre skills

Several people coming from, or still working in, theatre covered different roles in the teams of *Kartini* and *Destination X*, including designer, exhibition-maker, educator (specifically, Daniel Ament, Mohammad Babazadeh, and Wim Conradi in *Kartini* and Eva Tua Ekström and Andrén Andrén in *Destination X*). In my view the inclusion of these members injected *new blood* into the process of exhibition-making. These team members show an ability to look at museums and exhibitions from a different perspective and to challenge taken for granted conventions in the sector, thus countering myopia and stagnation.

Conradi, the 'sound expert' of *Kartini*, talks of exhibitions as cultural products that should effectively communicate with the museum's audiences. He states:

I am originally from theatre. I think one of the main aspects of art is communication. If you make something...but you do not reach the audience...I say, there is something wrong with the communication...if it [the idea] just stays on the stage and doesn't get to the audience...then the audience starts to protest or...walks away (Conradi 2010).

He suggests that the biggest difference between museums and theatres is that the latter *cannot* afford the luxury of not attracting audiences. However, he acknowledges that museums are improving their ability to communicate with their publics. If in the past the burden of communication laid on visitors who had to make most of the effort (for instance, reading and looking), 'now it is vice versa. They can sit down and images, sounds get into them.' Here, he refers to the use of sound (his area of expertise) as an instrument that facilitates the visitor-museum communication.

Although not having background/experience in theatre, Britta Malmberg (2010), *Head of Education* at the MWC, describes the gallery as a 'frozen stage' borrowing from Ekström, a member of her department. When asked to explain the meaning of the expression, Ekström (2010) states:

My background is in theatre and I think there is a drama in the museum. When I say that, some people think that I am the actor. I say the objects are the actors...and I am the director. I make the objects speak... tell their story...

Her statement shows that her background in theatre affects how she approaches exhibitions and works as an educator.

In addition, team members with a background/expertise in theatre were less constrained by conventional ideas in the sector of what museological structures and processes *ought* to be and more willing to risk-taking and innovation. Yet, in some

instances they were able to engender new possibilities for the institutions. Ament (2010), for example, argues that he would have opted for 'an exhibition entirely acoustic' on the team of storytelling. However, he states that the rest of the team was constrained by the institutional identity of the Tropenmuseum and did not dare to challenge the museums' traditional focus on objects. Ament (2010) states: 'They wanted to be original and renew' but could *not* 'dare to let go of the classical idea of a museum that is an institution which collects objects and exhibit them.' Here he indicates a problem of organisation identity but also a contradiction between the museum's wish to step away from conventional practices by displaying 'the immaterial collection' and its caution against challenging established conventions. Ament's statement may be contested, especially by those that regard museums as institutions devoted to the collection, preservation, study and display of objects. However, he is able to draw attention to museums' tendencies to objectify culture, and freeze it in "glass boxes" of interpretation' (Ames 1994). In my view Ament's position as a museum outsider with an extensive experience in theatre provides him with the necessary detachment to look at the museum world from a dispassionate position. Whether or not we agree with him, we should welcome similar remarks that point to beliefs 'that justify and explain current practices and maintain the stability of the institution' (Parsons and Priola 2012). By employing people with a background in theatre and the arts, I suggest, museums may be able to pay more attention to the intangible, living aspects of cultures and envision new possibilities. Surely, some of the most innovative (and radical) suggestions in terms of exhibitionary praxes came from team members who had moved into museums after having extensively worked in theatre. I shall expand on this point in the conclusion when envisaging other

professionals that (ethnographic) museums might bring into their exhibition processes. Hereafter, I turn my attention to the exhibition producer.

The exhibition producer

An exhibition producer features in the project teams of all the three exhibitions and, more broadly, in the permanent structures of both museums. The two institutions have recently included in their permanent structure a staff member responsible for the management of the exhibition projects: Mara Molekamp at the Tropenmuseum, and Bianca Leidi at the MWC. Although holding the same title and acting as central nodes of the projects, they have slightly different responsibilities. Molekamp (2010) is responsible for ensuring that the project develops according to plan and all the members accomplish their duties. In addition, Leidi (or whoever else acts as exhibition producer at the MWC) is in charge of the exhibitions' budget and the operative production and, as we shall see, has more *authority* to influence the process. In my view these differences are connected to the positions they occupy within the two institutions (Leidi - Curatorial Department, Molekamp - Public and Presentation Department). Molekamp (2010) states:

I am not the manager. Each project group has a project leader and he or she...is the manager...I have to be aware of everything that happens in the project. It is a producer but not like in films because I do not have the responsibility for the finances but just for the planning, logistics...

Leidi (2010) clarifies that her role is to act as a 'link between the content department and all the other units', for instance marketing, programmes, and collection. She argues that as different departments approach the exhibition process from different perspectives, her responsibility is to balance those different logics. As an example, she (ibid) refers to the different perspectives from which the marketing and curatorial departments approach exhibitions:

When it comes to marketing, there is a totally different logic that has to do with...we have to sell this product, we need people coming here and visit the exhibition...Here in the content department, we have an ideological responsibility... which means that if I am the link, I need to be able to communicate and balance...those clashes, whenever they can come up.

Leidi voices the challenges involved in working with multi-departmental, multi-disciplinary teams. She describes her role as a *cultural broker* but places herself firmly within the Curatorial Department, clarifying that she seeks to maintain an overall *editorial control* on the exhibition. Being responsible for the operative production of the exhibition she carries out an activity that (before her position was created in 2008) used to fall under the curator's sphere of influence. However, the curatorial department continues to maintain a close grip on it. If this shift of responsibilities internal to the department has not created conflicts (as it probably relieves curators of some of their manifold responsibilities), the loss of curators' full authorship that has accompanied the introduction of a multi-departmental approach to exhibition-making still creates some resistance. Leidi's effort to control the content expresses the

struggle of the curatorial department to maintain a semblance of authorship on the exhibitions. As I stressed earlier, attempts to alter the 'structure of production' require museums and their human actors to adapt to the shifts in power relationships and professional identities they generate. Hereafter, I turn my attention to the exhibition-maker, a professional figure featuring only in the Tropenmuseum.

Exhibition-maker

Frans Fontaine is the only staff member holding the title of exhibition-maker. He is responsible for translating the academic knowledge from a *language* that suits the expert to one understandable by a non-specialist public. He (2010) states:

I am a tri-dimensional story-teller...I give shape to exhibitions...I am more the translator of the scientific story into a good tridimensional story. I am looking at how we can do that, how we can catch the audience, what type of text, what type of performance we should do. Basically, it is like the dramaturge in a theatre (Fontaine 2010).

He stresses that his role overlaps with that of curator. Van Dartel (2010) suggests that if formally there is a sharp division between the two positions, practically curator and exhibition-maker work in partnership. She (2010) states that formally:

...the curator is responsible for content; he does [the] research into collection or is already knowledgeable on the collection... The exhibition-maker is responsible for the translation to the public....The

curator delivers the objects and the content and the exhibition-maker would make the exhibition’.

She (2010) stresses, however, that this never happens in actual fact:

An exhibition-maker cannot know the true story of an object. You need the curator to be able to present it. To translate to the public means to make it not too complex, not to involve too many texts and too complicated design...

Van Dartel acknowledges that curators’ (perceived) inclination to academism and their inability to speak a language understood by non-specialists was at the roots of the creation of the position of exhibition-maker. She refers to the negative stereotype for curators as ‘some kind of “scientific weirdo” that cannot write for the public.’ She adds ‘of course, curators do not agree and think...who needs an exhibition maker? I can write the text for myself. This is often a difficult process but it works fine.’ She voices forms of resistance that changes in ‘structures of production’ generate and curators’ unwillingness to let go of their inherited power.

Fontaine also suggests that the museum introduced the exhibition-maker (and embraced a team strategy) in an attempt to bring into the process of exhibition-making skills and expertise that curators generally lack of:

We have seen it happening that not every academic is a creative person. He might be very intelligent but not creative... In the past visitors weren’t very important; it was [about] showing our knowledge and

keeping cultural heritage and patrimony in safe places. Nowadays... you have to...compete with the infotainment industry and that means you can't afford curators who have no creative sense anymore. And some do, some of my colleagues are very good. In the past some weren't and we accepted that. You cannot afford it anymore because... a museum is [a] business. It is not [a] commercial business. However, you cannot afford to have bad exhibitions while...you have the capacity to make a good one of the same theme (Fontaine 2010).

He points out to creativity as one of the skills that curators do not always possess but are essential to the process of exhibition-making. Ethnographic museums appoint as curators scholars trained in disciplines (particularly anthropology and archaeology) that do not always foster their creative and artistic skills. As nowadays exhibitions have increasingly become artistic productions in their own right, it is crucial to include activities aiming at strengthening their creative skills in the training of museum professionals.

Returning to Fontaine's 'reactionary' remark, it is interesting that it comes from someone that was curator of Latin America department for fifteen years (1988-2003) and became exhibition-maker only in 2003, moving to the Public and Presentation Department. By creating the position of the exhibition-maker, I suggest, the museum is attempting to alter traditional museological practices and shift the focus away from the curatorial department to other departments with a stronger focus on visitors. When reflecting on his move to the Public and Presentation Department, Fontaine seems well-aware of this shift of focus and the creation of new centres of power. He argues 'I am like a "circus monkey". I want to be in the "circus", I do not want to sit in

the back of the “circus”, I want to be in the middle, and look, organize and control...’

Hereafter, I turn my attention to the role that the curator played in processes of exhibition-making.

The curator

In virtually every type of museum the role of curators has been normally covered by scholars trained in disciplines linked to the museum’s collections (for instance, anthropology, art history, natural science). They have acted as *collection knowledge specialists*, being responsible for leading the exhibition-making process. Curators have derived their authority from their ‘scholarship based on cumulative and specialised knowledge’ (Shelton 2003: 181). Nowadays they still hold what Senior and Swailes (2010: 186) call ‘expert or knowledge power’ as they are recognised as possessing specialist knowledge or expertise.

Exhibitions can be categorized on a continuum from those deriving largely ‘from the museum’s collections or the research of individual curators’ to those emerging ‘from museums’ interpretations of the public interest’ (Smithsonian 2002: 4). Semi-permanent exhibitions in ethnographic museums have tended to fall within the first end of the continuum. The strong collection-based identity of ethnographic museums and their tendency to structure their exhibitions around particular (geographical) collections, I suggest, are at the roots of this tendency. The three exhibitions I explored move away from one extreme to the other end of the continuum. Yet, the exhibitions did not derive from curators’ *a priori*, specialist knowledge of the museum’s

collections. Curators acted as *exhibition researchers* being responsible for the background research and the pre-selection of collections but also of non-collections, including photographs, installations, and films. I suggest that this was a consequence of the museum's decision to produce *topic-driven* exhibitions, which changed the 'structures of production' and altered the role played by curators. As the themes of the exhibitions did not map onto a specific collection but cut across several collections of the museums, no collection knowledge specialist was regarded as the 'expert' that *ought* to be included in the teams. Commenting on the selection of the topic food for the exhibition *Food for Thought* at the Science Museum (London), which did not map onto a specific collection, Macdonald (2002: 112) likewise stresses that the team members 'were not appointed to work on this project because of their specialistic curatorial expertise.'

Similarly, as *Destination X* was guided by the theme human mobility, it was expected that relevant objects were present in nearly *all* the collections of the MWC. It should be said that the museum classifies its collections according to their geographic areas of origin (specifically South America, North America, Central America, Caribbean, Asia, Africa, Australia, Greenland, Oceania, and Europe) and two disciplinary categories (ethnography and archaeology). The museum database is also organised according to these disciplinary categories which, Muñoz (2010) suggests, creates challenges, especially when contemporary objects are acquired. However, neither the galleries nor curatorial expertise are mapped onto these disciplinary and geographical classifications.

The curators of *Destination X* worked as *exhibition researchers*. Grinell (2010a) focused on the research background, while Palmgren researched artworks and multimedia. Even Muñoz, the curator responsible for objects, did not act as a collection knowledge specialist in a strict sense as objects were selected by the entire project group (Bagherzadeh 2010). She was responsible for the 'Collection Days', a two-day public event through which the museum sourced non-collections. During the event the Gothenburg population was invited to loan or donate objects (and their stories) for *Destination X* (Muñoz 2010). The event provided the museum with an opportunity to involve the citizens of Gothenburg in the project and to reflect upon and problematize the 'concept of collecting'.⁵

Despite his background in ethnomusicology, Frank Swart, the curator of *World of Music*, did not act as collection knowledge specialist (certainly not as expert on the Tropenmuseum's collection). As the objects had already been selected when he joined the project, his work revolved around the selection/production of non-collections, particularly audio-visual materials, as well as of the two 'immersive environments'. *World of Music* is an object-focused but idea-driven exhibition. Before the theme of travelling music was selected for the exhibition, the ethnomusicology department had already been chosen as focus for the exhibition so to maintain alive the museum's ethno-musicological tradition (Fontaine 2010).⁶ If it could be argued that the exhibition was thematic only in appearance, this statement would overlook the fact that the

⁵ The MWC has taken a similar approach during the production of previous exhibitions, such as *Trafficking*. Yet, the collection of a *patera*, a boat used by African migrants crossing the Mediterranean and trying to reach Spain, was used as an opportunity to problematise the concept of collecting.

⁶ In the 70s the Tropenmuseum played a key role in the development of ethnomusicology as an academic discipline. Jaap Kunst, a well-know ethno-musicologist who coined 'the term ethnomusicology' (Legene 2010), worked at the Tropenmuseum.

Tropenmuseum originally intended to produce a single exhibition covering both travelling stories and music. If this plan had been accomplished, the exhibition would have included several collections and would not have mapped exclusively onto one department.

Boonstra acted as *exhibition researcher* for *Kartini* drawing on her knowledge in the area of intangible heritage. Working together with other team members, she was responsible for the background research and the identification of world stories and their (tangible and intangible) cultural expressions as well as of relevant collections. Boonstra (2010) pre-selected collection pieces working with van Dartel; their selection 'was discussed...with the other group members.' This was a consequence of the fact that the production of *Kartini* was guided by the 'travelling stories' theme, which did *not* map onto any specific department. The team took as starting point world stories and then looked for relevant collections and not-collections. The only exception was the display 'Un-bounded-NL', which was produced taking 'the museum collection as a starting point' (ibid). As relevant objects were expected to be found in several departments, no curator could be regarded as *the* collection knowledge specialist to be included in the process. If none of the museum curators was part of the exhibition team, however, 'their' objects were employed in the exhibition without them being consulted, which caused some disagreement.

It should be said that the Tropenmuseum divides its collections and curatorial expertise into geographical departments that correspond to the areas of origin of the collections (such as South Asia and Latin America), with the only exceptions being the

two ‘thematic departments’ (and curators) of contemporary art and textile (van Brakel 2010). Formerly, the Tropenmuseum also included a department of ethnomusicology.⁷ Curatorial expertise is then mapped onto the museum floor. A discrete space in the museum (a gallery) is allocated to each department and curator (apart from textile to which no semi-permanent gallery is devoted). This creates a complex equation that identifies a direct relationship between curator and a department first and then between gallery (where his/her expertise is presented) and a geographical area of the ‘non-Western’ world where the objects in his/her care originate. It should be noticed that ethnographic museums have traditionally followed this approach and have arranged their collections, expertise and galleries according to those remote places where their objects were assembled. Those (often colonial) *geographies* have become the principal classifying system that ethnographic museums have applied to their collections. As Wingfield (2006: 50) stresses, forms of classifications ‘have an enduring influence on the way in which objects are subsequently displayed.’ In ethnographic museums the most visible result of the application of a geographical classification is that their *floor spaces* have been divided into discrete areas. Each area re-presents (if not materialises) an imaginary space (sometimes even an entire continent) *outside* Europe usually (but not always) identifiable using cartographical instruments, and often corresponding to former *colonial geographies*. As Pile states (quoted in Sharp et al. 2000: 21), cartographies are ‘the fixed grids of the latitudes and longitudes of power relationship.’ They are some of the instruments that have been used in an effort ‘to “territorialise” the world, to fix it, to grid it, to survey and to discipline it’ (ibid). In

⁷ However, when Elisabeth den Otte – the last curator ‘who was...an anthropologist specialized in performance arts’ (Legêne 2010) - retired, it was decided not to hire a new ethnomusicology curator. The intention was to employ someone with expertise in the organization of stage performances or interaction with the public, which is ‘another expertise in fact’ (ibid).

these *discrete* spaces collections of artefacts from those areas are presented for 'Western' *consumption*. This structure is problematic as it elicits a reading of *ethnographica* not as a product of human creativity in their own right but above all 'representatives of the larger context of the culture' (Bal 1996: 12) from where they originate. In order to explain the logics subtending this reading of 'non-Western' artefacts, Bal (ibid) recurs to the figure of rethoric of the synecdoche, 'where an element, a small part, stands for the whole simply by virtue of its being a part of the whole.' The problematic aspect of a synecdochical reading of 'non-Western' artefacts is that they can synecdochically stand for the culture they come from only 'on the basis of an assumed unity of that culture, thanks to which it is metaphoric of the "essence" of that culture..." (ibid) In other words this reading is problematic as it is based on geographical and often essentialist understandings of culture, which characterise traditional static views of cultures. In my view the division of collections, floor spaces and curatorial expertise into discrete geographical areas, and the reading of artefacts they elicit materialises the 'Western' desire to control the 'non-Western' world and its never-ending inclination to cultural imperialism.

Returning to the exhibitions, the decision to focus on themes that did not map onto a specific collection favoured cross-departmental and cross-disciplinary work. It enabled the teams to think 'outside the box', moving away from representing 'other' people and cultures. It provided the institutions with an opportunity to challenge binary divisions (such as 'us'/'them', 'West'/'Rest') and severed the 'natural' link between collections and exhibitions. This freed the process of production, contributing to the

creation of *new* knowledge. However, the lack of collection knowledge specialism was not without implications, as I elucidate hereafter.

Challenges and opportunities of change

As the discussion above suggests, the museums' attempts to alter 'structures of production' generated conflicts over professional identities and practices. My analysis highlights the complexities involved in managing change while maintaining cohesiveness and effectiveness within the institutions. I now discuss specific forms of resistance to change in an attempt to further uncover how power is distributed within the organisations. My intention is to elucidate how alterations of 'structures of production' challenged established power centres, requiring the staff to negotiate not only their position in the organisation but also their relationships. Those changes and forms of resistance to them were linked to and, in turn, questioned core institutional norms and values. By altering established practices and challenging the structural systems that enable and legitimise them, I suggest, the museums are shifting (more or less consciously) their inherited institutional identities.

Protecting 'authentic' knowledge (or professional identities)?

I now would like to reflect upon the way in which the lack of collection knowledge specialism in the exhibition teams influenced the products. Van Dartel (2010), for instance, suggests that the 'problem' with *Kartini* was that the team 'worked thematically but...gathered objects...geographically' without drawing on the

curatorial expertise existing within the institution. As an example, she refers to an object selected from the South-East Asia Department that was positioned incorrectly in the Hanuman section of *Kartini* 'with hands up or something, and it never stands hands up. There was an error that we could have avoided if we had consulted the curator.' Van Dartel (2010) states that avoidable errors due to lack of collection knowledge specialism laid *Kartini* open to criticism from the curatorial staff; she admits 'we should have consulted our fellow curators more...'

The decision not to consult the museum curators was certainly inappropriate and points to a loss or rather a neglect of knowledge within the organisation. I would suggest, however, that curators' discontent was due to the fact that, by overlooking consulting them at least after 'their' objects had been selected, the team challenged their authority. In my view the frustration of curators manifests *more* than only a preoccupation with how objects were displayed. It could be argued that curators were dissatisfied with an exhibiting strategy that was diminishing their 'expert or knowledge power'. They were attempting to defend their authority and professional identities by seeking to 'stake out and protect their own territories and interests' (Macdonald 2002: 5). I had almost the feeling that they had refrained from intervening and had 'sat back', almost waiting for the worst to happen. It could be even suggested that absence of action was being used as instruments of passive resistance. As Pillay (2004) suggests withdrawal and absence of action represents one of the ways through which power can be exercised. Curators seemed to be reluctant to give up their authority and were expressing some anxiety towards a *way of doing things* that challenged their inherited power, making their collection knowledge specialism appear almost redundant.

Changes of 'structures of production' and alterations of roles played by traditional professionals were disrupting power structures and creating confusion. As I discuss below, interestingly they were received with some resistance not only by curators but also by other staff members.

Are they curators after all?

At both institutions it could be noticed a certain hesitation to employ the title of 'curator' when referring to the three exhibition curators. I believe that this attitude merits further attention. When talking of Boonstra, for instance, my interviewees referred to her sometimes as curator and occasionally as curator/exhibition maker. Boonstra employed the expression curator/exhibition maker when describing her role. This may have happened because she was employed only a year before the opening of *Kartini*, which was the first exhibition she was responsible for. Although Swartz was in a similar position as he joined the team later in the process and *World of Music* was the first exhibition he curated, all my interviewees referred to him as the curator. In my view the institutions regarded Swartz as an 'expert' on ethnomusicology thus fully qualified to act as the exhibition's curator. Boonstra instead was considered as lacking of collection knowledge specialism and thus not qualifying for the title. The Tropenmuseum seemed to struggle to let it go of the curator's traditional idea whose power is based on his/her specialist knowledge on the museum collection. When talking of the curators of *Destination X*, Malm (2010) likewise stresses 'when we translate the title into English, it will be curator. For me it is not really the same because then you think of an art curator...' or, she could have added, an anthropologist

or archaeologist. She suggests that the title curator was at least misleading for those *exhibition researchers* lacking of collection knowledge specialism.

The examples above demonstrate that the two institutions were unsure, if not uncomfortable whether to use the title curator for everyone appointed as curator of the exhibitions. I have already suggested that the application of a thematic exhibiting praxis enabled the museum to appoint (or temporarily hire) as curator professionals that did not act as collection knowledge specialists in a strict sense. By producing exhibitions that did not draw on the collection knowledge specialism existing within the institutions, the museums were going 'against the grains' and challenging the conventions of the sector. However, the Tropenmuseum and, at a lesser extent, the MWC seemed somewhat anxious of this change. In my view this happened because the museums were conscious that this approach to processes of exhibition-making was in dissonance with contemporary and historical practices that still represent the established structural systems of ethnographic museums. As Achinstein (2002: 427) states, 'macro- (ideologies found in the larger environment) and micropolitical (ideologies within a community or organization) frequently interact', and sometimes may clash. Institutional histories of individual museums and the broader sector (and their taken-for-granted norms) may constrain attempts at change and preserve the *status quo*.

I wish to clarify that I am not suggesting that museums should do away with collection knowledge specialists. Conversely, I believe that museums need to further expand their knowledge on collections to better employ them in all their activities (not only

exhibitions). However, they need to develop new practices and approaches to the study of the collections. I shall return to this point in the next chapter. Here, I only intended to stress how changes of 'structures of production' impacted upon professional identities and generated forms of resistance to change. I would suggest that, if ethnographic museums wish to move away from their traditional identities as representatives of 'non-Western' cultures, it is imperative that they move away from the curator's established construction as the institutional 'expert' on the museum's collections and, more broadly, on the cultures from where the objects in their care originated. Hereafter, I discuss this point further.

Reinventing the curator's identity

I have earlier argued that ethnographic museums have developed an equation that problematically links curators to specific collections. Returning to figures of rhetoric, it could be said that 'curators...synecdochically stand for that culture' (Bal 1996: 2008) they curate. They are the recognised institutional *experts* that possess the knowledge and thus hold the cultural authority to re-present 'non-Western' cultures in their totality. As I argued in chapter two, after the postcolonial critique of the 1970s ethnographic museums started embracing a more dialogical and polyphonic approach to representation. Since then other voices (alongside to the curator's voice) have increasingly been included in exhibitions. However, curators' image as 'experts' on the cultures whose objects they care for has remained unchallenged. This approach, I suggest, is functional to ethnographic museums' claims to cultural authority and their

self-appointed missions as institutions devoted to the representation of 'non-Western' cultures. As Karp and Kratz (2000: 209) argue:

Museums' claims to cultural authority derive from their basic activities: collecting, documenting, conserving, displaying, researching. Two of the most important are the collective research experience and expertise of their curatorial staff, and the 'authenticity', quality and scope of their collections (again defined, verified, and certified by the staff's interpretation of academic conventions and their connections within chains of authentication)...

If curators may be *experts* on 'their' collection, their expertise on the broader cultures is surely questionable. I endorse MacDonald's controversial statement (quoted in Ames 1992: 159) that 'most curators, even in anthropology, spend at most a few years in the cultural milieu of their "speciality". In fact, they have the cultural credibility and often linguistic competence of a four-year-old child from that culture...' Although debatable, MacDonald's remark powerfully challenges the idea of claim of curatorial expertise on 'non-Western' cultures. I would like to take his statement forward and suggest that curatorial expertise on culture (including your own) is unattainable. If we consider culture 'not an object to be described, neither...a unified corpus of symbols and meaning that can be definitively interpreted' (Clifford 1986 quoted in Hallam 2000: 267) but rather as a never-ending process that is 'contested, temporal, and emergent', the status of expert becomes unachievable.⁸ Both insiders and outsiders

⁸ In this context, see also Clifford's renowned chapter 'On Ethnographic Authority' in *The Predicament of Culture* (1988).

may attempt to represent and explain 'culture', but cannot base their efforts on claims to expertise on those cultures.

At the Inclusive Museum Conference 2011 I heard an 'indigenous' curator working in a national museum in his country of birth in Africa powerfully challenging the idea of curatorial expertise on culture. When the idea of 'Western' expertise on African cultures was being discussed during the talking circle 'Collections, Culture and Intangible Heritage', he humbly but honestly expressed his discomfort with being considered *expert* of 'his' culture. His courageous statement made me reflect on the ephemerality and obstinateness of ethnographic museums that still base their claims to cultural authority on holding the *real thing* (Ames 2005) and hiring ('Western') *experts* on 'non-Western' cultures. It seems evident that ethnographic museums cannot achieve the same goal they have traditionally set out to achieve: presenting *sincere* representations of the 'non-Western' cultures from which their objects come. In my view the resilience of this idea is yet another manifestation of the 'Western' wish to maintain a hegemonic (although metaphorical) control on the entire world. This can be described as 'a fantasy of total power, a yearning for complete control where such control is impossible' (Hage 1998: 162). However, if we acknowledge that ethnographic museums cannot achieve this goal, we are left with an enigma to solve. Which role can ethnographic museums fulfil? I shall attempt to respond to this question in the next chapter.

Power and Conservatism

By focusing on the teams and their *modus operandi*, in this chapter I have sought to draw attention on the effects of changes of 'structures of production' on the human actors involved in the exhibition projects and, more broadly, on the structural system of the two organizations. I have described the atypical professionals that contributed to the processes of production. I have paid particular attention to the curator's role and have discussed how the application of a thematic strategy alters his/her role in the process. I have also elucidated the variety of factors that brought changes in the 'structure of the production', including those connected to the foregoing processes of managerial restructuring and organisational change aiming at professionalising the exhibitionary processes (particularly technological developments in the area of collection management and access). My investigation demonstrates that initiating change is especially problematic in traditional and highly institutionalized organisations such as museums characterised by 'systems of knowledge and beliefs that justify and explain current practices and maintain the stability of the institutions' (Parsons and Priola 2012). As the chapter suggests, change is always complex as it is connected to the use and the workings of power, which is in turn implicated in and constitutive of processes of domination and resistance (Sharp et al. 2000). If dominating power, in the sense of power to control and direct the workings of the teams can be located in the hands of those setting the agenda and defining the 'structures of productions' (for instance, Museum Directors and Head of Exhibitions), I have stressed how power can become operative in the acts of resistance of individuals attempting to oppose changes. I have also pointed to the conflicts that resulted from

bringing together individuals whose 'views and behaviours diverge (or apparently diverge) or are perceived to be to some degree incompatible' (Achinstein 2002: 425).

Before turning to the concluding chapter, I would like to state that my investigation of the behind-the-scenes process shows that it is not sufficient to accompany attempts to change products (the exhibitions) with alterations in the composition and the workings of the teams. These attempts should go along with (if not be preceded by) deliberate efforts to modify those processes and instruments that define and constrain the ways of working of the project teams. For example, Muñoz (2010) refers to the issues connected to the employment of digital technologies to create open access catalogues in order to facilitate access to wider publics⁹ without reviewing the existing system of classification around which they are structured. Muñoz (ibid) states:

We [the MWC] have been putting millions krona in a new database but without discussing what kind of categories we are going to use...[We have invested] zero Swedish krona...to have a group discussing categories...We are using the same categories that were implemented in the 50s'....now it is on the Internet and still you have categories from the 50s...I believe that technology is good...if you first have been looking for these therapeutic ways of seeing because otherwise...on the Internet you are reproducing racism, etc. on a big scale...

Here Muñoz suggests the need to rethink systems of classifications according to which collections are organised. She stresses the importance to accompany changes in the 'frontstage' with alterations in the institutions' 'backstage'. If those ethnographic

⁹ See Gibson and Turner (2012) for a discussion of the issues connected to the implementation of open access catalogues.

museums that are seeking to remain relevant by experimenting with alternative exhibiting strategies leave their internal structures unchanged along with their traditional practices and processes, I argue, there is a risk that a dyscrasia is produced between the 'backstage' and the 'frontstage' of their organisations. In order to improve their capacity to be still relevant in contemporary post/colonial, European societies, ethnographic museums cannot simply change their exhibitions but must rethink established norms and practices and be willing to question them and shake the macro-ideologies at play in the large sector. In the next chapter I envisage some of the changes in the 'frontstage' that might enable ethnographic museums to achieve those complex but crucial goals.

8. Re-envisioning the museum of ethnography for the twenty-first century

In July 2013 an international conference is scheduled to take place at the Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford) to mark the conclusion of the EU project RIME, which was briefly introduced in chapter one. Internationally renowned scholars such as James Clifford, Ruth Phillips, and Corinne Kratz will be addressing the question ‘what is the future of ethnographic museums?’ (Harris and O’Hanlon 2013). The conference organisers suggest that the event will not only stimulate further debate around the future of ethnographic museums, but also envision ‘new ways’ for thinking of and working in those institutions. It will be interesting to hear how those critics will reply to the contested question, the extent to which the conference will generate new understandings of the museum of ethnography remains to be seen. While waiting for the event, in this chapter I attempt to present my reply to the question by bringing together and expanding upon the key findings of the study. The chapter ventures to suggest changes in different areas of museum work and to envisage the future forms that the museum of ethnography might take.

Expanding on the findings

This thesis has attempted to fill a gap in existing scholarship by exploring the extent to which the employment of a *thematic exhibiting praxis* enables ethnographic

museums to re-purpose themselves in contemporary, post/colonial, multicultural Europe. As a 'museologist' (without a background in anthropology) interested in how ethnographic museums are responding to, what Hall (2005: 23) describes as, 'the explosion of cultural diversity and difference which is everywhere our lived daily reality', I have approached this study with limited assumptions about what these institutions ought to be. If it was not uncomplicated to investigate how exhibitions of a representational institution as complex as the museum of ethnography represent issues of cultural diversity, such a complexity has unveiled unforeseen but fascinating directions in my research, which I discuss in the remainder of this thesis. I would like, however, to begin with a few words about what I believe to be the successes and limitations of this study.

Successes and limitations of the study

Necessarily, the project has been framed by my own interest and preoccupations as well as my moral and political ideologies. I have brought a particular perspective to bear upon the ethnographic museum, one shaped by ideas of social justice and equality, and my belief in the potential of museums to act as agents of social change. The study has also been framed by the theoretical framework and research design I utilised. The development of an interdisciplinary theoretical framework strongly influenced by postcolonial study and political theory was effective in this study attempting to critically investigate ethnographic museums. The selection of case study as a research strategy and the restriction of the research to two case studies enabled me to look deeply at them and gain rich insights. The multiple data

sources, particularly interviews, visual documentation (that is, photographic and drawn images as well as films) and observations, generated very rich data. This richness, however, required me to make difficult decisions at the writing-up stage as to what to leave out from this thesis. It is hoped, however, I will have the opportunity to present this material elsewhere in the future. Moreover, the investigation of two institutions that are 'atypical' of ethnographic museums for their experimental application of a *thematic strategy*, but are applying this approach to different extents provided me with unique insights into the behind-the-scenes changes of two distinctive institutions in two different 'phases', you may say, of their process of reformation.

The methodology of this research could be fruitfully applied to other types of museums that are producing *thematic* exhibitions, such as art museums and migration museums. The study, however, points to the need for further research in several areas. While this research closely analyses the messages encoded in the exhibitions at the point of production, it neglects to address the other side of the visitor-exhibition encounter (Sandell 2007a). It would be valuable to explore audiences' reception of *thematic* exhibitions and investigate to what extent this strategy informs visitors' understanding of both cultural similarities and differences.¹ Additional studies are necessary to delineate how alterations of exhibiting strategies are modifying 'structures of production' and internal organisations. If this study has explored the process of exhibition-making *a posteriori*, it would be also useful to carry out an

¹ In the context of Europe I am aware of only two (unpublished) studies (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2008, 2011) exploring visitors' responses to a *thematic* exhibition. They were commissioned by the British Museum to study visitors' appreciation of the *Living and Dying* Gallery (Room 24).

ethnography following the entire process of production of a *thematic* exhibition. While this study has only pointed to how technological developments, disciplinary and museological practices, and 'categories' employed to organise and study ethnographica constrain attempts to decolonise the practices of ethnographic museums, further investigation is required in this area. Finally, it is thought that the recent increase of ethnographic museums undertaking processes of renovation of their buildings/exhibitions or embracing a *thematic strategy* calls for a pan-European study.

I turn now to the findings of this study and discuss them in an effort to generate insights of value to other (ethnographic) museums wishing to alter their displays, re-envision their organisation, and engage with the diversity of their societies in more inclusive and responsible ways.

Discourses, Leadership and Change

The thesis has drawn attention to the role that the discursive positions on difference of the Tropenmuseum and MWC, their articulation of ideas of cultural diversity and commitment to fulfil an active role in society played in initiating reforming processes of conventional exhibitionary praxes. The research highlights the impact that socio-political factors as well as governmental policies and the (liberal) discourses of diversity of supra-national, non-governmental organisations such as UNESCO have had on the attempts of the two museums to refashion themselves (although differently) as instruments 'for the promotion of cultural diversity' (Bennett 2005: 522).

Museums emerge yet once more as instruments of governance. However, particularly the case of the Museum of World Culture (interestingly, a government-funded institution) demonstrates museums' ability to re-interpret governmental 'assignments' in ways that depart from notions ingrained in national diversity policies. I argue that museums' capacity to maintain a 'critical stance' regarding state policies is paramount in contemporary times marked by a neo-liberal, conservative turn in the politics of European and 'Western' governments.

The research also demonstrates that a commitment at leadership level is vital for (ethnographic) museums wishing to refashion their role in contemporary world. Without leaders such as Susan Legêne or Jette Sandahl convinced of the importance of creating museums appealing to all the diverse members of contemporary societies and in a position to impact upon the institutions' thinking and practices, we may wonder whether the two museums would have embarked upon processes of renovation. Nonetheless, a noticeable difference exists between the formats chosen by the two institutions for their reformation processes. While the Tropenmuseum opted for an 'incremental change' (Marstine 2011: 5) and implemented innovation in a piecemeal fashion, the MWC initiated a process of 'holistic rethinking' by closing down the *old* Museum of Ethnography and opening a 'new museum' (Message 2006), changing its name, building, mission, practices and hiring new staff. If it is not my intention to suggest that the holistic strategy is more appropriate than the gradual or vice versa (selection being connected to several factors including museum tradition and funding),

the format chosen to implement change and the ways in which the museum staff is engaged in the process have concrete implications for how the organisation evolves.

It could be argued that the shift of focus that the two museums are undergoing has not been equally understood (or perhaps accepted?) by the staff at the two institutions. If my interviewees in Gothenburg all agree that the mission of the museum is to be a 'meeting place', some confusion seemed to reign in Amsterdam. While Legêne, for instance, argued that the mission is 'to present the collections of the museum, which are rooted in the colonial past but have a strong contemporary angle, to the audience and make them think about their own society...and to be really a meeting place for people', other interviewees stated that it is to tell stories 'about "other" cultures and primarily "non-Western" cultures"', reiterating the idea of ethnographic museums as interpreters of 'non-Western' cultures. Ironically, this was the response favoured by members of the Public and Presentation Department, those responsible for 'presenting' the museum and its products to the public. Their statement is not entirely erroneous as, particularly in those regional galleries produced at the beginning of the refurbishment, the museum substantially acts as an interpreter of 'non-Western' cultures. However, this is not the case in the *thematic* exhibitions I examined or even in the most recent geographic galleries, such as *Round and About India*, where the focus moves to processes of cultural exchanges and hybridity.²

² The exhibition moves away from representing cultural 'others' by including Europe in the frame, particularly in the textile section 'where is about European culture' and in the *Wanderings* section, 'where...the topic is Indian culture outside India' (Legêne 2010).

A possible explanation for this confusion amongst the staff regarding the mission of the institution may be that in the museum coexist semi-permanent exhibitions produced at different stages of the refurbishment, which reflect dissimilar display techniques, discourses about difference and understandings of the museum's role. If during the last decade there has certainly been an attempt to re-envision the organisation, such a reforming endeavour, I suggest, might have mainly remained confined at the level of the 'brain' of the institution. Moreover, the Tropenmuseum has not as yet introduced a new mission statement and new values. As David Fleming (2012: 74), *Director of National Museums Liverpool*, suggests missions, values and visions are essential devices 'not only for helping transmitting a new sense of purpose and a new way of doing things – both internally and externally; but for involving different staff and governing bodies in the process of re-envisioning an organisation.' If Van Dartel (2010a) argues that 'we are...individuals that like to discuss things' when referring to the issue of 'how far the Netherlands should be represented' in future displays, which suggests a collective effort towards the definition of the museum's future directions, a question that needs to be asked, however, is *who* contributes to those discussions. Does the involvement of staff remain limited to the senior team and members of the curatorial department? Further empirical investigation is necessary to clarify this point. I wish to argue that the involvement and support of the *entire* staff (from front-office to management) in the on-going definition of museums' future directions is necessary to ensure that the institution works towards the achievement of common, shared goals.

It is to the modes of representation and, specifically, to the question of the efficacy of *thematic strategy* that I now turn.

Virtues and Vices of Thematic Exhibitions

My analysis of the selected exhibitions suggests that a *thematic strategy*, although posing new and as yet unresolved challenges, nevertheless holds considerable potential to enable ethnographic museums to move away from their conventional focus on the representation of 'non-Western' cultures.

Thematic exhibitions present cross-cultural contacts as productive of cultural hybridity and change, not only for people on the move (for instance, migrants and cosmopolitans) but for everyone. They effectively question essentialist notions of *pure* cultural 'wholes' defined according to national-territorial or other geopolitical frames or static notions of 'communities'. By bringing together a multiplicity of groups, individuals and cultures and drawing attention to cross-cultural contacts as constructive of cultural meanings and new identity formations, *thematic* exhibitions express the shifting character of people's contemporary post/colonial identities and cultural expressions. Exhibitions that include several determinants of difference (for instance, gender, religious/spiritual beliefs, personal interests, profession) cross-cutting nationality, 'ethnicity' and 'race' highlight the diverse forms that differences take in contemporary societies. In following this line, *thematic* exhibitions question prevailing understandings of cultural diversity advanced by policies of multiculturalism and their exclusivist constructions of collective sense of nationality imaginary.

A central tenet of my argument is that the inclusion of 'ethnic' nationals and Europeans and their cultural expressions is particularly effective in sustaining ethnographic museums' efforts to move *beyond* the practices of 'othering'

underpinning their practices, and in liberating them from binary oppositions. By disrupting the binary dichotomies us/them, ourselves/'others', *thematic* exhibitions challenge constructions of the 'collective self' as naturally belonging to a homogenous collectivity, often the national us, and as existing in dichotomous opposition to 'the other' or, rather, to a variety of 'others'. Individuals are presented as having various levels of attachments to the national collectivity, while being attached to other collectivities of belonging. In following this approach, *thematic* exhibitions propose ideas of *postnationalism*, which shifts people's allegiance 'from the nation to units or networks smaller or larger than the nation' (Pieterse 1996: 26) and construct what might be called, a *postnational idea of belonging*. Cultural diversity comes to signify not simply the peaceful cohabitation of divided cultures but rather the process of continuous cultural change and negotiation of new senses of identity, both at individual and collective level.

However, my analysis indicates that *thematic* exhibitions are not totally immune from shortcomings. To what extent, for example, do *thematic* exhibitions risk glossing over differences? What are the implications of producing *thematic* exhibitions in an ethnographic museum? To address these questions I draw upon my critical readings of the exhibitions as well as on my observations of the behaviour of the visiting publics.

In the case of *Kartini*, for instance, remarkable differences exist between the historical and political circumstances behind the arrival of post/colonial or recent migrants to the Netherlands and movements of the Dutch to Africa and the Caribbean. If those movements have all activated cultural change and favoured the global diffusion of

world stories such as Anansi, they are *not* alike. Although these circumstances were not the main focus of the exhibition, there was a missed opportunity to explore those factors such as colonialism and slave trade that have played a central role in bringing about a multi-culture in the Netherlands. *Kartini* constructs an idea of a peaceful Dutch society where 'ethnic' and 'non-ethnic' Dutch are granted equal *cultural rights*, while not critically considering the limited entitlement to *political, civic and economic rights* of 'non-ethnic' Dutch. *Kartini* does not reflect upon the tensions that the cohabitation of people with different backgrounds is increasingly generating in the Netherlands. These limitations are connected, I argue, to the main 'discontent' of hybridity that can favour 'an uncritical celebration of the traces of cultural syncretism...without paying adequate attention to economic, political and social inequalities' (Coombes and Brah 2000: 1).

Similarly, *Destination X* is more eager to critically reflect upon the contradictions marking the policies of supra-national institutions such as the EU or UN (i.e. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) while dismissing the role that national policies play in disabling human movements. Moreover, by lumping together dissimilar experiences of mobility and presenting them side-by-side as if they stand on equal grounds, the exhibition downplays differences in favour of a focus on similarities. It produces an impression of universal human unity, albeit one fraught with a sense of injustice. If specific displays powerfully illuminate the dramatic differences existing amongst the 'protagonists' of *Destination X* and facilitate visitors' empathetic understandings of the restrictions faced by individuals in *minoritarian positions* (for

instance, migrants and refugees),³ I suggest that these are likely to be grasped only by the *committed* viewer.

During observations I saw many visitors that literally ‘took a stroll’ in the gallery, spending about seven minutes looking at the displays and reading a few labels. If I cannot comment on the extent to which they grasped the exhibition’s references to relations of similarities and differences, I can reflect upon my experience as a visitor to *Destination X*. During my first visit of the exhibition (about one hour long) I recognised most of its references to similarities but dismissed many of its representations of alterity, and felt a sense of unease. It was only after having spent many hours carefully exploring the exhibition that I perceived the museum’s genuine effort to balance similarities and differences. My initial difficulty to grasp the museum’s intended message was due, I believe, to the broad approach taken to the exhibition theme and the large number of ‘semiotics resources’ displayed, particularly texts. If the plethora of texts effectively highlights clashes of opinions (both inside and outside the institution), thus questioning the monolithic voice of the museum, I believe it may generate some confusion in visitors. While I concur with Grinell (2010a) that ‘it is an interesting way to go to have more conflicts’ in the way the museum communicates a theme, in my view texts might not be the most effective resource to achieve this goal. Yet, exhibitions dealing with complexity and contradictions should strive to maintain simplicity and clarity in their layout and design.

³ In this respect displays using a *juxtaposition* technique, such as the display presenting games played by children ‘in transit’ (for instance, in refugee camps or on Lufthansa aircrafts), are particularly powerful.

In concluding, I suggest that *thematic* exhibitions powerfully construct counter-hegemonic narratives of personal and collective identities. They propose an idea of inclusionary, cosmopolitanism humanism, which approaches people as being all part of a borderless 'human community' whose members are (in theory *only*) all entitled to equal rights and share similar needs and analogous experiences of joy, sorrow, and struggle. Although equalitarian, anti-hegemonic, activist intentions lie behind such a humanist approach, the danger is that they construct an 'unrealistic utopia of a rootless cosmopolitanism where everyone is supposedly "a world citizen" in a borderless world' (Ang 2005: 229). They disregard that (cultural) differences are always produced in a space 'traversed by economic and political relationships of inequality' (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 16). Particularly, they overlook the role that poverty plays as a marker of difference in contemporary neo-liberal societies. If poverty increasingly creates exclusion and causes alienation and rage of the type that found expression, for example, in the UK with the riots of summer 2011 (Williams 2012), it is often overlooked by museums attempting to engage with differences and promote social justice.

Although the focus on similarities of *thematic* exhibitions represents a laudable shift from the traditional bias of ethnographic displays towards alterity, it risks eliding significant differences. In my view, there is a need for exhibitions that construct the social as formed by a series of related though not equivalently positioned differences, draw attention to the economic and political factors that produce differences and create conditions for visitors' deep engagements. The question that arises is *how* those goals can be achieved, which I discuss hereafter.

How to?

I argue that it is essential for *thematic* exhibitions to unequivocally disclose to visitors the museum's intended reading and rationale. As Marstine (2011: 16) suggests, 'unconventional approaches to exhibitions often require greater transparency than does common practice'. Particularly, exhibitions seeking to present more inclusive ideas of the social by applying a *thematic strategy* may confront visitors with messages conflating with how societies are constructed through political and media discourses. *Thematic* exhibitions are therefore likely to generate some confusion, if not nervousness or anxiety amongst visitors, who may resist or misinterpret their message. To avoid this museums could present a frank *statement of intents* (in the form of a panel, for example) elucidating the rationale and values underpinning the exhibition. Sandell and I (forthcoming 2013) maintain that 'explicit public declarations of intent and ethical position may feature relatively rarely in museum displays' but are fundamental to the goal of fashioning egalitarian understandings of differences. Drawing on technological developments, particularly in electronic sensing,⁴ audio tours could be designed that reveal museums' motivations behind certain decisions. The museum that I envision here does not shy away from openly declaring its viewpoints and perspectives, and practices 'a politically committed museology, albeit one which honestly reveals the intentions underlying it' (Shelton 2008: 209), thus courageously confronting - what Peers describes as - 'the perils of cross-cultural politics involved in more inclusive-style exhibitions' (Shelton 2008: 219). In fact, it is fully aware of and takes seriously the potential of its (activist) practice (Sandell 2011).

⁴ For a discussion of how technological developments might change exhibition interpretations see Sharp (2012).

Museums could also ensure the habitual presence within their galleries of educators, volunteers or front staff trained in engaging visitors in 'conversations' around the exhibition theme. The MWC could expand upon the *pedagogues'* valuable work, who accompany visitors on 'exhibition tours' engaging them in powerful 'conversations'. Likewise, the Tropenmuseum could develop engagement activities drawing on the experience of the Tropenmuseum Junior, whose staff (mainly actors and performance artists) facilitate the intellectual, physical and emotional engagements of its young visitors (Ruben 2004). During observations it was interesting to notice some visitors who had mistaken me for a member of staff, initiating conversations and sharing their opinions with me. These educational/engagement activities would not only ensure that visitors do not to 'get lost' in the exhibition,⁵ but also powerfully transform the exhibition from a *technology* of cultural re-presentation into a *site* of cultural production.

Similarly, the production of programmes linked to exhibitions is another strategy that effectively reinforces museums' potential as sites of cultural production. Such a strategy is productively employed in Gothenburg, where a dedicated department devises programmes exploring the exhibition themes from different perspectives; these include lectures, festival, art fairs, night clubs, concerts, performances.

Programmes represent an unexplored area of museum work at the Tropenmuseum, which only exceptionally devises events in connection to exhibitions. The museum

⁵ Recent research conducted in science museums (Galindo Castro 2005) highlights the importance of 'orality' (through the provision of guides and co-ordinators with who visitors share their opinions and concerns) in visits to exhibitions.

primarily approaches events as a tool for audience development, as it did when organising on Sunday 24th January 2010 (during my fieldwork) a catwalk in connection with the temporary exhibition *Culture Couture* (figure 8.1).⁶ De Jong argues (2010) the catwalk enabled the museum to attract people ‘who normally don’t go to our museum...people in their 20s - hipsters, fashion queens...’



8.1 *Culture Couture* catwalk, Tropenmuseum.

I suggest that the potential of programmes goes far beyond attracting new audiences; they represent opportunities of knowledge production and ‘offer an epistemologically interesting location’ (Myers 2006: 504) to study processes of meaning production. Moreover, through programmes museums can highlight the living, intangible, performative quality of cultures. If museums are object-centred *technologies* of knowledge production *par excellence*, by offering programmes they can move their

⁶ The exhibition presented ‘modern’ clothes produced by young designers studying at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (Belgium) inspired by ‘traditional’ clothes from ‘non-Western’ cultures

focus away from materiality, which turn 'culture and identity into a thing' (Macdonald 2003: 3).

Through programmes museums can present living, changing cultural expressions that 'are not solid and cannot be put on display, unless stories are told or performances are enacted' (Legêne 2010). This enables museums to shift their focus from cultural *re-presentation* and *preservation* to cultural *production* and *negotiation*. This represents a 'paradigmatic shift in the purpose and role of museums' of the type that Sandell envisages (2003: 43), which would enable museums to play a more active part in the renegotiation of collective cultures and identities. Having discussed changes in the 'frontstage', I now move my attention to the backstage and examine those behind-the-scenes changes that were one of the unexpected findings of this study.

Behind-the-scenes

The research draws attention to the ways in which the introduction of a *thematic strategy* as well as technological and organisational developments are altering 'structures of production', that is, the composition and functioning of exhibition teams. There is evidence from the data that new expertises and skills are being included in the process of exhibition-making, for example, those of the multimedia producer, exhibition-maker, programmer, and exhibition producer. However, the most conspicuous change that the research identified is a shift in the role that curators play in the processes of production of *thematic* exhibitions. Yet,

processes of exhibition-making cease to be guided by collection-knowledge-specialists, which represents a significant move away from how ethnographic museums have functioned, that is, around the expertise of curators.

Curators are customarily regarded as the institutional 'experts' on the museum collections and on the 'other' cultures the objects in their care are presumed to stand synecdochally for. The expertise through which curators derive their authority to write the cultures of 'others' is based on Eurocentric, 'academicist' knowledges produced through the application of the discourses and practices of 'scientific' disciplines, usually anthropology and archaeology, and of standard professional methods of collection, care, interpretation (Kreps 2003: 29) defined by organisations such as ICOM, which set the rules of the 'game' of the museum culture. As Latin American scholars such as Walter Mignolo have long lamented, these disciplinary discourses have produced essentialist views of 'non-Western' cultures. Moreover, they problematically create 'what Michel Foucault called "societies of discourse" whose rules are only known to the "initiates" ...who possess a specific knowledge and can enter into this discourse, to the exclusion of the great majority' (Galindo Castro, 2005: 66). What needs to be altered in (ethnographic) museums, I argue, is the connection between collections and exhibitions and the organisation of the exhibition floor and internal organisation. This approach is not only epistemologically and politically problematic but also detrimental as it inhibits cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural modes of representation and knowledge production. Surely, these are complex changes as they dispute the 'ethnographic authority' (Karp and Kratz 2000: 207) of

curators, and necessarily cause nervousness, if not resistance, but also generate a certain identity crisis in the institution.

From my perspective, epistemological beliefs embedded in Eurocentric systems of knowledge, particularly in those disciplines from which (ethnographic) collections have been studied, constrain the work of ethnographic museums. This opens up exciting opportunities for institutions wishing to decolonise their practices. Before discussing those opportunities, I would like to clarify some points. It is not my intention to suggest that Eurocentric, scientific knowledge, which is at the heart of the museum of ethnography (and of the museum establishment for that matter), is to be dismissed and collection-knowledge-specialists should no longer be hired. Instead, I concur with Ewin (2012) that 'museums are ineffective, in the long-term, without employing staff with both detailed knowledge of the collections and practices to manage and utilise collections'. If I believe it is important to carry out anthropological research and produce more collection-knowledge, I also argue that new systems of knowledge production should be implemented in ethnographic museums. A viable option seems to be Sandahl's (2002) proposal. She suggests a system of knowledge production in which museums work in *networks* with individuals, groups, organisations or professionals that hold knowledge about their collections. She argues '...for me it seems like best practice to call in a specialist in African sculpture from Africa – or from somewhere else for that matter – to work through the documentation of our African collections rather than to educate and uphold this expertise ourselves'. Similarly, Muñoz (2010) stresses the importance of working in 'networks' with people that 'know how to deconstruct the history of the collections and....understand it from a de-

colonial point of view; to incorporate other ways of knowing but not as “alternative” knowledge’. Muñoz makes a very important point about the necessity to employ different epistemological approaches in the study of ethnographica. She argues, however, for the employment of ‘traditional’ knowledges as different ways of knowing (not as inferior to the scientific knowledge). She refers to a recent project of the MWC which applied this approach to study the Niño Korin Collection (Muñoz 2009). If I agree with Muñoz, I would also argue that the limitation of projects of this type is that the new knowledge they produce rarely goes on display, while being generally presented through academic publications, conference papers and, in the more accessible case, films.

It should also be stressed that new knowledge cannot be only produced through collaborations with ‘experts’ about museum collections from other parts of the world or ‘indigenous’ people or ‘ethnic’ communities, whose cultural background lies in the countries where collections originate. As I argued in chapter three, critics are increasingly recognising that, regardless of their background, individuals can approach and interpret museum collections, thus creating new meanings. The exhibition *Earthlings* at the MWC powerfully illuminates this point; it was produced in collaboration with forty children between four and nine years old from different areas of Gothenburg. Grinell (2010c) states that this collaboration enabled the museum to look at its collections from another perspective.

I now discuss the disciplinary and non-disciplinary perspectives that the work of ethnographic museums might benefit from.

New perspectives and (museum) professions

The most striking observation to emerge from the research is that new disciplinary perspectives can successfully contribute to the work of ethnographic museums, as the employment of Klas Grinell as *Curator of Contemporary Global Issues* in Gothenburg, whose 'expertise' lies in the discipline of 'history of ideas', demonstrates. Moreover, 'gender studies' seems to be another discipline that may enable (ethnographic) museums to explore their collections from new perspectives. Postcolonial theory and cultural studies could support ethnographic museums' efforts to explore their collections from a viewpoint critical of the value systems of colonialism, which are embedded in their collections and in the 'project' of the museum of ethnography. It is my conviction that contemporary research in anthropology has a great potential for (ethnographic) museums. 'Anthropology does not make any distinction between the "West" and the "non-West" any longer' (Shelton 2009). New fields and directions in the discipline, particularly the anthropology of Europe⁷ and urban anthropology, as well as new topics and entities of interest of anthropological research (such as rights discourses, the EU, cosmopolitanism) could support museums' effort to move away from the study of the 'other'. Sandell and I (forthcoming 2013) envisage the possibility of including the expertise of an urban anthropologist in the work of ethnographic museums. It was thrilling to recently learn that our 'vision' has found application in the Museum Rotterdam, a city museum in Holland, which since 2009 has employed a permanent staff member with the title of

⁷ Barrera-González (2005: 11) defines the anthropology of Europe one that 'takes Europe as its object of enquiry, that displays a more open outlook, that engages without reserve with the world around'. See also Goddard, Shore and Llobera, (1994).

‘urban curator’, who is responsible for devising participation programmes (such as exhibitions, events and educational activities) in collaboration with the Rotterdam inhabitants. These programmes employ anthropological fieldwork methods, for instance participant observation and in-depth interviews, ‘that help to unravel the contemporary history of urban communities and embed these in the larger history of Rotterdam and the historical collections of the museum...’ (van Renselaar and van Dijk 2010). Despite being a city museum, the example of the Museum Rotterdam is relevant as it demonstrates the potential of new fields in anthropology for museums seeking to engage with the societies in which they operate.⁸

Since I began this project I have been haunted by the question of whether (ethnographic) museums attempting to offer more inclusive programmes are employing the ‘right’ staff. In my view even institutions that shifted their aims and purposes have left substantially unchanged their workforce; consequently, they lack the skills they need to act in the service of society. Here, I do not refer to ‘the paucity of ethnic minorities in museum employment’ *only* (Sandell 2007b: 205), but of those non-museological skills and expertise that could beneficially contribute to museum work. This study has drawn attention, for example, to the contribution that museum workers with background/experience in theatre or digital media can make to museum work.

⁸ In the US the innovative work of Alaka Wali at the Chicago Field Museum through the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (CCUC), to which I referred in chapter two, represents another notable example of the positive contribution that the discipline of urban anthropology can make to the world of ethnographic museums. According to its web-site, ‘the CCUC uses problem-solving anthropological research to identify and catalyze strengths and assets of communities in Chicago and beyond. In doing so, CCUC helps communities identify new solutions to critical challenges such as education, housing, health care, environmental conservation, and leadership development. Through research, programs, and access to collections, CCUC reveals the power of cultural difference to transform social life and promote social change.’

From my perspective, individuals with knowledge and experience in cultural mediation and/or translation possess skills that are vital to museums wishing to create opportunities for dialogue and understanding in divided societies. Those professionals could be employed as cross-cultural curators, which Sandell and I (forthcoming 2013) envisage as another 'curatorial' figure that can contribute to the work of (ethnographic) museums. Particularly mediators with experience in the resolution of cultural/ethnic conflicts, who are experts in facilitating 'communication between conflicting parties' (Moore 1994 quoted in Lücke and Rigaut 2002: 5), could bring something to the work of (ethnographic) museums. It should be noticed that between 2007 and 2010 Tate Britain employed within the Learning Department Paul Goodwin with the title of *Curator: Cross-cultural Programmes*. Goodwin was responsible for creating platforms for cultural engagement, including talks, symposia, workshops and live art events. Although Goodwin did not work on exhibitions, I believe this example demonstrates the feasibility of my suggestion.

Museums may also benefit from including the skills of staff with background/experience in social work, which are necessary for museums wishing to act in the benefit of society and to work with minority groups and people excluded from 'the mainstream'. Silverman (2010: 4) highlights how museums are acting in the service of society through collaborations with social workers; however, she acknowledges that museum workers often question museums' capacity to engage in social work by recognising 'that they may well lack the necessary skills and knowledge for such work'. I have often heard museum professionals stating 'we are *not* social workers'. Although

this statement is unquestionable, it demonstrates a growing recognition in the field that museums should more seriously consider how to include those skills if they wish to do socially relevant work. The example of the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis, which – as Wilson argues - ‘has three full-time social workers on staff, working side-by-side with curators’ (Marstine 2012: 39), gives one example of how institutions might include social workers in their workforce.

I believe a clarification is needed here. While I am arguing for the employment of new disciplinary and non-disciplinary perspectives to the study of ethnographical, I believe that care must be taken in certain instances, particularly with objects holding spiritual or religious connotations or those for which their ‘originating communities’ claim the control over the right of interpretation. These objects, I believe, should be presented *only* in ways that respect those claims. Moreover, I am convinced that the inclusion of new skills and expertise is not sufficient to enable (ethnographic) museums to act in the service of society; changes of the organisational structure are also needed, as I shall elucidate hereafter.

Flexible organisational structure

This study suggests that there is a need for (ethnographic) museums to implement a collaborative and flexible organisational structure that enables disciplinary and non-disciplinary knowledges, expertise, skills and worldviews to work together in a non-hierarchical fashion. One way to achieve this goal could be to create an exhibition department flexibly structured around (exhibition) projects. Around each

project a temporary organisation, a network, is created to which both human and non-human actors contribute. Members of the exhibition department are assigned to each project, assuming diverse responsibilities according to their availability, relevant expertise and knowledges (also more subjective or informal forms of knowledges). Collection-knowledge-specialists work alongside 'exhibition-authors' or 'translators', designers, multimedia specialists as well as staff from other departments and external personnel, groups and organisations. Collection-knowledge does not automatically drive exhibition processes (although this might happen in certain instances) but it is made useable by 'exhibition-authors' and staff working in other areas of museum work. Sandell and I (forthcoming 2013) argue that the concept of 'trading zones' (Gorman 2002), originating in the domain of science and technology, may hold some potential for museum practices; particularly the idea of *contributory* trading zones, which 'are those where participants share a common goal and engage each other deeply in order to develop a new system/technology'.

I also believe it is paramount to encourage an experimental and self-critical attitude amongst museum staff, and adopt an *open path* to change, that is, one that embraces uncertainty, criticisms and 'failure' as necessary parts of any process of reform. It is important to foster what psychologist Carol Dweck describes as an incremental approach to development, which considers 'abilities as emerging through tackling challenges' and the experience of failure as the evidence that 'they are stretching themselves to their current limits' of their present abilities (Burkeman 2012). Only museums that encourage an incremental outlook in their workforce, training them to be less risk-averse and more willing to face 'failure', will have their workforce's support

when pursuing programmes of reform. Before turning to my concluding words, I wish to stress that the changes I suggest are not uncomplicated as they require the (ethnographic) museum to face 'the risk of unpredictability and of potential transformation of institution and self' (Marstine 2011: 11).

Ethnographic museums in *mutation*

This study demonstrates that a shift from dominant exhibitionary 'habits' to a *thematic exhibitionary praxis* enables ethnographic museums to move away from the established representations of cultural 'others', by highlighting cross-cultural exchanges and hybridity. A focus on themes is, however, not the only promising strategy available to ethnographic museums wishing to challenge their conventional focus on 'otherness' as the example of the *Multiversity Gallery* at MOA (Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver) demonstrates. The Gallery, which presents the MOA's worldwide collections that include European collections, has achieved this goal by turning to the concept of oceans rather than continents. Anthony Shelton, Director of MOA, explains (2009):

We wanted to emphasise the relationship between different parts of the world... We wanted to look at oceans as a way of communicating, of how cultures and civilisations have communicated and have influenced each other. We wanted, as far as possible, to get away from the idea of essentialised, purified objects... We wanted to look at the influence, the context in which they were [used as] objects and look at how they came over to Vancouver...

By referring to a geographical (but not geo-political) concept, the MOA has succeeded in moving beyond representing 'others' through the questioning of binary dichotomies. This example demonstrates that what is paramount for ethnographic museums striving for change is first to undergo an intellectual transformation by resorting to concepts and discourses that shake the ideological constructions that guided their establishment and shaped their practices so far.⁹

Ethnographic museums can definitely play an important part in contemporary, post/colonial times, *only* on condition they face the challenges involved in altering their established museological practices. I strongly believe that they have the potential to contribute to the re-negotiation of geographic, cultural, and political borders, and to facilitate 'mutual perception and appreciation of overlapping multiple and dynamic cultural identities of every individual and social and cultural grouping' (UNESCO 2009: 44) present in our contemporary Europe. Furthermore, ethnographic museums can satisfy what Geertz (quoted in Ames 1992: 149) describes as a persistent need to facilitate debates and

....enlarge the possibilities of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth, and power, and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way.

⁹ The travelling exhibition *Fetish Modernity* to which I refer in chapter one is a powerful example of the possibility to achieve those goals.

Those are, I believe, the most important and urgent contributions that ethnographic museums can make to our divided and troubled Europe.

To achieve these goals a shift from regions to themes is not enough. If Legêne (2010) maintains that it is necessary to develop a 'concept', this research suggests there is a need to refashion the 'backstage' of ethnographic museums, particularly, those more invisible factors that impede changes of museum practice and restrain cross-disciplinarily and cross-collection work. Museums should decolonise their 'structure of production', working practices and instruments framing processes of exhibition-making (such as classification systems of collections). If attempts to alter the 'frontstage' are not accompanied and supported by pertinent alterations behind-the-scenes, there is a risk of dyscrasia between the *visible* part ('frontstage') and the *invisible* part ('backstage') of the institution, which would make change unsustainable in the long-term. Plastering the 'cracks' will not be enough, a whole new earthquake-proof structure is needed.

I wish to conclude this thesis by arguing that the Tropenmuseum and the MWC, as the other (ethnographic) museums currently striving for change, are going through a process of *mutation*. They are losing some of the traits that have made them recognizable as ethnographic museums, which can be painful and destabilising for the organisation. If the process of mutation each institution is currently undergoing is not identical, the pervasive impulse towards renovation manifests a wish of many institutions to respond to contemporary societal needs more responsibly. It could even be said that the institutions I studied (particularly the MWC) are currently attempting

to be more than only museums by acting as *hybrid institutions*, and seeking to be simultaneously exhibitionary spaces, performance spaces, places for debate, clubs, as well as a myriad of other functions. They are demonstrating the capacity to also act as spaces for dialogue and social engagement. Interestingly, some critics have reductively dismissed those more 'radical' mutations as trivial attempts that devalue the immutable essence of (ethnographic) museums. It seems that many believe that the only 'justifiable' reason for the material culture of 'others' to be in the custody of European museums is to be studied through the prism of classical ethnology and to be displayed in exhibitions seeking to represent 'other' cultures; almost as if a change in the purpose of ethnographic museums would cause those institutions to lose their *raison d'être*. Those critiques demonstrate that the greatest impediments encountered are not of an intellectual but rather psychological nature. They seem to reveal a general resistance and fear amongst certain museum professionals of losing the privileges of their *caste*, thus having 'to shift the habits of a professional lifetime' (Hall 2005: 30).

The processes of *mutation* of the institutions I have studied are not yet completed. Neither of the two museums has found the 'way forward' as yet. However, while the MWC has at least chosen a new format (although one far from perfection), the Tropenmuseum has still not selected its new 'outlook' for the twenty-first century. If the employment of Wayne Modest in September 2010 as the new *Head of the Curatorial Department* suggests that winds of change were blowing in Amsterdam, the decision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs taken unilaterally in November 2011 to stop subsidising the KIT from January 2013 seems to imply that the institution might have

other matters to focus on in the years to come.¹⁰ However, in the current climate the challenge for *all* museums, including the Tropenmuseum, is *how* to work towards being more inclusive *while* at the same time being under serious budgetary pressure.

The thesis has proposed several changes that might support the efforts of other ethnographic museums wishing to re-purpose themselves for the twenty first-century. It is not my intention, nevertheless, to suggest that I have envisaged *all* the mutations yet to come. Surely, I do not believe those future *mutations* comprise the disappearance of the museum of ethnography from the European museological panorama - a possibility considered by two of my interviewees Legêne and Shatanawi. However, I agree with them that we may see some museums merging with other institutions or moving their focus to other geographical areas (for instance, Europe) or to world history or world cultures and arts, including European history and culture (as MOA has done).

I am convinced we will not see only one format of *post/colonial* ethnographic museums. Conversely, different ethnographic museums will take dissimilar names, identities, approaches and focuses. Despite those differences, I believe that the ethnographic museums destined to flourish in the twenty-first century are those that

¹⁰ On Wednesday 19 June 2013 the Dutch parliament discussed the fate of the Tropenmuseum. The ministers in the Dutch House of Representatives decided to momentarily save the museum and keep on financing it for the next three years. The museum will receive 5.5 million every year; the first two years will be paid for by the ministry of Foreign Affairs (Buitenlandse Zaken), whilst the third year will be financed by the ministry of Education, Culture and Science (Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap – OCW). A few conditions, however, need to be fulfilled. Firstly, the Tropenmuseum needs to merge with the Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde, Leiden and the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal to become a 'Museum for World Culture' (Museum voor wereldcultuur). Secondly, the Tropenmuseum's collection and its library need to become national collections. Finally, the Tropenmuseum has to be independent from the KIT.

will define their new identity and outlook starting from their history and from the recognition of the subtle but pervasive ways in which their past involvement in the European colonial project still hampers their work. My vision of the new ethnographic museum is compellingly expressed by *Metamorphosis*, a photograph by the Florida-based photographer David Taggart.



8.2 David Taggart, *Metamorphosis*.

The *new* ethnographic museum I envisage is an institution woven into the fabric of society and born *anew* by placing its colonial and imperial legacy at the very core of its future developments. An audacious organisation willing to accept that it is only by equipping itself with and learning to use the right ‘crutches’, that is, new perspectives, new disciplines, new staff, that it will be able to walk towards the future and have the resources and the bravery to question the very idea of what (ethnographic) museums

ought to be in contemporary, post/colonial, and multicultural Europe. It is with Taggart's astonishing picture that I wish to conclude this thesis, and with the hope to see many institutions taking this courageous and giant leap in the years to come.

Appendix I

List of Interviewees

Tropenmuseum	
Name	Job title
Ament, Daniel	Designer and Architect
Babazadeh, Mohammad	Staff Tropenmuseum Junior
Boonstra, Sadiah	Exhibition Maker/Curator
van Brakel, Koss	Head of Collections
van de Bunte, Hans	Director Public Programs
van Dartel, Daan	Collection Researcher for projects and (web) publications
Fontaine, Frans	Exhibition-Maker
van Gessel, Herman	Educator
Kis-Jovak, Jowa Imre	Designer and Architect
Legêne, Susan	(Former) Head Curatorial Department
Molenkamp, Mara	Exhibition Producer
Shatanawi, Mirjam	Curator of Middle East and North Africa
Ton, Susanne	Multimedia Production
de Vries, Joan	Co-ordinator Bookings Office Tropenmuseum/Management Assistant
Zuiderma, Eva	Education
Wim Conradi	Sound Engineer
Museum of World Culture	
Andrén, Agneta	Artist and Set Designer
Bergil, Catharina	Acting Director
Bagherzadeh, Farzaneh	Conservator
Ekström, Eva Tua	Museum Educator
Grinell, Klas	Curator of Contemporary Global Issues
Hultén, Jenny	Programmes Coordinator
Javér, Anna	Conservator
Leidi, Bianca	Exhibition Producer
Magnusson, Karl	Head of International Cooperation, National Museums of World Culture
Malm, Lina	Museum Educator
Malmberg, Britta	Head of Education
Mighetto, Anna	Head of Communication and Marketing
Morais, Luis	Designer
Muñoz, Adriana	Curator of Collections
Schiller, Malin	Head of Programmes
Zana, Muhamad	External Project

Appendix II

Interview Questions

THE INSTITUTION

- 1) Could you please tell me the mission and aims of the museum? How does the museum seek to achieve them?
- 2) In which ways is the museum seeking to overcome its colonial legacy?
- 3) In which ways is the museum engaging with and representing the differences that mark the multicultural society of which it is part? To what extent, if at all, is the museum acting as an agent for social change?
- 4) How do you think the museum interprets and approaches cultural diversity?
- 5) Could you please explain how the last renovation process was undertaken?
(TM)
- 6) What factors shaped current collecting policies (2008 -2012)? Could you explain the rationale behind their shift from a regional to a thematic focus? *(TM)*
- 7) How was the museum established and what factors shaped its formation?
(MWC)

8) Could you describe your target audiences? To what extent are you engaging with migrants and other minorities?

9) To what extent is the museum creating opportunities for dialogue and understanding between individuals from different backgrounds and walks of life?

FACTORS of CHANGE

10) How has the museum responded to changes in the demographic composition of Amsterdam/Gothenburg (and, more broadly, in Holland/Sweden)?

11) In which ways have (governmental and supra-national) cultural and diversity policies influenced the museum's work?

12) To what extent has the debate around the 'crisis of multiculturalism' affected, if at all, the museum programmes?

13) Do you feel that the growing tensions around differences that followed events such 9/11, the murder of Theo Van Gogh (*TM*)...has affected the museum policies and activities?

EXHIBITING STRATEGIES

- 14) Could you tell me the rationale behind the decision to apply a thematic strategy? What are the main challenges and opportunities of this strategy?
- 15) How does/did the museum select the themes for its thematic exhibitions?
- 16) In which ways is the museum employing its collections in the exhibitions, together with other 'semiotic resources' (i.e. artworks, films, texts)?
- 17) Could you explain how the process of exhibition-making usually takes place?

EXHIBITION PRODUCT and PROCESS

- 18) What is the main message that the exhibition tries to convey?
- 19) Could you outline the principal ideas and values that have underpinned the development of the exhibition?
- 20) Can you explain the rationale for the gallery layout and the organization of exhibits and spaces?

- 21) How were the members of the project team selected? In which ways did the team operate and which challenges did it confront?
- 22) What is your background/expertise? What was your role in the process?
- 23) How were the museum objects, artworks, installations, contemporary objects, texts, etc. selected/sourced/produced?
- 24) Could you tell me if and how the museum collaborated with external individuals/groups/organisations?
- 25) Which interpretative strategies does the exhibition employ to present those different voices?
- 26) Which educational activities/programmes, etc. has the museum organised in conjunction with the exhibition?

Appendix Three

Observation Sign

Hej, jag heter...

...Serena Iervolino och jag är på museet för att utföra forskning till min doktorsavhandling.

Idag kan ni se mig i utställningarna där jag är för att observera besökare – kanske kommer jag observera även dig, hur du använder utställningen. Om du ser mig, bry dig inte om min närvaro utan förstått ditt besök som vanligt. Jag lovar att inte störa ditt utforskande av utställningarna.

Ha ett trevligt besök!



Hi, my name is...

...Serena Iervolino and I am here at the museum carrying out research for my PhD.

Today you may find me in the galleries, where I will spend some time observing visitors - perhaps observing you too, the way you utilize the exhibition and its display. If you see me around, please ignore my presence and continue your visit as normal. I promise I will not interfere with your exploration of the galleries.

Enjoy your visit!

Appendix IV

The Exhibition Teams

LEGEND:

S: staff/**EP:** external personnel

I: interviewed

JT: job title

D: department

B/E: background/relevant experience

IR: institutional responsibilities

PR: project responsibilities

C: collaborations

Team members	Kartini	World of Music	Destination x
Project Leader	<p>Susan Lêgene (I) S</p> <p>D: Curatorial Department; JT: Head of Curatorial Department,ⁱ B: Political History</p>	<p>Susan Lêgene (I)</p>	<p>Margareta Alinⁱⁱ S</p> <p>JT: Museum Director</p>

Exhibition producer		<p>Mara Molekamp (I) S</p> <p>D: Public and Presentation; JT: Exhibition Producer B: museology IR: team’s central node; overseeing project development; responsible for logistics, information flow, timescale</p> <p>PR: as to IR</p>	<p>Lina Malm (I) Sⁱⁱⁱ</p> <p>D: Education, JT: Educator</p> <p>B: social anthropology IR: designing and delivering activities to promote visitors’ life-long learning; representing audiences in exhibition projects</p> <p>PR: team’ central node; ensuring project develops collaboratively; overseeing budget and operative production</p>
Curator/s	<p>Sadiah Boonstra^{iv} (I) EP</p> <p>B/E: history, cultural heritage PR: background research (identifying relevant stories); pre-selecting collections (C: van Dartel and all) and non-collections (C: Babazadeh, Ament, Ton)</p>	<p>Frank Swart^v EP</p> <p>B/E: conservatorium, ethnomusicology PR: background research; pre-selecting collections (mainly undertaken by first curator) (C: van Dartel) and non-collections (audio-visual materials)^{vi} (C: Ton and Fontaine); developing two ‘immersive environments’ (C: Ton, designer, Fontaine)</p>	<p>Klas Grinell (I) S</p> <p>D: Content and Development Department; JT: Curator of Contemporary Global Issues B/E: History of Ideas/activist work with Amnesty International IR: research background for exhibitions PR: as to IR; responsible for texts (C: Morais, Ekström)</p> <hr/> <p>Adriana Muñoz (I) S</p>

			<p>D: Collections and Conservation^{vii}; JT: curator of collections (specialised in the Latin American collections) B/E: archaeology/activist work in human rights movements/former staff of the Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum IR: collection research for exhibitions and other projects; research background for exhibitions PR: responsible for objects and for the 'Collection Days'</p>
			<p>Christine Palmgren S</p> <p>D: Content and Development Department; JT: Curator PR: responsible for artworks, photographs and audiovisuals</p>
In-house Designer			<p>Luís Morais (I) S</p> <p>D: Content and Development Department; JT: Exhibition Designer B: interior architecture IR: scenography and exhibition design (in collaboration with contracted designers or artists) PR: translating the exhibition design (C:</p>

			Andrén) into graphics and designing furniture (C: Håkanson); producing texts (C: Grinell)
Contracted Designer	<p>Daniel Ament (I), EP^{viii}</p> <p>B/E: architecture and design/ theatre, design-exhibition and interior design</p> <p>PR: exhibition design; designing non-collection pieces (e.g. Anansi game) (C: Ton and all)</p>	<p>Jowa Kis-Jovak (I) EP</p> <p>B/E: architecture/interior-3D/ furniture/museum and exhibition design^{ix}</p> <p>PR: exhibition design; development of immersive environments (C: Ton, Swartz and all)</p>	<p>Agneta Andrén (I) EP</p> <p>B/E: arts and theatre scenography/practising artist</p> <p>PR: exhibition design and scenography; production of <i>ad-hoc</i> paintings</p>
Collection Researcher	<p>Daan van Dartel (I), S</p> <p>D: Curatorial Department; JT: Collection Researcher for Projects and (Web) Publications</p> <p>B/E: cultural anthropology, museology</p> <p>IR: researching museum collections for exhibitions or other projects</p> <p>PR: identifying relevant collections (C: Boonstra and all)</p>	<p>Daan van Dartel (I)</p> <p>PR: identifying objects from the ethnomusicology department (C: Swartz)</p>	

Exhibition Maker	<p>Mohammed Babazadeh (I) S^x</p> <p>D: Tropenmuseum Junior; JT: staff B/E: theatre studies/ theatre director-actor IR: exhibition development; programmes for exhibitions RP: researching relevant stories; developing non-collections (focus on children); interviewing artists for 'Unbounded-NL' (C: Boonstra)</p>	<p>Frans Fontaine (I) S</p> <p>D: Public and Presentation; JT: Exhibition-maker B/E: anthropology/ former curator of Latin-America department IR: translating the exhibition message</p> <p>RP: as to IR; selection of audio-visual materials (C: Swart, Ton), design development (C: Kis-Jovak and all); reviewing documentaries created by the external filmmaker^{xi}</p>	
Educator	<p>Gundy van Dijk S</p> <p>D: Public and Presentation; JT: Educator B: history/museology IR: educational activities (especially up to six years old) PR: as to IR (C: Babazadeh and all); interactive displays (C: Ton and all)</p>		<p>Eva Tua Ekström (I) S</p> <p>D: Education, JT: Educator</p> <p>B/E: drama/theatre; running a ten-year educational/integration project for schools (organised by an agency of Gothenburg museums)^{xii} IR: designing and delivering activities seeking to promote visitors' life-long learning; representing audiences in exhibition projects</p>

			PR: as to IR (C: all); guided tours
Multimedia Producer	<p>Susanne Ton (I) S</p> <p>D: Public and Presentation; JT: Developer of Multimedia Productions</p> <p>B/E: Interaction design/web-design production</p> <p>IR: development of multimedia productions for exhibitions</p> <p>PR: development of multimedia productions (e.g. Anansi game)</p>	<p>Susanne Ton (I)</p> <p>PR: development of multimedia productions, including four touch-screens (C: Swartz); development of immersive environments (C: Kis-Jovak, Swartz); exhibition-maker for multimedia and documentaries (C: Fontaine, Swartz and contracted filmmaker)</p>	
Sound Producer	<p>Wim Conradi^{xiii} (I) EP</p> <p>B/E: theatre and performances; sound production for theatre</p> <p>PR: production of soundscapes^{xiv} and other sound materials</p>		

Conservator			<p>Farzaneh Bagherzadeh (I) S</p> <p>D: Collections and Conservation; JT: Conservator</p> <p>B/E: conservation/former staff of the Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum (since 1988)</p> <p>IR: responsible for all activities involving objects (for instance loans, acquisitions, unpacking collections,^{xv} and exhibitions)</p> <p>PR: at to IR, transporting and installing objects to the 'main house' (C: conservator Anna Javér)</p>
Marketer			<p>Anna Mighetto (I) S</p> <p>D: Communication and Marketing Department; JT: Head of Communication and Marketing</p> <p>B: marketing</p> <p>IR: responsible for activities through which MWC communicates with its publics (for instance, branding and advertisement)</p> <p>PR: focus groups; advertisement and marketing campaign</p>

Programmes			<p>Jenny Hultén (I) S^{xvi}</p> <p>D: Programmes; JT: Programmes Coordinator B/E: museology IR: designing and delivering public programmes PR:^{xvii} planning <i>Destination X</i> programme</p>
Technician			<p>Roger Håkanson S</p> <p>D: Operation, Production and Maintenance; JT: Technician IR: responsible for technical production of exhibitions PR: responsible for the physical construction (and its budget)</p>

ⁱ Lêgene was Head between 1997 and 2008.

ⁱⁱ Alin took over the role when Cajsja Lagerkvist (Head of Content and Development Department) went on leave. However, she retired before the project was completed.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Destination X*'s exhibition producer, Bianca Leidi, went on leave and was replaced first by an external professional, Anna Tellin, and then by Malm.

^{iv} Boonstra was hired in 2007 after the Tropenmuseum had been decided to divide the exhibition on world stories and music into distinctive projects, and the original curator had been assigned to *World of music*. Boonstra had already contributed to the development of the exhibition concept when working as a curator trainee at the Tropenmuseum (2005-2006). In this time she also had carried out a few (pilot) projects that eventually came to form the 'Layla and Majnum' section of *Kartini*.

^v Swart was hired in 2008 to replace the first curator who remained *unnamed* during my fieldwork. Apparently, he had been replaced as he did not deliver according to the agreed deadlines.

^{vi} Audio-visuals are projected in the exhibitions and are also accessible using four touch-screens. The latter also provide *digital* labels for the objects.

^{vii} Muñoz is based in the museum's storehouse, a separate 'house' where the collections are kept. The physical division between collections and exhibitions/programmes impacts on the MWC's working practices.

^{viii} Ament was selected as he had previously designed interactive exhibitions for the Tropenmuseum Junior.

^{ix} Kis-Jovak (2010) started working with the Tropenmuseum in 1982 when designing the temporary exhibition *Cotton Ikats*.

^x Babazadeh is a permanent staff of the Tropenmuseum Junior.

^{xi} The documentaries about the accordion, the trumpet and the ukulele were commissioned to van der Spek of Mirandas Filmproducties. Van der Spek is a visual anthropologist and filmmaker.

^{xii} The project used museums as neutral spaces where schoolchildren could express themselves.

^{xiii} Although he was added to the process at a later time and was not a member of the core team, I interviewed him as sound plays a crucial role in *Kartini*.

^{xiv} Soundscapes are a combination of sounds that can be heard in a particular location.

^{xv} During the transformation from Museum of Ethnography to MWC the collections were moved twice. In May 2010 about half of the collection (around 52,000 objects) had been unpacked, photographed and digitalised.

^{xvi} Following an internship at the MWC (part of the MA in International Museum Studies, University of Gothenburg), Hultén was employed on a temporary contract to cover for Malin Schiller that was Acting Head of Programmes, while Catharina Bergil, the Head of Department, was Acting Director of the museum.

^{xvii} During her internship Hultén's work focused on the 'Collection Days'.

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