Controversial topics in museums: how to handle these according to society's and experts' opinions, specifically colonial wallcharts in the Dutch National Museum of Education

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Abstract

This paper is about researching how controversial artworks should be handled according to societies- and experts' opinions. Based on explored background knowledge, the state of the art in academic literature and my own interpretation of the experts' and society's opinions, I came to the conclusion that controversial art works with topics such as colonial history and/or with racist undertones should still be shown in museums, but something more than only showcasing them is necessary. This can be achieved in the National Museum of Education via adjustments to the audio tour, a few new marketing strategies of the audio tour, and/or creating a pamphlet with information about the colonial wall charts. But what is most important is that contextualizing the colonial wall charts is made a priority and that opportunities to tackle this issue are realized.

Introduction

The Netherlands is known as a country where tolerance is highly valued. Yet, there is a different side as well. Racism is often still denied or downplayed, despite a long history of it. In an article on the acknowledgment of racism in the Netherlands, journalist Van der Mee interviewed Marlou Schrover, professor of socioeconomic history at the University of Leiden. She argues that our nation is not as tolerant of a country we often think it is. "In the Netherlands a lot is allowed. We are modern and progressive, a guiding country in that way. However, we are not frontrunners in the acknowledgment of racism" (Van der Mee, 2020, p. 16). The term 'white innocence', for example, refers to "the self-image of the Dutch seeing themselves as tolerant and liberal while at the same time racism is very much part of postcolonial Dutch society, or even institutionalized as such" (Walhout & Dane, 2020, p. 178). This needs to change, and the new generation is trying to accomplish what generations before failed to do. The current activists have a new strategy that is explicitly against anti-black racism, but goes way further than that (Rosman, 2020, p. 13).

There has been a debate about exhibiting colonial artworks for quite some time now. What is our current society's view on colonial artworks? Is it okay to showcase art that is stolen? Do museums need to present the dark sides of history to make us not forget what happened and never repeat those parts? How far should a museum go in giving context and information next to works of art? Should a museum be about aesthetics and presenting intriguing works or do they have an educator role in society and therefore need to provide explanations? How would this then present itself, in very long texts or 'compulsory' audio tours? These are the questions I will explore in this paper.

Education and racism

Most people think that the higher educated are not the problem, they will understand that everyone deserves to be treated equally despite skin color, heritage, sexual orientation, etcetera, right? Sadly, the opposite seems to be true. An article with the eye-catching title 'The dumber, the more racist?' explains that knowledge is a prerequisite for racist behavior (Van Os, 2020, p. 13). This article was written about journalist Van Os's book. He argues that our human ability to relate to others points to the conclusion that racism is learned behavior instead of already in our nature. Little children only see a factual difference between black and white, between a man and a woman, or between someone with a baseball cap or yarmulke. Someone has to learn them that one is 'better' than the other (Van Os, 2020, p. 13).

Investigative journalist Van Os recently argued, when put bluntly, the dumber someone is, the less they 'care' about differences between humans that others base their racism on (Van Os, 2020, p. 13). One has to be careful not to generalize, this is not always the case of course. However, this phenomenon has been present in history as well, for example with the Nazi regime. A ninety-year-old woman born in a Jewish neighborhood in Warsaw was interviewed for Van Os's book 'Liever dier dan mens' (Rather

animal than human) which was about her survival story. She, without hesitation, said that she fled the city and stayed with people who were too primitive to be antisemitic (van Os, 2020, p. 13). Van Os did not take her seriously right away, because precisely education is what creates the understanding to get rid of your stereotypes, right? Later on, he saw patterns. The Polish nationalistic political leaders complained about how much effort it took to stop farmers from doing business with Jewish people. Also ordering the population based on nationality did not work because around 700.000 people did not know the answer to the question if they were Polish, Russian, Jewish, Ukrainian, etcetera. They just filled in 'from here'. Officials complained they had too little education to create a national awareness and therefore had very little feelings for nationalism (van Os, 2020, p. 13).

Resistance from the Dutch society

Education with certain biases, for instance the lack of information on oppression in colonial times, can lead to resistance when public opinion on a topic goes through a change. This may explain the resistance against cultural decolonization when looking at the discussions in the Netherlands about the golden carriage[1], black Pete, and the golden age[2]. This is reiterated by previous research according to Karwan Fatah-Black, professor of colonial history at the University of Leiden (Rosman, 2020, p. 14).

On the golden carriage of the royal Dutch family, a scene is displayed where a white woman sits on the throne and others around her bring her 'colonial commodities' and are pictured in such a way that they seem like her slaves. When interviewed, Fatah-Black stated that he thinks it is a clear reference to the colonial times (Vink, 2020). The carriage was a gift to queen Wilhelmina in 1898, but it shows a message that does not fit our time anymore, according to Nugah Shrestha, who founded the popular Instagram account '@politieke_jongeren' (political youth) and started the petition to place the golden carriage in a museum about slavery. Shrestha says that "in this way, everyone that goes to this museum can learn about our history. Now it is almost concealed because the carriage rides around without most people knowing about this image, while in a museum you can show and learn others that there have been years where the royal family paraded around in this carriage, but now we have learned from this" (Vink, 2020). Historian Patricia D. Gomes agrees that the carriage should be exhibited in a museum, with texts and explanations. But statues and street signs of slave traders also belong in museums. "If such objects would be placed in a museum it would signal to our society that we renounce ourselves from this period. This is history and we turn the page" (Vink, 2020).

Another example of resistance can be seen when the first black hero was introduced in the comic book Lucky Luke. Here resistance is expressed as thinking it was unnecessary or it was regarded as "an American-inspired obsession with race" (Onishi, 2021), which is how it is often expressed.

The edition 'Een Cowboy tussen het Katoen' (A Cowboy in High Cotton) was made to take a step away from the reflexes and automatic responses in the cartoon industry as almost every appearance of a black person in comic books has been racist or stereotyping (NOS, 2020c). For a long time now, critics have associated comics with the perpetuation of racial stereotypes because cartooning relies on simplifications, generalizations, and exaggerations. Non-white people are typically shown as inferior and even subhuman, if they are present at all (Onishi, 2021). It was never a representation of a black person when people of African descent were pictured, it was "a representation of European fears for black people", according to Chad Bilyue, a black cartoonist from America (NOS, 2020c).

[1] The carriage in which the king is driven around on Prinsjesdag, the day on which he delivers the annual speech from the throne, a tradition that opens the new political year in the Netherlands.
[2] A blooming period for the Netherlands in trade, science, and the arts, but also for war and slavery trade.

Example from the cartoon ‘Kuifje in Afrika’ (Kuifje in Africa)
The original black-and-white version is from 1931, the renewed colored version is from 1946. Later a page was drawn again in 1975 to make it more ‘animal friendly’, but nothing was wrong with the way black people were portrayed apparently.

The Lucky Luke cartoon goes in on the oppression and segregation issues that were still present after the official abolishment of slavery in the United States. This comic had to find the balance between being honest and showing the truth, not distorting or glorifying the story, but also not be too gruesome and show torture, according to Jul, the cartoonist of this new story (NOS, 2020c). The cartoon is published in Dutch, French, and English.

The issue came out last year, so, only after 75 years the first black hero was introduced. Jean-Pascal Zadi, a film director whose parents immigrated from the Ivory Coast thinks "the cartoon was a sign that France was moving, though slowly, in the right direction" (Onishi, 2021). Chad Bilyeu thinks it is a step in the right direction as well, but also too little too late.

Approaches of streaming platforms to racism

When looking at another form of media, streaming platforms are becoming aware and taking action. Disney movies now have an announcement before they start, stating that the movie contains superseded, racist stereotypes. "This movie contains a negative representation and/or wrongful handling of humans or cultures" is the warning (NOS, 2020b). Examples are the movies Peter Pan and the Aristocats. In an explanation on why these warnings are added to the movies, Disney states that the stereotypes portrayed were wrong and are still wrong, but that they choose not to delete the movies from the platform because "it could be an opportunity to learn from a history that touches us all" (NOS, 2020b).

The Hollywood classic 'Gone with the Wind' from 1939 got taken down from the streaming platform HBO Max, as it would be romanticizing the American slavery history (NOS, 2020d). A different direction than Disney+ chose. However, after a while, the movie came back to the platform, with an extra introduction. This explained the context where the movie came from; a time where segregation in the south of the US was still very common. HBO thus agrees with Disney’s way of handling this issue; racist fragments or movies should not be taken down because it can give off the impression that such ways of thinking about other human beings have never existed. We need to be able to learn from the past.

Film expert Nataly Burgzorg thinks this is a wise decision (NOS, 2020d). To delete something completely is a form of 'silencing'. Then you are just pretending it does not exist. She thinks it is thus better to showcase the programs, but with additional information and context. This way the viewer can indeed learn something (NOS, 2020d).

Hassler-Forest, professor of media sciences at Utrecht University, sees a future where streaming platforms present fragments with stereotypes and discriminating movies in the same way a museum handles these topics. "You do not take it away, but you make sure that it is framed with information about the development and realization of these ideas. This can be done in numerous ways; with hashtags, with text on screen, with special apps" (NOS, 2020d).

Here museums are thus looked at for solutions in the media world; they are seen as guides. Museums also present themselves as a place where the general public can learn more about art but also about society. This is one of the reasons why I think they have the obligation to create relevant exhibitions, keep presenting difficult parts of history, and keep their role in society in mind.

State of the art in academic literature

Little scholarly research addresses Dutch depictions of slavery in history textbooks, while "most basic texts have racist content advanced through such fundamental subjects as geography, history, and biology" (Weiner, 2014, p. 6). Addressing slavery and abolition has been historically limited in schools' curriculum. An explanation could be that there is no national curriculum. Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution grants individual schools the freedom to choose their students' curriculum (Weiner, 2014, p. 18). Since the new history canon from 2007/2008, some books draw more attention to slavery, but stereotypes still persist (Weiner, 2014, p. 14). For example, "about 45% of the books state that the traders took 'slaves from Africa', rather than that they took people out of Africa and enslaved them" (Weiner, 2014, p. 10).

Primary school history books that are published since 1980 feature a Eurocentric narrative that contributes to a 'social forgetting' of colonialism and slavery in the Netherlands (Weiner, 2014, p. 16). Because education plays such a large role in shaping children's conceptions of reality and identities, textbooks "reveal the racial neoliberal foundation that young adults in The Netherlands today encountered and that with which the current generation of Dutch children will be embedded" (Weiner, 2014, p. 17).

This again reiterates how important the type of education one had as a child is. This is one of the main reasons why the colonial wallcharts exhibited in the National Museum of Education should be framed with more context, to let visitors reflect on what they were thought when younger and to remind us of what not to teach our future generations.

A visual analysis of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century educational tools written by Walhout & Dane (2020) goes into depth on some of the wall charts exhibited or in the collection of the Dutch National Museum of Education. What is often pictured in these is 'othering'. "In most wall charts,

indigenous women are featured as industrious, working women. Hence, they became the ‘other’, being the opposite of the white European housewife" (Walhout & Dane, 2020, p. 169). This served the purpose of creating an us versus them idea, as well as an economic purpose. They present a positive view towards colonialism, pictured in such a way that was suited for young children. These wall charts often were thus made to get the attention of young boys; to prepare them for life in the colony as soldiers or civil servants (Walhout & Dane, 2020, p. 173). "Negative aspects of expansionism, such as economic exploitation and atrocities towards the indigenous population, were not always shunned" (Walhout & Dane, 2020, p. 176). Some wallcharts from a series called 'Schoolplaten voor de Vaderlandse Geschiedenis' (School wall charts for Dutch History) were used for educational purposes until the 1970s (Walhout & Dane, 2020, p. 177). This generation therefore has to unlearn a lot of beliefs they were brought up with.

A reaction on the school wall chart ‘Mensenrassen in het klaslokaal (1911)’ (Human races in the classroom) written by Jacques Dane shows this as well. A public comment was left by Yvon, stating that she was very happy with the attention brought to this example. “I had learned the same thought process when I was young and I am convinced – after multiple exhibitions and lectures – that knowledge about the different races and showing the truth about methods used in history, is of essential importance to bring change in our thought process and our connected behavior!” (Yvon, 2020) Exhibitions showcasing wallcharts like these should get way more attention, according to her.

The five races of mankind, wallchart by G. Ellka. Publisher C.C. Meinhold und Söhne, Dresden, Germany, 1911. Collection Forschungsstelle Historische Bildmedien, Universität Würzburg, Germany.

The picture on the right shows the wallchart from Dane's article. This is a wall chart from Germany made in 1911, but it was also present in Dutch classrooms. “In light of colonialism, slavery, and genocide the title evokes a painful, ashamed association. We know what the horrible consequences are of this imagined superiority complex” (Dane, 2018).

The wall chart itself could maybe be seen as innocent, however, when images like these showing Eurocentric ideas are ‘fed’ to young children, they will carry these ideas for the rest of their lives. Clothes, jewelry, and face shapes show the differences between ‘primitive’ versus ‘civilized’ (Dane, 2018). Racist stereotypes on wall charts served "not only to justify economic superiority, but also as a central basis for the legitimacy of European colonial politics in Germany and the Netherlands" (Walhout & Dane, 2020, p. 175).

Teaching in the Netherlands was thus focused on recruiting people to go work in the Dutch East-Indies. Teachers were telling children how great the business dealings were, instead of explaining what had actually happened, for example. This was done through books and wall charts, mostly in the subjects history and geography. In the accompanying teacher manual colonial commodities played the leading role, not that extortion of other humans is morally wrong. “Acknowledgement of the wrongful actions the Netherlands committed was not present” (Dane, 2020, p. 10).

People have had issues with the lack of respect and honesty of the Netherlands about this timeframe for a long time now. It wasn’t until 2016 that the government acknowledged that there had been systematic and excessive violence against the population between 1945 and 1949 (Dane, 2020, p. 10).

The one-sided, pre-war image of Dutch East Indies caused a lot of stereotypes and prejudices to develop. Research done by Dane (2020, p. 11), points out that the French historic Marc Ferro in his *'The use and abuse of history, How the past is taught* (2003)' proved that our self-image and how we view others is mostly based on history and geography lessons we had as a child. These lessons have imprinted on us and will always stay with us. Due to this, a big part of our current opinions and emotions stem from our childhood and school years and therefore seems non-erasable. This can help explain why generations of Dutch people find it difficult to see the colonial history from the perspective of the oppressed side. Therefore, adding background to the observation that there is quite some resistance against cultural decolonization.

This is thus a very good reason to research formerly used methods of teaching. Learning about the issues present in those teaching methods could help the people who grew up with them to learn more about their world view.

These methods, like movies and works of art, should not be hidden from society and we should not pretend they have not existed. Presenting them respectfully in a museum could help people learn from our history and prejudices. The older generation who grew up with the ideas presented in the teaching methods of the past will probably not completely change their worldview through showing one colonial wallchart with a short explanation of the exploitation happening. However, when asking multiple critical questions, in, for example, the museum guide you can just walk around with, it could lead to critical thinking about what you have learned when you were young and frame those ideas in a new context. Maybe they could add a new perspective to their memories about the history and geography lessons from their past.

This also shows us how important schooling is in general. When these two subjects can have such an influence on one's life, they should fit the current view and educate the youth on all important matters, even the ones we are not proud of.

Institutional racism still has a lot of influence on our educations system, according to Anousha Nzume, writer of the book ‘Hallo Witte Mensen’ (Hello, white people). If a teacher tells you over and over again that your Dutch is not good enough, instead of praising you for speaking two languages, it will definitely affect you as a child, for example. Non-white people also get a lower advice about the level of education you can follow in Dutch high schools more often (Rosman, 2020, p. 14).

Concrete example exhibited in the National Museum of Education

When looking at a map of the Dutch East Indies form 1881, it looks quite normal and non-problematic. That is until you read the teacher's manual for the course geography where this map was used. Under the subheading 'population', multiple stereotypes can be found; "the people are smaller than Europeans, the nose is quite small, doesn't stick out, but it is straight and well-formed. In his speaking, he is slow and calm. He is susceptible to being polite, but that trait can be overshadowed by ruthless cruelty and a disdain for life, which make up the shadow side of the character of the Milesians. Especially when they are abusing opium ('amok-makers'), their savageness knows no boundaries." (Bos & Rijkens, 1881, p. 11). And "[...] with these people mainly desire for knowledge is absent, but it has to be acknowledged that the Milesians have gotten most elements of civilization from the Hindu, Arabians, and Europeans" (Bos & Rijkens, 1881, p. 11).

Wandkaart Nederlandsch Oost-Indië en Java (Map chart Dutch East-Indies and Java), 5e herziende druk, P. R. Bos / R. R. Rijkens, J. B. Wolters Groningen

Next to this, there are also more 'normal' geography things explained in the teacher manual. For example, individual islands (like Maluku, little Sunda islands, Java) were discussed; where they are located, what type of climate they have, etcetera. Yet what stands out is that this information is not used to just expand the children's knowledge about these islands, no, this information is used to learn which soil can be used for grain cultivation or to grow spices. Geography was used to teach kids which soil could be used for self-interest. "The Moluccas and Timor have a dry climate, due to which the ground is not really suited for grain cultivation, but is very much suited to grow spices. These spices grown here were the reason the Portuguese, and after them, the Dutch, were lured to the Indonesian archipelago" (Bos & Rijkens, 1881, p. 31).

Guidelines for all Museums

The ‘Raad van Cultuur’ (Council for Culture) gave an advice to the Netherlands in October 2020; give all colonial cultural heritage pieces back to countries of origin if it can be proven that these countries have lost these pieces involuntarily (Raad voor Cultuur, 2020). The report is available in Dutch and in English. The Dutch version came out first in 2020 and the English translation came out this year (Raad voor Cultuur, 2021).

This advice is about art objects that have been conquered during the colonial wars, or when Indonesia and Suriname were under the control of the Netherlands. However, it is not as easy as just that. That is why this committee is working on writing guidelines; how do you exhibit and where do you exhibit these pieces? Where do these pieces fit best and can shine in their full glory?

The council was very clear: historical injustices that took place in the colonial area cannot be undone, however, it is possible to contribute to the healing process (Raad voor Cultuur, 2020). The report states that the first step is acknowledgment; these objects were taken into possession against the will of the inhabitants of the original colonial areas. Repairment of injustices is not only realized by giving artworks back, but also through acknowledgment and taking responsibility (Raad voor Cultuur, 2020).

Requests to give back cultural goods not coming from countries that have been colonies from the Netherlands should also be heard, according to the new guidelines. Especially if they hold a special cultural, historical, or religious importance for the country of origin. However, those requests will not be honoured unconditionally (Raad voor Cultuur, 2020).

The advice of the council has influence on hundreds of thousands of objects. Mostly ceremonial weapons, flags, religious objects, and sometimes even human remains, according to Jos van Beuren, who is an independent expert on the restitution of colonial heritage (NOS, 2020a).

According to Susan Legene, professor of political history at the Vrije Universiteit, it is not as straightforward and easy to give artworks back. “It is more a political wish, because it just is not that easy” (NOS, 2020e). There are tens of thousands, maybe even hundreds of thousands of objects, and finding one categorical solution for those high numbers is very difficult (NOS, 2020e). The guidelines

by the Council for culture therefore are a good start, but are not end all be all. Hopefully, the council listens to the critical voices and keeps trying to improve their policies and research.

A model exhibition

In 'het Rijksmuseum', the Dutch National Museum, an exhibition about slavery was supposed to open very soon, but the pandemic prevents this currently. This exhibition took three years to complete and is more about what you cannot see instead of what you do see, as most tangible pieces of art with a colonial history are made by and for the rich at that time, so, the people in power. There are not a lot of colonial goods that have belonged to people who were formally enslaved, therefore, oral history is a majorly important addition to tangible art hanging on the walls.

Finding a balance between ethics and aesthetics

When asked about what the approach of this exhibition would be, an ethical or an aesthetic standpoint, Valika Smeulders, one of the curators for this exhibition and head of history at the Rijksmuseum answered that aesthetics would remain somewhat important, but that the museum was focussing on telling stories from multiple angles, like one finds in literature (Jaeger, 2021). Nowhere in a movie or book do you expect to find uncomplicated beauty, people would find that boring. There are also enough beautiful visuals to admire in the other parts of the museum. The exhibition will tell the story and provide context to the artworks, according to Smeulders. "With social media, audio-visual means and other such things we can make it very thrilling and humane" (Jaeger, 2021).

Here she makes an interesting case for the balance between aesthetics and ethics. Is this then how every museum should handle their exhibitions based on history that is not always accurately portrayed in works of art? It seems like a good way of handling the problem and this can be used as a point of departure when a story needs to be told instead of being shown.

Currently, the National Museum of Education contributes to the above-mentioned debate on whether objects should only be labeled in an artistic context, or whether other aspects (colonialism, ‘othering’) should be addressed. In the museum, this is done by providing context through public lectures, guided tours, blogs, publications, temporary exhibitions, and events. But the permanent exhibition of school wallcharts are shown first and foremost as artistic products (Walhout & Dane, 2020, p. 180).

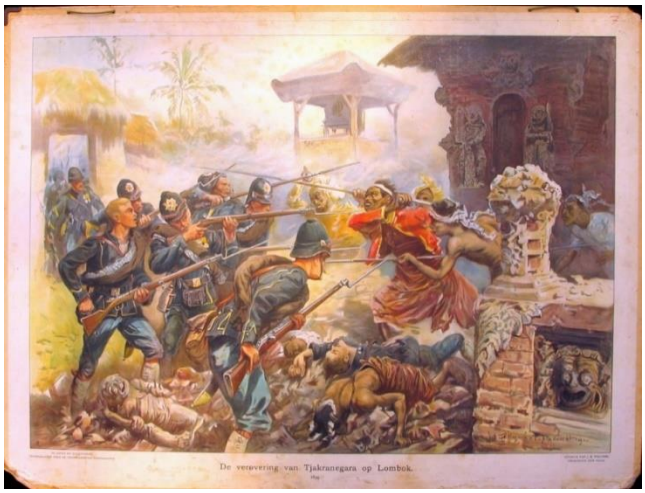
The role of museums in society

The idea that museums should have a societal or political stance is growing louder. The idea that a museum is something neutral in what they are offering seems quite outdated (Jaeger, 2021). Smeulders states that she thinks it is important to be a historical museum, to focus on history. But "what I want to keep neutral is the fact that visitors should feel free to come to their own conclusions about what has been showcased in the exhibition" (Jaeger, 2021). Museums fill the role of feeding the public debate with new information, but making excuses is up to the politicians, according to Smeulders. A lot of slavery history has not been told and/or shown yet, especially so open in a prestigious museum. So, this could be a model exhibition for other museums.

Second concrete example exhibited in the National Museum of Education

In the Dutch National Museum of Education, wall charts and maps about former colonies can be found. An example is 'De verovering van Tjakranegara of Lombok' (The conquest of Tjakranegara on Lombok). This wallchart pictures one of the last big colonial battles of the Dutch until the independence war (Dröge, 2021, p. 17). The Dutch army has a couple of tens of casualties while the army of the opposing side suffered several hundred casualties. 200 kilos of gold, 7000 kilos of silver, and a

multitude of crystals are taken from the palace of Mataram and Tjakranegara, and after taking everything of value, the remains are burned to the ground (Dröge, 2021, p. 21-22).



This information is not given, there is no context explained, only the title and when this wall chart was made is presented on the wall chart itself and in the museum guide.

The conquest of Tjakranegara on Lombok, 1894. Artist: Jan Hoynck van Papendrecht, 1911. Publisher J.B. Wolters Groningen. Inventory number H018.016 (110x83 cm). Collection Nationaal Onderwijsmuseum

Example from the collection

Another example from artworks in the collection is ‘Ver van huis’ (Far away from home), a booklet for children who could already read very well. It, again, may seem innocent or neutral. The everyday colonial life as seen through the eyes of a young boy is pictured. However, these school books justified the unbalanced power structures (Dane, 2020). 'Ver van huis' was a teaching method again designed to legitimize economic extortion and inequality based on gender, class, race, and religion.

Illustration by Cornelis Jetses from Ver van huis. Een vervolg op Ot en Sien (Far from home. A follow-up of Ot and Sien) by Jan Ligthart and H. Scheepstra. For the schools in the Dutch East Indies edited by A.F.Ph. Mann. Publisher J.B. Wolters, Groningen / The Hague, 1921 (second edition), page 47. Inventory Number 1052 E 2-7 (10x15 cm). © Noordhoff. Collection Nationaal Onderwijsmuseum, Dordrecht.

Are there alternatives to restitution of art works?

In the Rijksmuseum all exotic objects are placed in one corner of the museum; all different stories from different colonies are shoved into one story. "We don't really know what to do with our history. The proud catch from then now is a ‘clumsy’ question" (Dröge, 2021, p. 22).

In the late seventies, a large part of this collection was given back to Indonesia, with the idea behind it being that it belongs there instead of here. However, het Volkenkundig Museum (The museum of folk art) in Leiden still has one of the most important things taken in their possession; a diamond of 75 carats taken in the fight pictured in the wall chart 'The conquest of Tjakranegara on Lombok'. It is stored in their safe, so, it is not on display. Should this not also be returned to the rightful owner? If that happens it will very likely end up collecting dust somewhere in the back of the overflowing National Museum in Jakarta, thousands of kilometres from Lombok, according to Dröge (2021, p. 23). He thinks selling the diamond would be a better idea. That way the profits can be used to rebuild the cities that have still

not regained their strength. "A new pier to bring back some life would right our wrongs way more" (Dröge, 2021, p. 23).

This is an interesting approach and shows that there are alternative answers than the ones provided by the Council for Culture; return colonial artworks. Returning stolen goods seems to be the fairest option but maybe it will not be the most optimal choice every time. Looking at it case by case is probably the best option, though time and money constraints will probably prevent this. Choosing the most important pieces to examine if alternatives to 'just' returning the art work are feasible and desired, may have the greatest impact on the affected cultures and/or previous colonies.

The National Museum of Education stated that they are committed to featuring the downside of educational history prominently in the new strategic long-term policy plan (Walhout & Dane, 2020 p. 180), as well as stand for the worldwide fight against racism (Nationaal Onderwijsmusem, n.d.).

With these statements the museum shows a great deal of engagement with current societal problems, but certain updates need to be made to also actually show visitors and the rest of the world that this commitment remains.

Conclusion

The official advice – rules even – are already given by the Council for culture, which is thus the first point of departure. Advice based on opinions from different experts that we have encountered in this paper, people in different jobs and fields of interests, and voices from our society, is to place artworks in their historically correct surroundings, while adding critical questions and/or the perspective of our current society. Do not hide the past, but do not make people feel uncomfortable or experience racism again. Let museums enlighten every generation on how we should not treat each other instead of 'only' showcasing interesting art.

As we have seen with older movies, they should not be taken off from streaming platforms because we should not pretend that they don't exist. Like film expert Natalie Burgzorg said, this could be seen as silencing. She advised to still have them online, but add more context or something like a warning. Disney+ and HBO Max have implemented this measure already, like described earlier, and this can be translated to museums as well. Keep things (that are not requested to be given back) in the collection in the open, but add more. Context, a warning, an explanation, the historical framework, a critical question to let the museum visitor think for themselves, etcetera. This way no silencing of history or minority voices is done, while also 'forcing' people – in a good way – to learn from the difficult history.

Weighing interests

Some hold the opinion that what a museum wants is not of importance to this debate. The interests of museums or other possession holders cannot be weighing in on this discussion, that is just principally wrong according to Jacob Kohnstamm, head of the evaluation committee appointed by minister Ingrid van Engelshoven to evaluate the policy regarding returning artworks to their country of origin that we have been using since 2001. Kohnstamm made this statement about returning art stolen by Nazis to the heirs of the original Jewish owners. The righting of wrongs weighs heavier than any interests a museum might have is the conclusion of their evaluation report that was handed to minister van Engelshoven, minister of education, culture, and science (Hijmans, 2020). This is thus not an exact parallel, however, it does show how some people view museums that have things in their possessions that maybe are not rightfully theirs.

Kohnstamm also thinks that the same should be true for every type of artwork that has been taken against someone's will, especially colonial artworks (Hijmans, 2020). The Netherlands once was a

leading country in giving back art taken by the Nazis. However, in the last few years, a lot more criticisms have surfaced and now that reputation has been damaged. Important for the policy on restitution is the 'Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art', signed in 1998 by the Netherlands and 43 other countries. But now the Dutch policy is contradicting this act on one very important point, according to Kohnstamm. There is no structured research being done on origins and this leads to policies that do not feel transparent at all. Why a claim is approved or denied is based on fifteen official reports which are letters from ministers and state secretaries; completely unclear for someone who wants to know if their claim has any chance at all (Hijmans, 2020).

The committee spoke with some people who made claims and some gave very fierce criticisms. "Arrogant, bureaucratic, and absolutely not willing to work with you" (Hijmans, 2020). This added to the evaluation committee being very clear on their stance in the debate if a museum may take into account their own interests when considering whether to give back or keep an object. The balancing of interests is not necessarily in conflict with the 'Washington Principles', however, the evaluation committee states that one's focus should be primarily on the injustices committed and if and how these can be restored (Hijmans, 2020).

Even with committees who should be the first place to turn to and knowledgeable about the issues of restitution of stolen art, problems still arise and the Council for Culture needs to be checked by another independent committee. We thus see that some steps in the right direction have been made with at least having such a committee, however, there still is some way to go.

Advice specifically for the National Museum of Education

After consulting research from others, societies' opinions, and news articles, my advice to all museums and specifically the National Museum of Education is to provide (more) context and information next to the works of art. This can be tackled in multiple different ways; an audio tour, a small text written in a museum guide for every artwork individually, more texts next to the name of the artwork on the wall, an extra flyer or booklet that contains some information about a collection of artworks spread across the museum that fall into the same category, or a few critical questions on a wall as part of the collection to let visitors think about their views themselves. But something more than only showing colonial artworks, specifically the wallcharts, would be best.

Also always keep listening to the voices of people affected, especially when making an exhibition featuring colonial artworks or when updating guides, or anything to do with how to handle new ideas/policies that have to do with the colonial past. Here we can look at the slavery exhibition in the Rijksmuseum again; the most important committee that put together this exhibition consisted of two women of color and two white women who, all four, were qualified and suited for the position of curator and all brought something different to the table. They kept each other sharp and complement each other (Nieuw licht: Het Rijksmusem en de slavernij, 2021, 42:02-42:43). Which is important because exhibitions of sensitive materials must be done with “great tact and respect for the feelings of religious, ethnic or other groups represented”, according to a study done on exhibition ethics (Gazi, 2014).

Concrete plans

To put this research to use and make more of a concrete plan of action, I made three different types of advice. These three different ‘tiers’ of advice are based on how much money and effort can be put into making improvements. A complete transformation and putting in a large sum of money does not necessarily seem very feasible in the current pandemic state, however, I did want to put everything I gathered to use and just write down what I think would be the best-case scenario. What is most important is that issues like these are placed on the agenda and made a priority. If

contextualizing the colonial wall charts is placed on the agenda as a priority, I think a lot can be accomplished.

Most amount of effort and money

- Update the current museum guide, create a new one or find a different format that is more flexible than a printed museum guide. This guide should have a special section for all colonial artworks or a few sentences for each wallchart that give a short historical explanation. The museum guide then can function as a short explanation available for everyone.
- Expand the current audio tour. I think this is one of the best ways to make information more accessible. For example, more information can be given when you do not have to stand still and read a long text on a wall as this can become boring relatively fast. You can also seek out what you are interested in and get a few minutes of interesting explanations or stories about this art work, and skip what does not grab your attention. The audio tour can function as extra information for everyone interested, as an addition to the museum guide and go more in-depth on the difficult history attached.
- 'Hire' a social media/marketing intern who can help promote the audio tour and how to make it as accessible as possible for all ages. Now there are still a lot of practical difficulties with the audio tour and the biggest group of visitors who are a little older. But I think quite a few of the most common difficulties can be tackled by someone who is knowledgeable on how to reach all ages.

  Some examples that could help improve the accessibility that I can think of are: tickets need to be bought online as timeslots need to be reserved (during the pandemic). The confirmation email with the tickets seems like a great opportunity to promote and explain the audio tour. One of the biggest practical difficulties is that people need an app to listen to the tour. If there is a short step-by-step guide on which app you should download and the information that you should bring your earbuds in this email, it will reach everyone who comes to the museum. You could even go as far as making sponsored posts on Instagram or buying advertisements on YouTube to gain more younger visitors. I do not know how to calculate what could be gained or which platform is best, but I do think that promoting things like a new audio tour or a short clip from educational videos made by the museum's educator Stefan Vogels about the Nazi propaganda could be helpful to get more people interested to come to the museum when it opens again.

  Also set up an automatic email as a reminder to download the app the day before visiting.
- To make the audio tour more accessible for all ages, so, for people not comfortable using smartphones and/or apps, the volunteers working at the desk should get an explanation training. When they are comfortable with explaining how the app works, they can answer all questions people have before starting the tour or can even promote the tour when people validate their ticket at the register.

  Then for the people who do not understand how a smartphone or app works and are also not necessarily interested in figuring this out, a few very simple and inexpensive smartphones with the app already installed can be provided by the museum. Accompanied by a simple headset (for example from plastic so that it can be cleaned easily). Or, if allowed, use the iPods that are already in possession of the museum. These devices are also fit to install an app on and plug headphones in. They would be as user friendly as a simple inexpensive smartphone.
- When an audio tour is available, the question if a museum should focus on aesthetics or ethics can also be answered. This way everything visual can be mostly focussed on aesthetics, while the stories and background information to place the artworks in their context are not lost and/or take away from the visual experience. For example, long texts next to artworks are common in museums in Germany, but the experience of a museum then could turn more into reading a bookwork and seeing only a few interesting things.

- Plan an interview with someone who is an activist for colonial history and who can speak from experience or as expert to get feedback on plans before executing them.

Moderate spending of resources

- Make an addition to the existing audio tour because right now this tour does not cover the colonial wallcharts. This should not be too difficult because it is supposedly quite easy to add a few clips into the app. The writing and recording is the part that takes a bit more time and effort, but still seems manageable.
- Implement measures to make the audio tour more accessible, such as a short introduction on the available audio tour in the confirmation email and an audio tour section on the website containing information on which app to download and how it works etc., but no free headsets and phones provided by the museum. Also, no improvements need to be made to the museum guide because here the audio tour can be used as the complete package of information. No extra museum guide should be necessary, the old one could be used by visitors that want to know who made the wallchart and when, or could be left out because the guide is already quite old and most information is provided by listening to the audio tour.

Simple yet effective improvements

- Writing a short but stimulating text specifically about the colonial wallcharts to put on a flyer. This can contain a more general historical account of all the colonial wallcharts exhibited to not make the text too long. Or it can give context through a short historical explanation per wallchart and then, for example, number the wallcharts. The pamphlet can be ended with a few critical questions to stimulate the visitor to keep thinking about the implications this history has on us in our current society while walking around.
- Laminate these pamphlets and place them at the counter. When tickets are checked, this can be given to the visitor with their ticket or register employees can explain that it is available if people are interested and they can just take these.
- In corona times it would maybe be better to not laminate them and to let people take this paper home with them or recycle it. However, for the longevity and showing that this is an important topic that will be made more permanent, laminating the flyer when possible again, would be better.
- I think this can be written, printed, and laminated in a few days if wanted. Jacques Dane, head of collection and research, has already written multiple in-depth articles about colonialism in general as well as visual analysis about the wallcharts in the museum. Because of this he seems very much suited to write this pamphlet.
- It would be great if the museum could also reach out to another activist, expert, or a public figure, to work together on this flyer with someone whose voice is otherwise not always represented.
- A free extra pamphlet makes the information very accessible for those interested. It gives context, information, and stimulation to the visitors, as well as legitimacy to the museum's claims that they are committed to featuring the downside of educational history prominently in the new strategic long-term policy plan. With a flyer people do not have to stand still in front of a wall with text, they can just take the flyer and read while walking or just read parts whenever they want to and not be tied to standing still in one place.

This is also what I as outsider, but with an interdisciplinary social education specialized in cultural processes, think. However, I still have a lot less knowledge on how these things normally are tackled than the people already working in the museum. Requesting subsidies and asking ambassadors to

become a part of the project or 'struikelstenen'[3] (stumble stones) are other options that came from people working in the museum which are also great options that could be looked at.

Recommendations for further and/or personal research

Anousha Nzume, author of 'Hallo, witte mensen' (Hello, white people) is now working on a second book about the inequality in schools. This book will contain new up-to-date information given from a perspective that matters and has been overlooked for a long time. Maybe this will also give new insights about objects, books, wall charts, manuals, etcetera that are already exhibited in the museum. "How is it possible that children with the same Cito-scores will get a different advice for secondary education? Color and class appear to influence this decision more often than we want to admit. Nzume asks scientists, professionals, parents, and children" (bol.com, n.d.). This book is recommended for everyone working in the education field, for policymakers that determine the future of thousands of children, and for everyone who wants to learn more and broaden their perspectives on the inequality in education. The book is called 'Hoe was het vandaag?' (How did it go today?) and will launch on the 24th of August of this year.

Qualitative research I wanted to do during my internship, but have not been able to execute due to the museum being closed was asking visitors what they see, what stands out, and what they already know about the colonial wall charts exhibited in the museum. The purpose would be to gather insight into what would be clearly missing as information from people's knowledge or what should be pointed out because people do not see this as important details in the wall chart themselves. Maybe this can still be done when the museum eventually is opened again as visitor research about colonial artworks.

There is also an actual company that gives professional advice on how to build inclusive visitor experiences; Guide-ID. They give museums advice on how to create a more inclusive environment, which mostly takes form in audio tours in their opinion. "We believe in undivided attention for your collection and its stories. An audio-only tour makes sure the visitors' full attention is directed to the object itself. Let their imagination run free while listening to the tales of your exhibition" (Guide-ID, n.d.). They, for example, advise on how to make audio tours more inclusive for deaf people. Free webinars are given about how to create an audio tour attractive to every target audience. These could be used to gain more insight before starting the process of extending the audio tour.

The museum week is 19-25 April and the theme is freedom. This year it is all about online 'shoutouts' to museums and their online collections. What could be nice is promoting here that the National Museum of Education is working on making a pamphlet about their colonial wallcharts (or more but this seems more reasonable in such a short time) to acknowledge the difficult history behind these and to let visitors think about their own experiences in school.

[3] A project from the German artist Gunter Demnig where he places engraved stones in front of houses where people have died as result of the Nazi regime. It is a monument spread out across all of Europe to honour the victims.

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