Words Matter

Matter

An Unfinished Guide
to Word Choices
in the Cultural Sector

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Words and the norms around language are constantly changing. Being aware of why and how these changes come about is important if we are to be inclusive institutions.

Stijn Schoonderwoerd is General Director of the National Museum of World Cultures (NMVW) and the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam.

Foreword

BY GENERAL DIRECTOR

Stijn Schoonderwoerd

Today in the Netherlands, public institutions are under close scrutiny from diverse corners of society as to whether, and how, they address the colonial past or deal with questions and claims about (national) identity. Some argue that these institutions are much too reluctant to address what the colonial past means today and the role they have played in it. Others criticize even such considerations, let alone actual change, as shown by the recent controversy after the Dutch Broadcast Foundation (NOS) announced that it would no longer use the word "*blank*" and would replace it with "*wit*."

Museums, although they are still often seen as places solely dedicated to beautiful things, and therefore as neutral and non-political spaces, are players in the social and political arena too. The politically infused media storm, which even included reactions from the Prime Minister on Twitter, in response to the Mauritshuis's decision to make minor adjustments to their displays, clearly shows that the work of museums has, arguably now more than ever, gained a political dimension.

But that controversy is not all bad, and maybe is not bad at all. Because museums *do* have a role to play in the public domain, in shaping how we see the world and interpret what is happening around us. Museums are visited by literally millions of people who may be challenged to reflect on our history and to think about our future. They have knowledge and

experience that, when shared with others, can contribute to making that future better for all.

One of the areas in which museums should have a lot of experience is the use of words. They use language to describe objects and the makers of these objects and/or their countries and cultures. Museum staff know through their practice that the choice of words can be sensitive.

For us, as a museum that deals with cultures from across the world and that has the task of representing these diverse cultures with integrity, it has become a necessity to be self-critical about the types of narratives we develop and the words we use. We have come to question our perspectives and our practices of marketing and display, and seek to include diverse voices. In doing so, we have had to think about the words or phrases that are sensitive to particular groups, that can cause offense, that elide important context, and that are understood as derogatory.

That words and norms around language are constantly in transition can cause confusion and discomfort to those accustomed to these words; this is also true within museums. But society changes, and language changes with it. Our objects may be timeless, but the ways we speak about them are not. But precisely which words are these? And, more importantly, *why* are particular words understood as derogatory or offensive, and by whom?

These questions, as we have experienced in our museum practice, often don't have easy answers. Therefore, we felt that we needed to offer our exhibition makers, curators,

marketers and educators more guidance on word use. So we produced a list of words, an explanation of why a particular word is considered sensitive or contested, and alternative terms that may be used in our museum practice.

After having been asked a number of times by other museums for advice on this matter, we became aware that our efforts could be useful to others in the field. This led to the idea for this publication.

Compiling such a list is not a simple matter. The realization that there is something "sensitive" with a word is one thing, but explaining why that is the case requires care. In many cases it is all about context. Our list should therefore not be regarded as a clear-cut list of "bad" words and "good" words. Our aspiration is not at all to police word choices. It is to promote greater awareness within our sector of the meaning behind certain words, so our choices are more conscious and informed.

There is an additional disclaimer: this list is neither comprehensive nor finalized. We remain convinced that this book will never be complete; words will need to be added and our descriptions of why certain words may be sensitive may also need revision. This is a *work in progress,* nothing more and nothing less than the results of our efforts thus far. Now we invite others to help in the further development and refinement of this guide. We therefore expect and welcome reactions from every quarter. Let us know what you think, what can or should be added or removed, what may need revising. In this way we can work together to update the current version. Although this publication has been prompted by issues related

to Dutch language use, our museum operates in an international arena and thus the publication is bilingual. We hope that this publication is useful for, and we invite comments from, colleagues outside the Netherlands.

"Work in progress." This classification also applies to a number of other projects that are central to the National Museum of World Cultures' current working practice, which include attracting a broader and more diverse range of audiences, strengthening the diversity of our staff, developing a framework for rethinking questions related to the return of cultural objects, conducting provenance research on colonial heritage, developing new organizational models, and to deepening our experience with the de-accessioning of large collections.

We are regularly asked to speak on these subjects and to share our experiences with other museum professionals. Consequently, we are planning to work together with our colleagues to share knowledge and develop further publications. This publication, then, is the first in a series that we give the appropriate title "Work in Progress."

Now, to return to the sensitive words. I have already stated that context and nuance play an important role here. To emphasize this, we start this publication with a number of short articles about language and word use, especially in the context of museums. With this we aim to provide different perspectives and more background information about why words matter. After these, the list follows.

We welcome your thoughts, suggestions and criticims.

Wallcharts for teaching in anthropology, ethnography & geography, by W. von Steiner (after photograph by Prof dr. M. Futterer) circa 1905. Colored lithograph on paper, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.

Words Matter

BY

Wayne Modest

Recent controversy in the Netherlands surrounding whether museums should change the titles of some of their paintings and refrain from using discriminatory, derogatory and racist words in wall texts or catalogues is in part the lead up to this publication. The emotionally and politically charged nature of the discussions in the media surrounding such proposed changes should persuade anyone in doubt that *words matter,* that language matters. This is not an issue for just a small group of experts.

The suggestion that some words are outmoded, even racist, struck a chord with a broad and diverse group of people, from academics and journalists to members of the general public. For some, however, "meddling" with language is nothing less than an act of political correctness, an oversensitive response, evidence of a sentimentality to be derided. For others, it is an attempt at rewriting history. One commentator in the discussion in the press explained that while she valued her "non-White" friends, she could not come to terms with them *always trying to change history.*

Yet for those in favor of such changes, changing words is not about changing history. For them it is about removing from the museum's vocabulary—and from the broader societal vocabulary—words that emerged as part of racist and discriminatory discourses, which, they argue, have shaped in harmful ways how certain groups are perceived and

represented. For them, paying attention to language means acknowledging that the language we use affects whether groups feel a sense of belonging to society. This, then, is a battle over representation, recognition and respect.

The media attention to this topic aside, such a discussion is by no means new, especially in ethnographic museums. Indeed, for museums like the Tropenmuseum, Museum Volkenkunde and the Africa Museum—museums that share a history with both the field of anthropology and Europe's colonial project, and that have claimed to study and represent "other" cultures—questions about the importance of words, *about how words matter,* are present and ongoing concerns. In fact, working with ethnographic collections today, one is always aware of the shadows of colonial categories and of the critiques of words (and images) long voiced by those we try to represent. Indeed, it is not just words that matter: the perspectives or the position from which one writes, or displays, also matter.

Culturally specific terms, such as "**Eskimo**"—used by some of the people they describe—have sustained longstanding critique. Similarly, we now know that terms such as "**Caucasian**" and "**Negro**" came into widespread use as part of racial sciences. These terms reproduce the stereotypes that emerged under colonialism and they continue to shape how people previously described in this way are viewed.

Ethnographic museums have a history of trying to address problematic terminology. We recognize that meanings may change, as happens when the groups such terms describe voice resistance to them or re-appropriate them, turning

their meanings upside down. Can the word "**tribe**" be used today, and, if so, whom does it describe? Why is "tribe" not normally associated with Western Europeans in the same way it is with other groups of people across the world? Which groups are **Indigenous** or **Aboriginal** and which are not, and where do those terms come from? Who is included in or excluded from "**non-Western**," "**traditional,**" "us" and "them"? Is "**disability**" the right term to use to describe people who are less able? And what is the correct pronoun to describe someone who identifies as **transgender**?

These are the words and issues that this publication addresses, beginning from the premise that *words matter*. We consider here some of the most contested words in the vocabulary of museum practice, many of which are part of our everyday language, at least in the Netherlands. Some of the words we examine in detail, probing their history, how their meanings have changed over time and how they are understood today. In many instances, we offer alternatives to contested words or ideas for how best to use such words.

This publication is primarily a tool of empowerment, a suggestion for how to make our way through the political and social terrain of word use in museums. We hope that museum staff will use it to inform their writing of wall texts and the cataloguing of objects. We also hope that it will support educational and programming departments as they develop their offerings for our audiences.

The publication is also intended as a corrective to our earlier misrepresentations that may have reinforced stereotypes of peoples and cultures. In this sense, we hope that its impact

reaches beyond the walls of the museum. Undeniably, the demands for change issued by diverse groups, to which the museum is responding, are also broader demands for a more inclusive society. The book should, therefore, also be read as supporting museums as they respond to the rapidly changing society in which we live and as they strive to become more inclusive institutions.

We do not expect that the publication will be read in full. Rather, it is written as a pocket manual. On consulting this publication, the reader should be able to make more informed choices about the words they choose, knowing the sensitivities of particular words as well as their possible effects on their intended publics.

Paying attention to words means acknowledging that the language we use affects whether a person or a group feels excluded or included, whether they feel a sense of belonging to society. This is about representation, recognition and respect.

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Michiel van Musscher, Thomas Hees with his Nephews Jan and Andries Hees and a Servant, 1687. Oil on canvas. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

WHAT'S IN A TITLE?

The issue of terminology is a complex one; there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. While we can generalize, each object presents a unique case with a specific complexity. Take for example this painting, entitled: *Portrait of Thomas Hees, with His Nephews Jan and Andries Hees and a Servant.*

This was painted in the Netherlands. It is likely that Thomas Hees, a Dutch ambassador, took the servant (who he also gave the name Thomas) with him when he returned from his stay in Africa, where the servant Thomas most likely had been enslaved. But as slavery was officially forbidden in the Netherlands, Thomas could not have had the legal status of a slave, and was instead considered a servant.

Should we follow the painting's title and call him a servant? Or, should we acknowledge the fact that his life in many respects was similar to that of an enslaved person, as he had no way of changing his status and leaving Hees? I can recall a caption in a catalogue from the Figures of Empire exhibition at the Yale Center for British Art where they state:

There was considerable variation in how eighteenth-century Britons understood the legal status of slavery in England. For that reason, the distinction between free and enslaved servants was often deliberately left unclear, both in everyday life and in the realm of rep-resentation. For example, contemporaries frequently

used the term "servant" when referring to enslaved Africans. Written archives generally are unhelpful when trying to be precise about these distinctions… The one clear signifier of slavery in British art of this period is the slave collar. These iron or silver neck braces often were inscribed with their owners' name or coat of arms, and carried padlocks. They frequently were advertised for sale along with dog collars. Not all slaves were made to wear collars. However, we can be quite certain that anyone who is shown wearing one in the portraits dis-played here was intended to be understood as property, and thus, as a slave. In this exhibition, we therefore have described any figure shown wearing a metal collar as enslaved.

Was the situation in the Netherlands comparable? To answer that question, more research is needed. Following this we could adopt a convention to use the category of servant or enslaved servant, when we can confirm his or her unfree status.

As far as I am concerned, we as a museum should at the very least recognize Thomas's presence. We should also include his name, if known, like we do for Hees's nephews, Jan and Andries. Perhaps identifying him as either "his enslaved servant, Thomas" or "his servant Thomas" might add the necessary complexity while acknowledging his given name.

There is pressure to hold on to historical records in order to preserve the history and use of notions such as tribe and race in museum labels... The desire to stop the perpetuation of administrative racism is met with the desire to document this history.

Ciraj Rassool is Professor of History and Director of the African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

Museum Labels and Coloniality

BY

Ciraj Rassool

From the moment of their acquisition, cultural artifacts and artworks are subject to administrative systems. Like a kind of birth certificate, the first museum records of these objects usually contain information about their acquisition and provenance and sometimes about who made them. Such information was seen to add value and a sense of authenticity to an object, making such "birth certificates" objects of curatorial and scholarly interest.

In recent years, such records of origin and acquisition, and further records of conservation, exhibition and loan, have become even more significant for researchers studying object biographies. The history and cultural politics of artifact labeling, considered as part of the administrative and social life of objects and collections, have varied in different types of museums. Ethnographic museums and museums with anthropology collections, for example, have their own history of object labeling, characterized by the practice of attributing the work to a group or tradition or **"tribe"** rather than to an individual. Similarly, artifacts are often placed into tribal or **ethnic** arrangements for storage and display.

Just as tribe has been an important concept for classifying objects in ethnographic museums, it was also a key governmental concept used to classify and govern the peoples such objects were thought to represent. Tribe also became a unit of colonial disciplines through which people and artifacts were

studied and became subjects of collecting and preservation projects, which sought to rescue people and their material (and immaterial) culture from disappearance.

Museums of ethnography and cultural history have for some time now posed questions about the labels of their objects, as part of increasing awareness of the colonial history of their acquisition. Some, like the Fowler Museum of Cultural History in Los Angeles, have sought to correct the ethnic labels of some of their artifacts, which may have acquired erroneous attribution through the chain of acquisition and transmission through collections. The tribal category "Zulu," for example, came to be applied not merely to the artifacts of Nguni speakers but also to artifacts from all across southern Africa. This conflation appears to be part of a long history of complex colonial processes of trade, conquest and resistance that saw an ever-expanding category of "Zulu" and a deepening desire for "Zulu" material culture in the wake of the Battle of Isandlwana in 1872.

Other museums have set about removing labels that are objectionable because they reflect categories of conquest. This is the case with the Tropenmuseum, Museum Volkenkunde and the Afrika Museum, all part of the National Museum of World Cultures in the Netherlands. Such changes are, in part, a response to public calls to recognize societal diversity and to "decolonize" public institutions, and sometimes may also reflect wider tensions between the legacies of colonial collecting and current scholarly trends.

Many museum collections continue to carry the offensive labels that were assigned during object acquisition. For the

South African context from which I write, labels such as **"Kaffir,"** the colonial label for Nguni speakers in the Eastern Cape at the time of their nineteenth-century conquest by the British, present a challenge to museums. In these cases, removing old labels is part of a desire to show respect for the societies from which such objects have come. Yet there is also pressure to hold on to the historical record, in order to preserve the history of such notions of tribe and **race** as they were used in labeling. The desire to stop the perpetuation of administrative racism is met with the desire to document this history.

Building on the notion of "*entribement*" (placing people into tribes based on ideas of incommensurable differences), some scholars have called for the study of *museum entribement*, which would encompass the processes of inventing tribes and classifying groups and artifacts with tribal labels. Carolyn Hamilton, Nessa Leibhammer and their colleagues undertook an interventionist study of such archival and collecting histories, which they called "Tribing and Untribing the Archive."[1] This and similar projects are a significant part of the effort to reassess the meaning and value of colonial collections and labels. Yet it is also possible, perhaps, to go even further by rethinking the intellectual framework of collecting institutions. More than just a term used in the past to govern people and order artifacts, "tribe" remains part of a colonial discourse, one that lives on in seemingly benign forms of administrative and documentary management.

Labels are not merely attestations of authenticity. They reflect and re-iterate the discourses of society and the object, and they concern the relationship between collections and living

cultures.[2] To fully understand how labels matter we must come to appreciate the interconnected histories of physical and cultural anthropology, and how disciplines and discourses were expressions of how people and objects were governed. Changing labels needs to be part of a larger project of reconsidering the museum itself as an institution that categorizes and orders knowledge.[3]
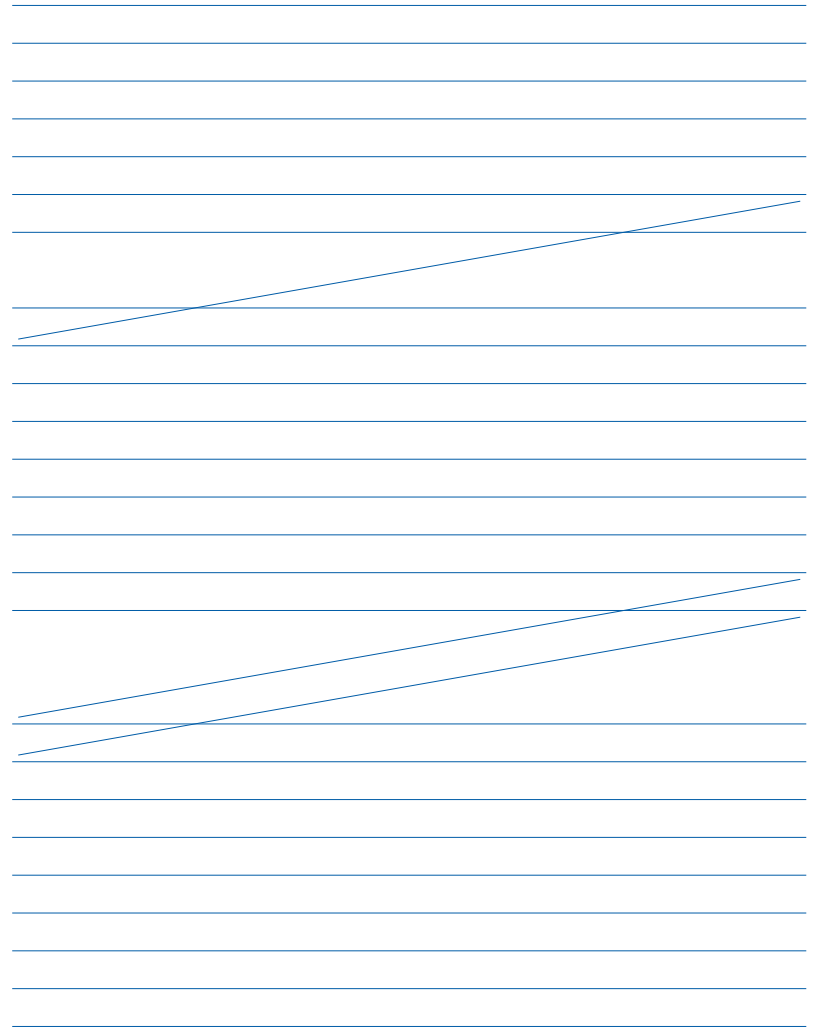
1 Carolyn Hamilton and Nessa Leibhammer, eds. *Tribing and Untribing the Archive: Identity and Material Record in Southern KwaZulu-Natal in the Late Independent and Colonial Periods.* 2 volumes (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2016).

2 Sally Price, 'Alternative Authenticities (and Inauthenticities)'. In *Creating Authenticity: Authentication Processes in Ethnographic Museums,* ed. Alexander Geurds and Laura van Broekhoven (Leiden: Museum Volkenkunde, 2013), 135–47.

3 Paul Landau. *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400 to 1948* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Leroy Vail, ed. *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey, 1989).
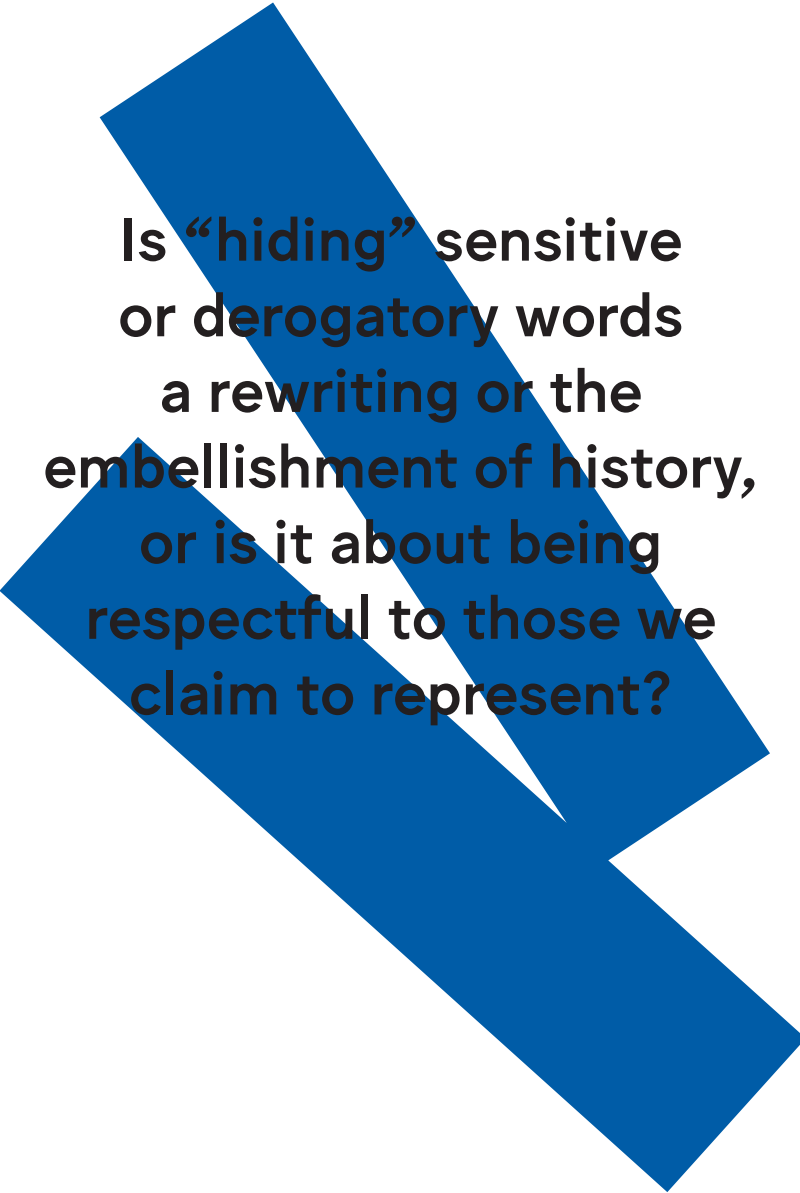
Pair of calf bands. Indonesia.
Before 1889. Animal skin, rattan.
Royal Zoological Association
Natura Artis Magistra.
Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.

WORDS OUT OF TIME

The challenges that we face in registering objects and documenting them are numerous. Undoubtedly, they differ for different museums, for different collections. Of course, like many other museums we have issues with outmoded and derogatory words; we could even say that within ethnographic museums these challenges are greater than in most other museums. Yet, there are two other subtle but important issues related to temporality and perspectives that I want to mention: the choice of verb tense in describing past practices, and the use of diminutives.

It goes without saying that cultures change over time; so should the way we write about them. Yet, you often find in a database or exhibition texts that, even if unintentional, present some peoples as always being in the past or suggest that their cultural practices are unchanging. Take, for example, this description of a pair of calf bands in the database of the National Museum of World Cultures, where the text reads: "These calf straps are worn as dignity signs by men

who have distinguished themselves as headhunters." The use of the present tense suggests not only that these ornaments are still worn but also that headhunting is something that is currently practiced, when in fact the practice ceased in the mid-19th century. The anthropologist Johannes Fabian describes this as writing in the "ethnographic present," which represents the "Other" as always out of time. Texts such as this can be found in many object databases.

A second example is the use of words like "hutje," in Dutch to describe people's houses, which has the effect of locating them in a different time and marking them as simple and childlike. Why are some people's houses hutjes, while others' are not? Do we use the term consistently to describe the same kinds of houses? This use of the diminutive, which implies that such structures are somehow less valuable, can be found in more general usage as well: take for example how we describe grown women as "meisjes" (girls).

Is "hiding" sensitive or derogatory words a rewriting or the embellishment of history, or is it about being respectful to those we claim to represent?

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ESSAY

Being True to the Catalogue

BY

Marijke Kunst

Recording the many traditions of naming and categorizing museum objects, collection databases often contain words and phrases that express stereotypes about, are disrespectful to, or are outright offensive toward the people and cultures they try to document. Museum staff do not, typically, intend to perpetuate derogatory language, but instead use the terminology that was conventional at the time of documentation. As the other essays in this publication suggest, what is thought to be appropriate changes over time.

Photographers, authors, publishers, curators, dealers and cataloguers, among many others, give titles to museum objects, and these are used within the documentation system and in exhibitions and website texts. The database, with its archival function, preserves the original title of every object. Within a museum's collection database, and especially those of ethnographic museums, questionable words are mostly found in the (sub)titles or description fields.

From at least the 1990s, digitization projects within museums have struggled with what to do with sensitive terminology. For some museums, the process of digitizing collections and making them publicly accessible through the internet included the wholesale transfer of each object's data (origin, description, context, etc.) from old inventory cards and catalogues. The decision to do so was not about being true to the language of the object's historical context but a more practical

concern: "cleaning up" the language of the archive before digitizing and publishing the data would be a time-consuming process.[4] After putting the information online, the museum invited viewers to take a critical eye and help improve their documentation. For other museums, a more cautious approach was adopted, with staff reviewing all the data before opening the archive up to a broader public. While it is not within the scope of this brief essay to judge which method is better, I wish to highlight that museums must make choices in making their historical documentation accessible.

These 1990s attempts were in many ways nothing special, but reflected the ongoing work of museum documentation professionals to ensure that object data in databases are substantiated, standardized and accessible—and thus retrievable. As museums increasingly make their collections accessible online, often by providing a link to the database on their website, identifying and finding alternatives for inappropriate words has increasingly become part of this process. The question that arises is: what information should be made accessible for whom? Should the same information be shared with researchers as with the general public? This raises a further question: Does "hiding" sensitive or derogatory words limit access to the full history of objects, effectively distorting or embellishing history?

At the National Museum of World Cultures, we distinguish between the data that is shown on the collections website of the museum and what is embedded in the database. As a document of the history of the object, including how the object was described and categorized, the collection's database includes all of the various titles that the object has held over

time. An object's original title—on the (back of the) object itself, for example—is given in quotation marks. For the public interface, however, the museum has chosen a presentation title, which may be different from the titles on the catalogue card, for example. While offensive words are not included in the presentation tile, the original titles, which may contain offensive words, are preserved in the database itself and thus remain accessible to the public. The National Museum of World Cultures also intends to include explanations on the collection's site about the museum's decision to replace derogatory words with more respectful terminology.

In the mid-'90s, ethnographic museums in the Netherlands began developing an ethnological thesaurus, which is used to standardize and make retrievable information in collection databases. The strength of this thesaurus lies in its having or providing possible terms for describing things, not only preferred terms but also synonyms, homonyms, antonyms, alternatives, and older or **indigenous** terms. This enhances the retrieval of objects. On the collection's website of our museum, people can search the thesaurus but derogatory terms will not be visible; search results will point to preferred terms.

One good example is the term **"Eskimo"**: if someone searched the thesaurus for it, the preferred "Inuit" would be presented in the search results. This happens because the word "Eskimo" is connected in the thesaurus to the preferred term "Inuit," and therefore all objects labeled with "Eskimo" and "Inuit" will be included in the results. Even if someone doesn't know that they should search for "Inuit," they still get all of the related results. An explanation might appear

alongside the results, detailing why a person might find "Inuit" objects during a search for "Eskimo."

Continuing with this example, it is important to note that while a search for "Eskimo" will display "Inuit," this does not mean that the original term is deleted; it remains within the structure of the database and thesaurus. Researchers who are interested in the history of cataloguing or naming of these collections can retrieve all of the titles or keywords ever used through the collection's database or by visiting and doing research at the museum itself. "Eskimo" is only one of many such terms that could be searched in ethnographic collections; the glossary included here includes many other possible terms. What is important is that presentation titles offer museum professionals the possibility of giving the public access to our collections without using derogatory, sensitive or discriminatory words.

This is only one possible solution, and we know that they are many others. What it does, though, is to show that attending to language is not about making history look better than it was—"cleaning up" history. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the meanings and connotations of words change over time, and that as a public institution, we want to ensure that every visitor and researcher feels included and is not offended when they engage with our collections. Similarly, we want to raise awareness of these issues more broadly for the public as well. This, we believe, is part of our responsibility as public museums.

4 See Peeren's essay in this publication.

Practices of exclusion are not always overt or conscious; they are sometimes implicit and embedded in the structures of our everyday language and may arise simply because we take our own perspective for granted.

Simone Zeefuik is a writer and organizer whose work centers on representation and inclusion.

Perspectives Matter

BY

Simone Zeefuik and Wayne Modest

Whether insidious or innocent, conscious or "unintended," acts of exclusion achieve similar ends: they challenge the idea that certain people belong to a given group or society. Practices of exclusion are not always overt or conscious; they are sometimes implicit and embedded in the structures of our everyday language, for example, and they may arise simply because we take our own perspective for granted.

Museums too enact such exclusionary practices, not only in whom they employ or attract through their doors but also in their use of language. Indeed, many museums still claim that they present objective, scientific or neutral histories, an assertion that is often belied by the assumptions conveyed by their texts, both in exhibitions and in educational and marketing products. Dividing lines are drawn when using words such as "we" and "they," "our" and "their," "here" and "there," all of which define who is regarded as one of "us" and who is one of "them."

Unfortunately, the use of exclusionary language is common in many situations. Think about what might be presumed when a stranger is asked, "Where are you from?" What presumptions are made explicit in a statement like "Go back to your own country"? These statements are so often repeated that "we" have come to think of them as normal or innocent.

Typically asked of **Black** and other **people of color**, "Where are you from?" is often presented as an innocent act of curiosity. But a simple answer giving the name of the city where one lives, such as Tilburg or Amsterdam, is rarely considered to be a sufficient response, as this will be followed by: "But where are you *really* from?" This emphatic use of "really" precludes Black and other people of color from "being from" the Netherlands. Irrespective of whether the person was born in the Netherlands, has parents and grandparents born in the Netherlands, or is a naturalized Dutch citizen, their claim to belonging is brought into question. Until one replies with the name of an elsewhere—Martinique, Rwanda, Senegal, West Papua, Bonaire, Sudan, Djibouti, Angola or Yemen—the question is considered unanswered.

Even more exclusionary are commands like "Go back to your own country" and phrases like "non-Dutch appearance." A statement almost exclusively directed at Black and other people of color, "Go back to your own country" is an insult, often in response to criticisms of the Netherlands or Dutch customs. Recently, a museum professional working at a major Dutch museum, who had co-curated an exhibition about the Netherlands' colonial history, was told by a Facebook user that he should "go back to [his] own country" if he did not like how things were done in the Netherlands. Despite being born in Groningen to a Dutch parent, his perceived racial identity and his critical position on Dutch history were presumed to preclude him from claiming the Netherlands as his and having a say in what the Netherlands is or should be.

This statement is even made to Black and other people of color from St Eustatius, Bonaire and Curacao, islands that
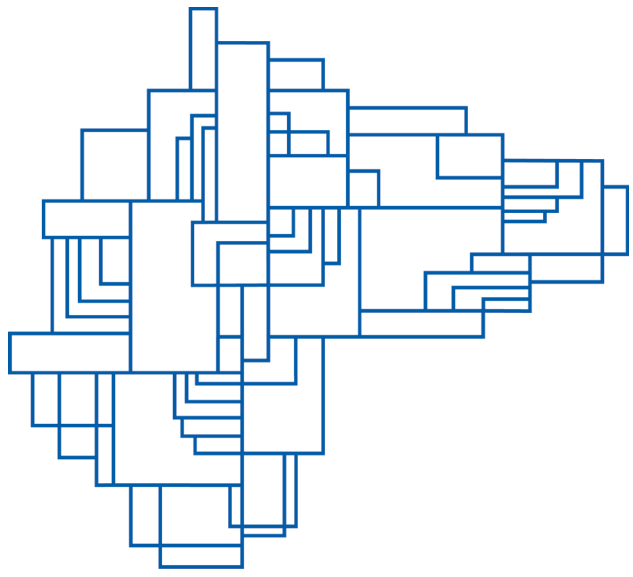
through colonialism remain part of the Dutch Kingdom. Such a statement questions the claims of people of color to belonging in the Netherlands. Moreover, it points to the precarious citizenship of formerly colonized people and recent migrants, and the limits of their inclusion in society.

Similarly, describing someone as having a "non-Dutch appearance" is exclusionary. It is commonly used in a negative context, for example, in the news to describe a non-White person accused of a crime or disruptive behavior. But what does it mean to look or behave Dutch? This use of "non-Dutch appearance" has also turned up in museum texts. Take for example, the caption below, included in an exhibition some ten years ago. The curator describes in detailed art historical terms the image, its main protagonists, and other attributes of the painting. In describing the **servant** in the painting the curator writes:

> *The most striking element is the black page who is in the process of walking out of the picture frame. His un-Dutch appearance is stressed not only by the color of his skin but by his turban and earring. His necklet, like the dog's collar, shows that he belongs to the family; the spectator should be in no doubt that this dark handsome young man is a slave to be proud of.*

What is it, specifically, that is un-Dutch about his appearance? Why should his skin color make him look non-Dutch? From the way this phrase is used, both in everyday speech and in museum texts, it is clear that to have a Dutch appearance is to be White.

Yet museum texts that exclude, misrepresent or discriminate are often not so overt. Were oppressed and colonized peoples in the Americas and in Africa fighting to regain their freedom "rebels" or "freedom fighters"? Were the wars fought between Indonesia and the Netherlands between 1945 and 1949 the "police actions" or the "War of Independence and Sovereignty"? Is "police actions" not written from the perspective of the colonizer, the Netherlands, and not from those fighting for their freedom? "Police actions" is a particularly one-sided perspective on what was colonial subjugation, eliding the violence perpetrated by the Netherlands.

Many texts still do not take adequate stock of the multiplicity of perspectives people bring. Take for example the wall text in one of Amsterdam's main museums, which is illustrated with an image of the first Dutch constitution of 1798, celebrating this as the turning point in the Netherlands' institutionalization of equality. But for whom was this equality guaranteed? Since the Dutch did not formally abolish slavery until 1863 (and then extended it for ten more years), was there equality for the enslaved?

Such is the language used by many museums. It is a language that creates or carries categories of us and them, we and they, based on a presumed understanding of who is Dutch and who is not. Such language talks about (and seldom, sadly, with) Black people and other people of color, making clear not only who is involved in creating such exhibits but also who is expected to view them. Perspectives matter.

AFRICA IS NOT A COUNTRY

Logo of Africaisacountry.com blog. With the courtesy of Remeike Forbes (designer)

This book explores specific words that are regarded as difficult or exclusionary, important concerns for us in our museum. Yet there are further issues to consider beyond the use of sensitive words. For example, one thing that I find important is the image of Africa that we have, and moreover, how we represent the continent in our museums. How often have we heard the phrase "In Africa they do..." this or do that? I have not only heard this in presentations but I have also seen it reproduced in numerous academic publications. Influenced by the media and by popular representations, the African continent is often reduced to a single country, rather than the fifty-four countries that comprise it, with their vast diversity of languages and cultures. Moreover, the common idea of Africa restricts the continent to sub-Saharan Africa, thereby excluding Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, for example.

Presenting the African continent as one coherent space means that one not only denies the differences between the many nation states on the continent but also ignores the many diasporic communities that are now spread throughout the globe. While these communities share histories of forced migration and displacement, they are anything but homogenous.

This may also be the case for other continents, but in my experience, such generalizations are very often projected onto Africa and build on earlier stereotypes of the continent as "dark" and "in need of development". Words matter, yes. But we also need to decolonize our understanding of what Africa is and how to represent it. **Africa Is Not a Country.**

All the words we use today have histories of use that accompany them and influence their meaning, beyond our will. We cannot just "clean up" words, we have to also address the worldviews they represent.

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Language Cannot Be "Cleaned Up"

BY

Esther Peeren

In 2016, the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) published a general guideline that people should refrain from using the terms "*autochtoon*" (a person who is indigenous to a place) and "*allochtoon*" (a person born elsewhere; in the Netherlands, also used to refer to people who have one parent born elsewhere), and their cognates. The reasons given were, firstly, that there was a lack of precision in how the terms were being used and, secondly, that negative associations had developed around the term "*allochtoon*," originally "conceived by sociologist Hilda Verwey-Jonker as a neutral term to avoid the words 'foreigner' or (ethnic) 'minority'."[5]

The Council also considered no longer using the terms **"Western"** and **"non-Western,"** because "now Japanese and Indonesians are [considered] Western and Surinamese and Antilleans non-Western."[6] Behind this guideline lurks a specific conception of language as, in principle, a neutral instrument, used to describe the world objectively; should certain terms lose their "neutrality" in daily use, they can simply be replaced by other, still neutral words. As WRR-member and professor of sociology Godfried Engbersen puts it: "every now and then you need to have a big clean-up."[7]

The idea that language can be "cleaned up" in this way is disputed by the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), who argues that words, in practice, are never neutral descrip-

tions, but always represent a specific ideologically colored view of the world.[8] This is so because language is a socially stratified medium, and one that does not exist in an unchanging form. Instead, it is accentuated differently by different social groups. Additionally, Bakhtin stresses that we are not the biblical Adam, who had at his disposal a brand new vocabulary to give meaning to the world around him (but who, at the same time, did so from his position as the first man and therefore not objectively). All the words we use today have histories of use that accompany them and that resonate in them, beyond our will. The force of this resonance—the extent to which an earlier accentuation of a word puts its stamp on what it expresses, even when it is used with a new intention and in a different context - depends on the social significance (or, in other words, the position of power) of the worldview represented by the earlier accentuation.

A word with a long history of racist accentuation by a dominant social group, for example, cannot simply be stripped of this accentuation, especially when institutional racism still pervades the contemporary context. However, since language as a social medium is always changing, a certain degree of reaccentuation remains possible, as when words like "sissy" or "slut," which are connected to oppressive heteronormative and patriarchal worldviews, are taken up as terms of pride. This does not mean that the hurtful histories of these words are erased or that anyone can use them. Within Bakhtin's theory of socially stratified language it matters who says what and in what context, and it can therefore be completely logical to restrict the use of certain words to particular groups of speakers.[9]

Taking up Bakhtin's perspective, it makes perfect sense to no longer use words such as "*allochtoon*" when they become too strongly associated with a worldview in which certain groups are stigmatized, subordinated and excluded. As long as we are not under the illusion that this will also make such worldviews disappear. We need to keep questioning what worldviews are spread through the language we use. By recognizing the inherent link between language and ideology, it becomes clear that the problem with the opposition "Western"/"non-Western" is not its inconsistent application, but the opposition itself, which is tightly interwoven with a colonial-racist worldview. That Japanese and Indonesian people in the Netherlands are considered more "Western" than Surinamese and Antilleans is, within this worldview, not inconsistent at all. What should be challenged, therefore, are not the terms of the opposition and their use, but the colonial and racist assumptions that produced the opposition in the first place.

If we accept that the use of language always expresses a certain worldview, the WRR's search for neutral terms is bound to fail. Telling in this regard are two supposedly more precise and not negatively loaded alternatives for the term "*allochtoon*": "Muslim" and "migrant."[10] That they are anything but neutral becomes clear when we take into account that in the current European context both these terms are intricately bound up with the rise of Islamophobic and more generally xenophobic worldviews. Language, then, is never neutral or objective, nor does it lend itself to a "big clean-up."

5 Remco Meijer and Martin Sommer, 'Overheid schrapt "allochtoon" per direct uit vocabulaire'. *De Volkskrant*, 1 November 2016: https://www.volkskrant.nl/binnenland/overheid-schrapt-allochtoon-per-direct-uit-vocabulaire~a4406224/.

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
9 Ibid.

10 Pieter Hotse Smit en Berend Sommer, 'Allochtoon in de ban: "Politiek correcte oplossing voor nietbestaand probleem"'. *De Volkskrant* 1 November 2016: https://www.volkskrant.nl/wetenschap/allochtoon-in-de-ban-politiek-correcte-oplossing-voor-niet-bestaand-probleem~a4406597/

BY SIMONE VERMAAT, SENIOR COLLECTION ADVISOR AND CURATOR OF ART COLLECTIONS AT THE CULTURAL HERITAGE AGENCY OF THE NETHERLANDS

"NEGRO ART" FROM AFRICA

Poster for exhibition "Negro Art" from Africa in Gemeentemuseum The Hague, 1957. Ink on paper. Collection Cultural Heritage Agency, ABAF4994.

"NEGRO ART" FROM AFRICA

If I look at our collections in relation to words that emerged from the colonial past, one of the issues that we have, which is very complex, is the way the term "Negro" has been used. If we were to do a simple search with this term, about fifty records would result. I have included here one example.

As I understand it, many of the works in our collection were given titles by dealers, curators and museums, especially during the 19th century. By the beginning of the 20th century, such terminology was common within art practice across Europe and America, seen in the emergence of concepts such as Primitive Art or so-called "Negro Art". And this is where I find the complexity. How do we change the name of a painting or object while still acknowledging the histories or artistic movements of which the work was a part? What text do we apply to such an object?

Take this poster in our collection, dating back to 1957. It announces an exhibition called "Negro Art" from Africa that

was displayed in Gemeentemuseum den Haag, the Stedelijk Museum and the Wereldmuseum. The objects on display were collected by ethnologist Rolf Italiaander (1913–1991).

The exhibition was reviewed at the time as "primitive art of natives [Dutch: *jonge inboorlingen*] that were inspired by western civilization". This is important, because it represents the societal context in which inherited colonial relations informed not only the value that was given to these art works by critics, curators, collectors and the public, but also the language that was used to speak about them.

We cannot change the original title. However, we can choose to develop presentation titles that can accompany the original titles. Whatever we choose, I find it important to ensure that the context is clearly explained, as this gives the reader a good idea of our history and that of the Dutch society since 1957, where colonial histories still have their afterlives.

Words that seem neutral can take on negative meanings. Unnoticed, they may become vehicles for unspoken and exclusionary norms and assumptions.

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ESSAY

Exclusionary "Conviviality"

BY

Anick Vollebergh

"To say that there is a bad relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish people—I absolutely do not agree," said Perel, an orthodox Jewish woman living in the Jewish quarter of Antwerp. Her insistence increased as our conversation about her perception of her neighbors and neighborhood progressed. Non-Jewish residents of the same neighborhood, on the other hand, tended to talk about their neighborhood as a social wasteland, where their desire for "normal" contact and their attempts to create community through street parties or neighborhood gatherings met an unwillingness among orthodox Jewish residents to really try to live together (*samenleven*) with others. "There is no conviviality here," non-Jewish residents said. "'Conviviality,' they do not even know the word!"

Hearing about such statements made by her neighbours, Perel was initially confused; their experience was so different from her own. For her, the way that Jews and non-Jews were living together was "very, very good." Her confusion gradually turned into something else: a kind of urgency, anxiety and anger. She wanted to explain, to defend herself and her community, to refute. "Conviviality" and "co-existence" suddenly turned out to be divisive words.

When we think about the exclusive effects of language, we tend to think of the more explicit names and terms used to refer to groups and to focus on the power relations behind

them: **"Negro,"** **"White,"** **"slave,"** **"primitive."** Sometimes, however, words that seem neutral and broadly shared can also take on a narrow, negative meaning. Unnoticed, they become restrictive and calcified, and may even become vehicles for unspoken and exclusionary norms and assumptions. They are, in short, oppressive.

Words such as "conviviality" or "cohesion" and concepts like "co-existence" can be such words. At first glance, they express generally positive ideas with transparent, neutral meanings. Do we know of anyone who doesn't believe in the importance of co-existence or the goodness of conviviality? Is there anyone who cannot imagine what living together well with others really means? However, when we poke at these concepts, puncturing their surface of apparent neutrality, we find that they are more complicated, entangled as they are with political and emotional associations that have different meanings and consequences for different groups of citizens. The presumption of neutrality works to include some people while excluding others.

The notion of an ideal society, characterized by the peaceful co-existence of diverse people, has become a key part of many political and social discussions about "the multicultural society." In the 1980s, the concept was included in many policy initiatives in an attempt to better understand and address what were believed to be the social problems that emerged from people of diverse cultures living together. How could we prevent the multicultural society from disintegrating into diverse and distinct groups along ethnic or religious lines, alienated from one another even while living side by side?

In Antwerp, where Perel lives, as in many cities across Belgium and Europe, promoting "living together in diversity" did not address all residents in the same way. "Immigrants" and disadvantaged "native" residents (who were linked to support for extreme-right parties) were implicitly imagined as being responsible for the lack of harmonious co-existence. For policy makers, both at the national and city levels, these groups had to learn to be more open to others, be more positive about their neighborhood, accommodate assumed norms, and participate more actively in convivial multicultural efforts. Middle-class city dwellers (largely White people), in contrast, were seen as ideal citizens who were naturally contributing to a better society. Policy documents mentioned "having understanding for each other" and the importance of "meeting" and "dialogue," but without any clarity on what this would look like in everyday life. An elusive, abstract notion of "conviviality" was accompanied by a notion of "cohesion" that was associated with very specific forms of interaction. Participation in and appreciation of the sociability of a neighborhood barbecue or street party increasingly became the litmus test of how much different residents were open to others and how much they wanted to "really" live together.

The effects of this particular idea of co-existence are not the same for all groups in society. For non-Jewish residents this process remained invisible and the meaning of the word "conviviality" retained its naturalness. But Perel and other orthodox Jewish residents sensed that the ideals of conviviality and cohesion had become pregnant with a meaning that they did not share, one that seemed to cast them in a negative light, as always-already deficient in proper sociability. This led to them feeling a constant need to defend themselves to

counter the accusation. They argued, for example, that good co-existence, as far as they were concerned, lies more in courteous distance and in openness and accommodation to your neighbors than in, as Perel said, "to come party." Their arguments over what conviviality and neighborliness is, or should be, is not a matter of just nit-picking over definitions. These are anxious, urgent attempts to critically engage with the exclusionary charge that "conviviality" has gained in the contemporary political context as a new lens for assessing who does and who does not belong.

Beyond uncovering the presumed neutrality of words such as "society," "community" and "co-existence" is a bigger issue: How do we accommodate one another's interests, values and ideas about community, as we try to live together in our changing societies? What do we have to give, or give up, to accommodate each other? Whose values lie at the core of these assumptions? And do the values of a society change over time? In the debate over difficult or sensitive language, is it really a choice between rewriting history or having a right to offend, or is it about accommodating each other's norms and feelings within a diverse society?

Perhaps these are the questions that need to be addressed in response to the issue of the language that is used or not used in museums today. If museums are to serve all their visitors equally, then using language that makes all visitors and audiences feel welcome and included, not alienated or insulted, should be the ultimate goal. Language, then, is a tool to create community, to fashion co-existence.

Guided Tour in the
Tropenmuseum 4 June,
2015; Kirsten van Santen
(photographer)

CULTURE AND OTHER SEEMINGLY NEUTRAL TERMS

Within the education programs of the National Museum of World Cultures, the issues related to word choice are not always about words that are sensitive or discriminatory. Instead, sometimes the problem is much more subtle and unexpected.

Take for example the word "culture." As the National Museum of World Cultures, this word is at the heart of what we do, and for many people it is a neutral term. Yet it is not interpreted in the same way by everyone. On the one hand, in our classes it often refers to diversity of family histories and backgrounds. Yet, many White pupils (but also adult visitors!) do not relate the word "culture" to themselves. Culture, they believe, is something that "Others" have.

When examples are mentioned such as clogs, tulips, and windmills it is often laughingly done. Pupils indicate that they do not feel personally connected to these icons of Dutch culture, nor to famous works of high culture from the past, for example by Van Gogh and Rembrandt. In this sense culture is understood as a set of outmoded stereotypes or

as high culture, not something that comes close to their own experience. For many White pupils, the culture they are part of is invisible or difficult to perceive because it is their baseline; it is what they think of as "normal." Culture, then, is misperceived as something exotic and—both in time and place—far away.

How do we expand people's understanding of what culture is so that they can understand that how they live, their everyday life, is also a culture?

There are many other words that, like culture, seem to be neutral but inadvertently include or exclude people. For example, do all students feel included when we use a word like "us"? How do we as educators actively resist normalizing words like these, terms that create oppositions such as "we" versus "them," without denying difference? Moreover how do we push against hierarchical dichotomies, such as "high culture" versus "low culture" and "normal" versus "abnormal"?

Perhaps a starting point for museums is to acknowledge how certain categories can exclude some people from belonging.

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Migrant Art and the Politics of Language

BY

Guno Jones

Not so long ago, I was asked whether I thought it necessary to "develop language that considers artworks made by Dutch artists with a migrant background as culturally Dutch." This question came from a good place, a desire for a more inclusive environment for art and culture within the Netherlands. In that moment, however, I was reminded of my ongoing discomfort when confronted with strategies for inclusion that (even unintentionally) reinforce established categories, such as "Dutch" or "migrant." Do such attempts at creating new categories, I wondered, undermine the very goal of inclusion that they try to achieve? What does it mean to be "of migrant background," and why does it matter for art or museum practice, more generally? Is an artist from Germany living in the Netherlands also regarded a migrant artist? Or is this category just a euphemism for **non-White**? And what does "culturally Dutch" even mean?

Within the Netherlands, like elsewhere, we have become comfortable with binaries such as *autochtoon* and ***allochtoon,*** migrant and non-migrant, Western and non-Western to define citizens. These terms are used in popular language; they are also partly derived from demographic categories used by city governments and institutios such as the Central Bureau for Statistics, in their attempt to measure demographic changes within society. As Peeren (in this publication) shows, such terms are continually being challenged from diverse quarters for their lack of specificity, for the stereotypes they carry,

and for how they reinforce ideas about who belongs and who doesn't.

The term "person of migrant background" (iemand met migranten achtergrond) has only recently become accepted among policy makers. Prior to 2016, the binary *autochtoon/allochtoon* (the latter category further divided into "non-Western *allochtoon*" and "Western *allochtoon*") was officially used in national Dutch policy documents and statistics. Policy makers also referred to those classified as "non-Western *allochtonen*" with the term "ethnic minorities." On 22 March 2016, after years of criticism that pointed to the exclusionary nature of the *autochtoon/allochtoon* binary, a narrow majority of the Dutch parliament requested the Dutch government to abstain from using this terminology in future policy documents.

Admittedly, there is no easy solution for how to describe the complex biographies of diverse citizens. Indeed, the inclusive politics of naming has long struggled with the tension between ignoring difference and foregrounding essentialized identities. Yet, holding on to earlier categories without thinking of their contemporary, real life consequences may help perpetuate structural injustice and exclusion, creating hierarchies of citizens.

How, then, do we move beyond older, exclusionary categories of thinking?

Within the art and museum worlds, there has been a longstanding discussion about the inclusion of so-called non-Western artists. In response to both academic and popular critiques, and informed by the diversification of the global art scene, institutions have been challenged to include a broader range of artists in their collections and exhibitions. These discussions have been fruitful, as art museums have begun to focus on becoming more representative, even if much more work needs to be done. Yet the challenge of how to categorize artists and their works continue to be a struggle. In these discussions, artists, like curators, have asked whether works, like the artists themselves, should be organized in categories such as **Black**, non-Western or migrant. Or, should art, as a practice that explores human experiences (albeit from a situated perspective), be a site where we push beyond reductive categories? After all, isn't Black art just art?

To take such a challenge seriously, artists and museum staff must challenge the dominant, hierarchical classificatory system that divides populations according to degrees of belonging. In my experience, the figure of the migrant artist, like the category "people of migrant decent," is often a metonym (a euphemism) for **race**. In this use, "migrant" is not primarily concerned with describing movement from one place to another, but with signifying a notion of "elsewhere," including ideas about **traditional** culture or ethnicity. The so-called migrant artist (or other marginalized subject, including female artists) is presumed to create art based on a select set of experiences, often informed by their origins, and knowing their background is somehow seen as a prerequisite for appreciating their work: "Now that I know where you are from, I can better understand the meaning of your art."

Conversely, the "Western" (non-migrant) artist—from the Netherlands or Germany, for example—does not need to

identify with that place for us to understand their work. Rather their work comes from "nowhere"; it is "universal" by virtue of a presumed lack of difference or ethnic background. I want to describe this as the "god trick" of so-called Western art. Such racialized hierarchies in the art world (as in all other domains of life) depend on earlier (colonial) categories of difference for their meaning. In this language we abstain from naming people as "non-migrant artists," and by doing so we naturalize them as the norm, as belonging, as real citizens. For sure this is now a familiar argument, but one still worth mentioning.

Writer Karin Amatmoekrim has observed that reductive classifications are too often the lens through which we interpret the works of "migrant artists," in contrast to works deemed "neutral and literary." [11] Must the interpretation of works by so-called migrant artists, she asks, always reference migrant identity? Moreover, does doing so blind viewers to the potentially universal value of such work? The presumption that an artist's ethnic background reveals something about the artist and their art, I want to suggest, restricts not only the reach of their work but also what is regarded as appropriate topics for their engagement.

In my own attempts to move beyond those reductive claims, I feel a greater affinity to more complex definitions of life, "identity" and art. For me these definitions loosely follow what Édouard Glissant[12] describes as the "poetics of relation." In this view, all identities are creolized (recognizing the fundamental "relatedness" of everything), created through dynamic relations that are inherent to all life. Art, as part of life, materializes these complex relations.

My hope is that the museum can lead in this attempt, moving beyond categories of migrant and non-migrant, Western and non-Western, *allochtoon* and *autochtoon*. Not to do this is to continue practices of hierarchical citizenship, indeed of differently valuing humans. The challenge will be to balance respect for self-ascribed identity terminology while still questioning these when they become essentialist. How might we—whether policy makers, museum staff or general citizens—acknowledge that artists and artworks carry with them specific embodied experience and knowledge, while still acknowledging their universal nature, reflecting a shared humanity?

Perhaps a starting point, at least for museums, is to acknowledge how categories can reinforce notions of difference, and, together with the diverse groups, expand these categories to create new and more inclusive possibilities. Yesterday it was "*allochtoon,*" today it's "person of migrant background". . . what will it be tomorrow?

11 See https://www.amster-damenco.nl/interviews/literatuur-is-de-spiegel-van-het-leven/

12 Édouard Glissant. *Poetics of relation*. University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Chains, part of a shackle.
Suriname. Early 19th century.
Wrought iron. Tropenmuseum,
Amsterdam.

'SLAVE SHIP': DISRESPECTFUL OR NOT?

When writing about slavery and colonialism for the National Museum of World Cultures, I'm very happy that the museum has standardized the use of the term "enslaved" or "enslaved person" when mentioning people who were forcefully deprived of their freedom. Using "enslaved" instead of "slave" acknowledges enslavement as an act of power and dehumanization rather than simply referring to the person within a social category. I still struggle, however, with how to name things that were used to enslave people. Terms like "slave ship," "slave shackle," or even "slave driver" contain the word "slave" but do not directly refer to a person that is forced into slavery. Still, using them feels uncomfortable.

Recently, my colleagues and I wrote an exhibition text about a chain with shackle that was likely used during the transportation of enslaved people from Africa to the West Indies. The question in this case was not about what to call the object itself, but rather what to call the ships on which such objects were used.

Would using the term "slave ships" draw attention to the fact that they were specifically designed and constructed in order to transport enslaved people as commodities? Or would it undermine the attempt at questioning the category of the slave as an identity? A similar question can be asked of "slave driver."

If we uncritically reproduce outmoded language used to describe people with disabilities, we stand the risk of marginalizing them, portraying them as silent, passive sufferers.

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Diversity, Disability and Words

Paul van Trigt

"Please do not use the word 'leper,'" was the first thing my colleague said when she began reviewing a draft of an article I was writing about a colonial photograph of people affected by leprosy. Although my analysis was meant to address the reproduction of stigmatizing categories, I was not aware that the word "leper"—as used in the database of the museum collection the photograph came from—was considered a derogatory term. Of course, as a scholar working for a couple of years on disability history, I might have known that any word that reduces a person to a disease or disorder is almost never an appropriate term. However, as a newcomer to the historical investigation of leprosy, I initially followed the catalogue descriptions and in so doing reproduced a word that many people affected by leprosy and their allies associate with stigmatization and discrimination.

I start with this example because it raises at least three issues regarding language use and what terms mean to the people to whom the terms are applied, which are important issues if we take seriously the assertion that words matter.

First, **"disability"** is an umbrella term for very different conditions, varying from intellectual to physical impairments. In recent years, "disability" has replaced "handicap," especially in Western Europe and the United States, although "handicap" is still used in France because it does not have pejorative connotations there.

At the beginning of the twentieth century in Western Europe and the United States, the term "handicap" was used to indicate a person's "deficit" or inability to function "normally." The prevailing thought, especially in the aftermath of the World Wars, was that these different deficits could be overcome by rehabilitation. Beginning in the 1970s this concept of "deficit" and related words like "handicapped" became increasingly contested. Activists argued that a disability was not an individual problem to solve, but a social construct that made living with an impairment into a problem. People no longer wanted to be called "the disabled," but rather "disabled people" (UK) or "people with disabilities" or "differently abled" (US). Deaf activists contested stigmatizing words like "deaf-mute" and wanted to be recognized instead as an ethnic community with their own language. Some communities do not even have an equivalent for "disability" in their language. All in all, disability is a contested concept, and in the slipstream of this word we have to be aware of many other inappropriate terms of which "leper" is only one.

Other words used in the context of disability take me to my second point. One of the alternatives for "leper" is "person affected by leprosy." The word "affected" may often be acceptable, but how exactly do we write about having a disability? Often one may read about people who "suffer" a disability: sometimes this term reflects the experience of people with disabilities, but often it does not. If we uncritically reproduce that language, as I did initially in the case mentioned above, people with disabilities will be portrayed as silent, passive sufferers. Therefore our language needs different narratives to counter or replace existing stereotypes. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, a professor of English and

bioethics, has developed a helpful "taxonomy of four primary visual rhetorics of disability."[13] This taxonomy, which distinguishes among wondrous, sentimental, **exotic**, and realistic images, can also be applied to terminology, thereby adding complexity instead of deeming a term as either positive or negative.

This brings me to a third and last issue: collaboration with people with disabilities. My colleague was aware of the harm the word "leper" could do because she has worked with people affected by leprosy. As the slogan of the disability movement is "nothing about us without us," choosing words to describe the experience of living with disabilities should not happen without working with people with disabilities. Of course, word choice is highly contested *within* disability communities and achieving consensus is therefore a challenging task. But if we do not want to reproduce stigmatizing stereotypes and if we believe that words matter, we must be sure that when we say "we" people with disabilities are included. Not to pay lip service to diversity, but to enact the idea that inclusion matters.

13 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography," in *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, ed. Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggermann, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2002), 56–75.

Adriaen Hanneman, Posthumous Portrait of Mary I Stuart with a Servant, ca. 1664. Oil on canvas. Mauritshuis, The Hague.

AGAINST INVISIBILITY?

I had a similar problem to Eveline. For a recent exhibition, I was confronted with the choice of how to caption this painting. The painting was done by artist Adriaen Hanneman and was later given the title *Portrait of Mary I Stuart with a Servant*.

The painting was to be included in an exhibition about feathers; in the caption I therefore highlighted the feather cape that was draped across Mary Stuart's left shoulder. However, in doing so, I completely neglected to acknowledge the presence of the enslaved boy standing by Mary Stuart's side. By doing so, I perpetuated the long history of ignoring the presence of Black people in Western art. Used to reinforce the status of the White person sitting for the painting, through

their representation as property, or as a visual device that contrasts with the representation of main White subject, Black subjects remained unnamed, and further made invisible in much of the study and presentation of Western art within museums.

Just before the caption was to be printed, someone from the research team asked about the young Black boy in the left-hand corner of the painting: "Are we just going to pretend he is not there," she asked? "Why haven't you mentioned him in the caption?" As a result, we changed the text to include mention of the boy. We tried to help the public understand how both the boy and the feather cape were iconographic devices to show the affluence of Mary Stuart.

For museums, addressing gender and sexual diversity may still be something novel, but not doing so may inadvertently contribute to the ongoing marginalization of LGBTQIA people.

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"LGB" and the Addition of "TQIA2S"

Eliza Steinbock

The representation of gender and sexual diversity should be an important priority for any socially engaged museum today. Currently, activists and interest groups such as Queering the Collections [14] are working to push this agenda within museums in the Netherlands. This short essay contributes to these attempts by addressing the importance of the terminology museums use to represent gender and sexual diversity. What are the terms that people use to describe their own identities and how have these changed over time? How do these terms differ from those museums have used? What kind of politics of inclusion or exclusion has influenced the emergence of these terms? And how can museums contribute to ongoing attempts to achieve equality?

"Lesbian," "gay" and **"bisexual"** are commonly used terms to refer to non-heterosexual sexualities. These community-derived descriptors are preferable to the general medical and legal term of "homosexual." Homosexuality as such was invented in the mid-nineteenth century to distinguish a person who engaged in sexual acts with another of the same sex, but before that time partaking in such practices did not necessarily indicate a different kind of identity, though doing so might be considered sinful. Homosexuality has been, and continues to be in some nation-states, considered a mental illness, and it has been given criminal status through statutes against sodomy and cross-dressing. To avoid the further stigmatization of this group, the acronym "LGB" has become

favored to indicate the plurality of sexual diversity. The phrase "gender and sexuality diversity" or "GSD" is also used, though less frequently so outside of community organizing. Should museums adopt such terminology?

How best to refer to non-heterosexual identities continues to be an important discussion, as people seek to account for meanings related to specific historical and cultural contexts. In general, lesbianism and gayness tend to be understood as orientations towards people of the same sex, including romantic feelings, sexual desires and erotic acts. But pervasive sexism resulted in lesbians being long excluded from archives of non-heterosexual life and activism; for this reason, the "L" is usually placed before the "G" to try to correct the regular omission of lesbian lives. Bisexual men and women, attracted to both men and women, have been less culturally visible and stigmatized by both heterosexual and homosexual cultures; beginning to use "LGB" instead of "gay" was then an important step toward inclusion.

In addition to these sexual identifications, other terms have been added through related though distinct political struggles. The LGB acronym is most often extended to include "T" for **transgender/transsexual/**transvestite, referring to experiences and identities that concern gender transition. **Trans** (or trans*) people can also be L or G or B, or heterosexual, or other sexual identities, and their sexual orientation may or may not change in conjunction with their social, medical or legal gender transition. The inclusion of trans identities raises the issue of gender identity for everyone; people may identify as "gender non-conforming" or "non-binary," or they may feel that their assigned gender matches their gender identity

(cisgender). Hence, one might describe someone or themselves as being a "cisgender gay man," or a "lesbian trans woman," or a "non-binary queer." The "Q" is for the word **queer**, which has been reclaimed as a political and sexual identity from earlier etymological usages that meant strange, aslant, or curious.[15] "Queer" has, however, been and still is used as a slur against people perceived to be sexually deviant. Over time, and particularly since the 1980s, "queer" has served as an umbrella term for sexual interests and identities that challenge social norms for sexual behavior. "Queer" then is not only shorthand for "LGBT" but also the full range of human sexuality, such as people who have particular sexual fetishes, practice polyamory (being in a romantic or sexual relationship with more than one person), or identify as pansexual (attracted to people regardless of gender or sexual identity), and so on.

The "I" stands for intersex, an adjective used to describe at least twenty naturally occurring differences in primary and secondary sex characteristics that do not fit into society's definitions of male and female; one should refer to "an individual with an intersex condition," or an "intersex person" and not use the outdated and inaccurate term **"hermaphrodite."** The "A," which stands for asexual, refers to a sexual orientation generally characterized by not being interested in partnered sexuality or sexual desire, and may involve having no sex or only intimate friendships. Being trans, intersex or asexual are all relatively more common experiences than previously acknowledged, and are today entering public discussions through media and other cultural forums.

The acronym "LGBTQIA" has been critiqued for being **Western**-centric, or for its use of concepts related to the imperial and colonial histories of American and European sexology. Culture-specific identities often do not fall under these dominant categories. In China and Hong Kong, for example, the term "*lala*" is the preferred term for "lesbian." Similarly, "2S" refers to the "Two-Spirit" identity, which is a translation of an Ojibwe phrase, a language of the **Indigenous** people of Turtle Island/North America. "Two-Spirit" became popularized in the 1990s to unite native sexual traditions that had been misrecognized by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthropologists who described men who had sex with men or engaged in cross-dressing when studying "berdache" sexual cultures. The Two-Spirit identity had also been mis-recognized by settler cultures of LGBTQ people. Like "2S," all of these terms have histories intertwined with colonialism, criminality, pathology and Westernization that should be understood when describing sexual cultures and practices and gender identities.

For museums, addressing gender and sexual diversity may still be something novel, but not doing so may inadvertently contribute to the ongoing marginalization of LGBTQIA people. Museums like the National Museum of World Cultures are important places where such work against structural injustices can be fought. Not only do they have objects and archives related to the Two-Spirit identity described above but they also hold collections that show other forms of gender diver-sity across the world, for example in Japan and Indonesia. These can be foregrounded. Such objects and their collection histories offer us important entryways into the entanglement of colonialism, racism, and sexism and the ways that sexual

and gender diversity has been lived and experienced in the past and continues to be in the present. Using the correct terminology in describing such diversity is part of this process.

14 A collective working towards more inclusive museum practices in relation to LGBT communities.

15 See Peeren in this publica-tion on words gaining new meanings or being claimed as empowering nicknames.

Ceremonial breast decoration for men (Wirahukang). Brazil. ca. 1950. Bone, cotton, feather. Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden.

MAY I CALL YOU BY THAT NAME?

The Ka'apor people of the northeastern Amazon refer to themselves as Ka'apor. However, traditionally in the literature and our database they are called Urubú, which means "vultures." This name was given to them by their Luso-Brazilian enemies towards the end of the 19th century. Even though "Urubú" is considered a derogatory term by the Ka'apor themselves, it still appears in literature to this day. Virtually all Amazonian peoples face a similar challenge.

One simple principle is to refer to people in the way they would like to be referred to themselves, in this case: the Ka'apor. In other cases of course this is not as simple. For example some derogatory words have been reclaimed and turned into terms of endearment (see Peeren in this publication). Certain pejorative terms—such as "queer"—have been adopted within the communities to which such words were formerly applied as slurs. Their use within these groups is often based on codes of acceptance, long-term relationships or other shared understandings, and their use in this context is experienced as emancipatory or empowering.

At the same time, however, communities are obviously not homogenous masses that always share the same opinion. The term "Indiaan" (Indian) among the Indigenous inhabitants of Suriname is a case in point. While "Indiaan" is popularly used to refer to Indigenous peoples of Suriname, Indigenous organizations themselves prefer the word "Inheemsen" (Indigenous) because of the colonial connotations of the term "Indiaan." However, many Indigenous people insist on referring to themselves as "Indianen," using the term as a badge of honor that is closer to their identity than the more generic "Indigenous."

The privilege of using such terms is often not extended to those outside the group, especially when there are historical relationships of unequal power, including museums and other institutions. As cultural institutions we should choose the formal, respectful terminology. In general, it is good practice to stick to the terms that people would like to be called, and to recognize when terms are intended to be reserved for group members only.

In the development of new exhibits it is important to be aware of how colonial narratives work in museum texts in order to avoid reproducing them.

Hodan Warsame is a sociologist and activist whose work centers on decoloniality, feminisms and intersectionality. She was one of the initiators of the Decolonize the Museum collective.

Mechanisms and Tropes of Colonial Narratives

BY

Hodan Warsame

As an activist, I co-organized an intervention aimed at uncovering and critically analyzing recurrent colonial themes and motifs (colonial tropes) in the Tropenmuseum's exhibitions. The intervention was called "Decolonize the Museum" and consisted, amongst other things, of reflections on the museum experience by a group of more than fifty people with different racial, gender, sexual and class identities, (dis)abilities and citizenship statuses. Many of the exhibits we visited and analyzed are now in the process of being reworked.

Overwhelmingly, the group—mostly **Black** and other **people of color**, many of whom queer—described experiencing feelings of discomfort from the moment they walked in. They did not feel like their presence was welcomed. Although many participants were open to the idea of having their history and heritage displayed in the museum, most were disappointed in the representations of their culture, those of **non-Western** peoples in general, and Dutch (colonial) history. Many of the **White** participants also felt uncomfortable with the uncritical, exoticizing gaze these exhibits seemed to expect from them.

The participants' critiques touched upon many aspects of the language used in the museum. Participants spoke about the exoticization of non-Western peoples, the erasure of cultural differences among (formerly) colonized peoples, the glorification or minimization of colonialism, the lack of agency in the portrayal of people of color, a lack of attention to decolonial

struggles, the lack of representation of women and other genders, and the lack of attention to the present-day impact of the histories depicted in the museum.

The accessibility of the museum was also a point of critique; at the time of our visit, in 2015, some parts of the museum could not be reached by elevator and few exhibits could be experienced by people with a visual **disability**. The sheer number of objects and information was experienced as over-whelming, both intellectually and emotionally, especially because there was not much context given. Further, many in our group found it unsatisfying to merely take in information, with no way to respond to or interact with exhibits.

The group's assessment makes sense when you consider the historical purpose of the ethnographic museum in explor-ing and structuring difference, and the subsequent role it played (and still plays) in upholding the White supremacist, capitalist and patriarchal social order that still exists today. In "Decolonising the Museum: The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC," Claire Smith succinctly describes the societal function of the museum and how this has impacted and continues to impact the design and language of exhibits:

> *The discourse of colonialism informs the design of museum exhibits in a number of specific ways, and can be identified with three governing concepts: the boundary, the label, and the meta-narrative. The 'boundary' is important because it allows the classification of collections according to time and space as well as the dichotomies essential to colonialism, such as that of 'self' and 'other'. The 'label' is important because it demonstrates that the unknown is known, and that the world can be ordered. The 'metanarrative' is important because it establishes the authority of the institution as well as the positional superiority of the colonizers. Taken together, these three concepts shape the exhibits of the colonial museum, normalising the power relations inherent in cultural hegemony. Challenging these concepts is an essential step in the decolonisation of the museum.*[16]

As the former Colonial Museum, the Tropenmuseum was founded with the purpose to reinforce the Dutch colonial pro-ject. It was meant to display the wealth of the Dutch colonial empire, it was a research center that aimed to stimulate trade and production in the Dutch colonies, and it was a place to educate and entertain the Dutch public using collections of objects from the colonies. A large part of the museum's pres-ent collections originated during colonial times.

In the current renovation, the museum's staff are making a conscious effort to move away from the colonial logic of labeling and displaying; more, however, could be done to explain how this logic impacts Dutch society today, and why it must be rejected. This publication is part of that process. The museum is now taking up responsibility in unmasking the violence of Dutch colonial history, for example through the "Afterlives of Slavery" exhibition. In the construction of new exhibits, it is important to be aware of how colonial narratives work in museum texts in order to avoid reproducing them.

Here are some of the most common ones found in ethnographic museums.

1 Stuck in time and space

In ethnographic museums, people of color, and especially **Indigenous** peoples, are often represented as existing in the past. Objects and photographs, and sometimes even their descriptions, originate from colonial times and so a picture is presented of these people as stuck in that time. Often, little mention is made of their present-day lives, the ways their cultures have changed over time, and the larger context of colonialism that was the reason for the "encounter" between the people depicted and those White people who collected the artifacts or made the photographs. The logical conclusion for the museum visitor is that these people must have disappeared as "progress" and industry inevitably took hold in their lands and that their way of life and seeing the world have vanished.

2 Exotification, "Othering" and the assumption of whiteness

In museum exhibits, non-Western peoples are often presented as more spiritual, closer to the natural world, more magical, and **primitive**. They are the "Other" against which the European Self constructs itself, so as to identify as rational, modern, progressive, benevolent, technological, efficient, productive and so on. The museum assumes that the visitor does not share a heritage with the cultures on display. Visitors are expected to marvel at how different these people are from themselves. This—quite literally —alienating experience is in part due to how representation works in many ethnographic museums: the museum assumes the authority to tell

non-Western peoples' stories. This power to know and name is, as Claire Smith describes above, an important basis for power, allowing the colonizer, the Westerner, the museum staff to place themselves above those they claim to know. These representations are often one-dimensional, presenting a group with a complicated history and diversity of culture as monolithic. The exhibits are designed to represent a culture, a people and a history to a White, middle class, heterosexual, Christian or secular Dutch people. There is no expectation that Dutch people of Asian, African or South American descent, queer people of color, and people who actually identify with the cultures on display might also visit the museum.

3 Heroic adventurers –"Indiana Jones"

In (ethnographic) museums, stories often feature a heroic White man, an Indiana Jones-like protagonist. He might be an explorer, scientist, artist, photographer or a missionary, someone who bravely went where few other White people had gone before and came back to tell tales of wild, untouched peoples and dangerous natural landscapes. He returns with artifacts: art, objects, photographs, video, audio and perhaps even people. The adventurer in these narratives is the one who has agency, the one who is doing the "doing," the one through whose eyes we view **exotic** people. In an exhibit about the history of the Dutch East Indies, for example, the people indigenous to those territories often remain an anonymous mass whose thoughts, words and feelings remain unexamined. This focus hides the fact that such adventurers often were the vanguard, collecting information and laying the groundwork for a colonial force that would take control of a territory and violently oppress its people. This hero is an exciting, dangerous and playful figure that museum visitors are taught to

admire. The idea of **discovery** or exploration of the unknown and the exotic, and the possible danger in such, is a trope often used in the marketing of ethnographic exhibitions. In this regard, the lands of non-Western peoples are often cast as playgrounds for White Westerners.

4   Euphemistic language and erasure

Participants in the Decolonize the Museum intervention drew attention to the language used in the texts of the Dutch East Indies and the Dutch slavery exhibits. One person pointed out that the word "progress" was used in a text about the colonial industries in the former Dutch East Indies. Another noticed that a text describing the end of slavery in Surinam presented the fact as a benevolent act of the Dutch government, erasing the struggle of enslaved people for their liberation. The use of the word "encounter" to describe the arrival of Dutch colonists in the former Dutch East Indies was another example. These are not just oversights, but misrepresentations of history that have resulted from a lack of attention to the experiences of the colonized. The museum visitor therefore remains uniformed about the scale of colonial violence, a history that continues to impact the life chances of many ethnic minorities in Dutch society today. It masks and erases the large power imbalance that was forcefully created and upheld throughout the centuries by the Dutch, which is the root of the structural racism within education, housing, the labor market, politics and media today.

5   Authority and the illusions of objectivity and neutrality

Western societies have endowed museums with the authority to convey narratives that are meant to help us order and know the world around us. An important aspect of that authority is the aura of objectivity and neutrality the museum projects. The knowledge presented by the museum is supposedly trustworthy, because it is assumed to have come to that knowledge from an objective standpoint and in a scientific manner. Social scientists and curators merely recorded, classified and archived. The museum purportedly abstains from passing judgment on the historical events and movements it represents, and merely reports on them for the visitor, who is free to form their own opinion.

This creates the illusion that the methods, motivations and impact of this knowledge production are also somehow objective and neutral. In fact, there is nothing neutral about them as this knowledge has represented and legitimized a colonial hierarchy that places White Western people at the top and Black people and other people of color at the bottom. To stop reproducing such hierarchies it is important relinquish the cloak of objectivity and neutrality.

Museums should take a clear decolonial stance and make efforts to stop reproducing colonial narratives. The first step in that process is critical self-reflection, asking: how have museums contributed to societal injustice through such narratives in the past, and how do they continue to do so? Acknowledging complicity and responsibility will open up new ways of exhibiting and collaborating with communities whose material heritage is in the museum.

16 Claire Smith, "Decolonising the Museum: The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC." *Antiquity* 79, no. 304 (2005): 424–439.

JACOBUS ELISA JOHANNES CAPITEIN 1717 – 1747

Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein was abducted from his family at just eight years of age and sold to Captain Arnold Steenhart of Zeeland. Steenhart subsequently presented him to Jacobus van Goch of the WIC as a gift. In 1728, Johannes, whose Ghanaian name is unknown, was sent to the Netherlands, where he attended school in The Hague. Here he became inspired by Reformed Protestantism, studied theology, and wrote a thesis in 1742 in which he posited that slavery was 'not incompatible with Christian liberty.' In spite of the fact that – as a black man – he defended slavery, his academic success also helped to undermine the racist stereotypes that were used to justify slavery.

Text label, from the Afterlives of Slavery exhibition (2017–2019). Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.

SHOULD I MENTION HIS SKIN COLOUR?

Recently we at the Tropenmuseum organized an exhibition on slavery and its afterlives in the present. A few weeks after the opening, during a general check of the exhibition, I noticed that one of the text labels—about theologian Jacobus Capitein—was smeared with chewing gum, likely placed there by a visitor. The full text read:

Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein was abducted from his family at just eight years of age and sold to Captain Arnold Steenhart of Zeeland. Steenhart subsequently presented him to Jacobus van Goch of the WIC [West India Company] as a gift. In 1728, Johannes, whose Ghanaian name is unknown, was sent to the Netherlands, where he attended school in The Hague. Here he became inspired by Reformed Protestantism, studied theology, and wrote a thesis in 1742 in which he posited that slavery was "not incompatible with Christian liberty." In spite of the fact that—as a black man—he defended slavery, his academic success also helped to undermine the racist stereotypes that were used to justify slavery.

The chewing gum covered the words "as a black man." As the exhibition was built to invite comments from the public, we were intrigued. What was wrong, in the visitor's opinion, with us mentioning Capitein's racial identity? Should we remove this reference and change the text, or just replace the plaque with the same text?

Was it really necessary to emphasize Capitein's skin color? In the first lines, we mention his Ghanaian descent and that he became the property of a WIC official. His status as a formerly enslaved person was clear, and, albeit conveyed implicitly, his skin color was too. Instead of emphasizing the man's racial identity, which betrays our own surprise that a Black person defended slavery, should we have simply made a reference to his new status as a formerly colonized person in the Netherlands? What does it mean to highlight his complicity as a Black person especially given that Whiteness is rarely named?

From A to Z

Aboriginal

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "Aboriginal" stems from the Latin words *ab* and *origine*, meaning "from the beginning", and is a commonly used word, including in museum databases. "Aboriginal" describes the original inhabitants of a place and is primarily used to refer to Indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada (see also "Indigenous"). However, in Canada, there has been a recent preference for the use of Indigenous.

The term does not adequately describe the complexity and diversity of Indigenous peoples. Many Indigenous peoples in both countries do not like to be referred to as "Aboriginal", preferring to emphasize other markers of their identity such as language, land and clan relationships. In Canada the term came into general use in the 1980s, when a legal and overarching term was sought to collectively describe the existing—but controversial—categories "Indian," "Inuit" and "Métis" (see also "Indian" and "Eskimo").

SUGGESTIONS

- Adopt the terminology used and accepted as respectful by the people themselves.
- In cases where it is not possible to avoid generalization, for example, should it be impossible to find out the specific group from which a person/object comes, then use "Aboriginal" as a compound noun, always with capital "A": *Aboriginal people(s), Aboriginal Australians*.
- In Canada, certain First Nations groups in Ontario prefer "Indigenous," i.e. "Indigenous people(s)." "First Nation(s) people(s)" may also be acceptable.
- In Australia, "Aboriginal" and "Torres Strait Islander peoples" is in most situations appropriate.

Allochtoon

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

Allochtoon entered the Dutch language in the 20th century as a geological term. The term, which literally means "from another soil/location" (antonym *autochtoon*) was introduced as an identity category in the Netherlands in the 1970s to replace "immigrant," which by that time had started to develop negative connotations.

While the term itself was intended to be generic and to describe anyone born outside or with one parent born outside the Netherlands, it was split into the subcategories of Western and non-Western, thus creating a distinction between different categories of outsiders.

The term has increasingly been used as a stand-in for people who appear to be visibly different, i.e. non-White people.

"*Allochtoon*" has lost favor with some, including policy makers and the public alike, with some municipalities deciding no longer to use the term.

SUGGESTIONS

- Adopt the terminology used and accepted as respectful by the people themselves.
- There is an increasing tendency to use hyphenated identification, for example, Moroccan-Dutch, Surinamese-Dutch etc.
- The phrase "person of … background" is commonly used and acceptable for many.
- Whatever of the three alternatives you choose, it should be used consistently. For example, if we choose to describe someone as a person of Surinamese background then we should also say a person of German or Japanese background.

Barbarian

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "barbarian" originates in antiquity. In Ancient Greece, "barbarians" referred to people with an unfamiliar language and/or culture. Then the term "Barbarije" was used for North Africa, for example in 16th century cartography and travel accounts. Its inhabitants were described as "barbarians". These words became negatively associated with piracy and the slave trade and the word "barbarian" increasingly gained the meaning of uncivilized.

Nowadays the word is often used to express the idea that someone or something does not meet generally accepted standards, norms and values, usually those associated with the higher social classes.

SUGGESTIONS

- There is no suitable alternative for this term, except when used in a descriptive or historical context, in which case we suggest the use of quotation marks.
  For example: *The "barbarians" were a group of people with whom the Greeks came into contact in antiquity.*

Berber

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Berber" refers to various groups of people living across several countries in Northern Africa. The term dates back to antiquity and appears in Arabic manuscripts by 900 AD. Many people, however, believe it to be a European invention related to the term "barbarian" (see previous entry). While the term is still used by many people who self-identify as Berber, it is rapidly falling out of favor and more and more people now refer to themselves as "Amazigh."

SUGGESTIONS

- Amazigh (singular) and Imazighen (plural)

Black

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

As an identity category, "Black" has different meanings in different contexts but in general it refers to people of African descent. The term has come to replace the earlier racial category of Negro (see also "Negro") now regarded as derogatory by many.

Within the Netherlands "Black" is used most often to describe people of African or Afro-Caribbean origin. In Britain the term is used similarly; however it has also been used as a socio-political identity category to unite diverse non-White groups of people, regardless of their ethnic or geographical origins, who had suffered racism. This usage is less common in the Netherlands. In the US, the term primarily describes African Americans; "people of color" is also used as a political identity category that includes all non-White people.

Rooted primarily in the North American Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and other global anti-racism struggles, "Black" has become an identity category of pride for many people of African descent, challenging earlier stereotypes associated with Black people.

SUGGESTIONS

- The term is appropriate when used in the contexts as described above.
- Because of its many meanings the category should be used with caution.

Blank

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

In the Netherlands, the term "*blank*" is a synonym for "White" (see also "White").

As an identity category, the term shares its genealogy with other terms such as Black (from the Latin) and associated with the racial sciences of the 18th and 19th century.

The Van Dale dictionary, defines the term as "unblemished" and non-colored. (See "White", "Black" and "Person of Color").

The association of such 'neutral' and even 'positive' connotations of the word has generated critique from anti-racist/racial equality activists in the Netherlands, demanding that the word be replaced with the term "White" as a racial and political identity.

SUGGESTIONS

- White
- The term White is increasingly used, especially by activists and academics.

Bombay

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

Bombay is the colonial toponym—the name given to a geographic place under colonial rule—for the Indian city of Mumbai. The term was first used in the 16th century.

The renaming of places is a common occurrence, both historically and in the present, often resulting from different political shifts over time. This was an important ideological practice, both during the colonial period and during decolonization. This practice continues today.

On claiming territory, colonizers named cities and towns after important people or after their own places.

Renaming—either restoring earlier names or creating new names—was an important practice for newly formed nations in the decolonization process. The use of names that were assigned under colonization can be painful for some, as a legacy of colonialism.

The city of Mumbai continued to be called Bombay until long after independence but was officially changed in 1995. Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Chennai (Madras) are similar colonial toponyms that were Anglicized during the colonial period.

Other contested colonial toponyms include: Jakarta (formerly Batavia), Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia).

SUGGESTIONS

- Mumbai

Bush Negro

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

In Dutch, this term originates from the two terms "*bosch,*" meaning "wild land" and "*neger*" (see also "Negro").

It was a pejorative term for Africans (and their descendants) who escaped from slavery in Suriname and the Guyanas and settled in inaccessible, interior/mountainous regions, from which they fought against colonization.

Some people in Suriname and the Netherlands still use the term interchangeably with "Maroon" and "Boslandcreool"

While the term "Maroon" is itself contested, there is broader popular and academic agreement about its appropriateness. (see also "Maroon").

SUGGESTIONS

- Maroon
- Should it be necessary to used this term, for example, in a descriptive or historical context then we suggest the use of quotation marks. For example: *The term "Bush Negro" originates from...*

Caucasian

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "Caucasian" originally referred to the people of the Caucasus. In the 19th century, the term was taken up as a racial designation for White Europeans, informed by the anthropological work of J.F. Blumenbach (1752-1840).

In the 20th century "Caucasian" was used within the Nazi ideology of racial hierarchies.

Within the Netherlands, the term mainly appears in museum databases, and is not often used in common language. In other places— such as the US –the term is more commonly used in daily language. There is growing criticism of the term, however, because of its racialized origins.

SUGGESTIONS

- When referring to people from the Caucasus region, "Caucasian" is correct.
- When used within the context of the history of racial categories we suggest the use of quotation marks.
- White (see also White in this table)

Colored

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Colored" is a controversial term normally used to describe a person or a group of people with mixed White European and non-White, for example, someone of African or Asian, ancestry. In some cases the term is also used to describe a Black person. The term has different histories of use and meanings within different parts of the world, but is generally regarded as derogatory today.

Within South Africa, for example, the term describes someone of mixed ancestry, including Khoisan, Malay, and White. Within the USA the term was used historically to refer primarily to a Black person or the Black community, and is more restrictive than the similar term "person(s)/people of color". In the Netherlands, the term is used similarly to describe a Black person, or someone of mixed ancestry, with several interrelated Dutch language terms for these identity categories such as: colored (gekleurd), having a bit of color (met een kleurtje) or with a darker skin colour (met een donkerdere huidskleur). The use of these terms harkens back to a racialised idea of whiteness as the norm. These different Dutch terms are all increasingly regarded as inappropriate and derogatory.

There is growing acceptance by many for the use of the American identity category "person(s) of color" or "people of color", abbreviated POC.

There is also the more recently emerging group category to more broadly describe non-White people, which is "Black and Non-Black People of Color".

While the terms "Black", and "person(s) of color" remain generally acceptable terms for many, using the terms that the persons themselves find respectful and acceptable is advised.

SUGGESTIONS

- Person(s) of Color or People of Color
- Use terms that people find respectful and acceptable for others to call them.
- Colored can be used in a historical or descriptive context, between quotation marks.
- Black and Non-Black person(s) of color can be used, but with caution.

Coolie

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "Coolie" is thought to be derived from the Hindi word *"quli,"* meaning "day worker." In Dutch it specifically refers to untrained contract/indentured laborers from Asia, who in the 1850s worked in the Dutch colonies of the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) and later in the West Indies (Suriname). The term has also been used to describe contract laborers, especially from India, working in the British colonized regions of the Caribbean.

There has been broad agreement among scholars, activists and diverse communities of interest from the mid-20th century onwards that the term is offensive. It is still used as a term of abuse for people of Asian descent.

SUGGESTIONS

- This term is derogatory, but can be used in a descriptive or historical context, in which case we suggest the use of quotation marks. For example: *"Coolies" is a term that was used to describe people who labored in European colonized regions, for example on plantations.*

Descent

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term refers to the group or place where someone comes from or was born. It is not a controversial term in itself. However, because the term is often used to ask someone where they are from based on a presumption of him or her being non-Dutch because of their appearance, it can be experienced as offensive (See article Zeefuik and Modest; also words such as "Roots"and "Allochtoon".

SUGGESTIONS

- See suggestions for Roots and Allochtoon.

Disabled

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

Disabled, like the word "handicap", is an umbrella term to describe varying forms of intellectual to physical impairments. In recent years, "disability" has replaced "handicap" in much of Western Europe and the United States. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the term "handicap" was used to describe a person's "deficit" or inability to function "normally." Beginning in the 1970s this concept of "deficit" and related words like "handicapped" became increasingly contested. Activists argued that a disability was not an individual problem to solve, but a social construct that made living with an impairment into a problem. People no longer wanted to be called "the disabled," but rather "disabled people" (UK) or "people with disabilities" or "differently abled" (US).

SUGGESTIONS

- Disabled people
- People with disabilities
- Differently abled

Discover

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

 "Discover" can be used in a neutral manner, for example when used in the context of to find out something, or to uncover how something works.

However, when used to suggest that a place did not exist, was not known by Europeans or was not inhabited prior to European encounter it is far from neutral. For example: *"painted almost 40 years after the discovery of 'America' by Columbus in 1492, this work of art was one of the earliest attempts by an artist to give an impression of the new continent."*

Such a text essentially omits the fact that the continent was populated with thriving societies, and thus is pejorative, as it implies neither art nor people existed prior to Columbus's "discovery."

SUGGESTIONS

- Phrases like "was the first European to reach..." would be more appropriate.

Dwarf

Eskimo

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

Dwarfism (*Achondroplasie* or *dwerggroei* in Dutch) is a medical or genetic condition for people of short stature. When used outside of a medical context the term is considered offensive.

The term dwarf entered the Dutch language in the 14th century, when it had the connotation of monstrous.

Satirical portrayals of people of short stature can often be found in (the history of) European art, literature, and film. In 19th- and early 20th-century colonial exhibitions, freak shows, and circuses, dwarfism was seen as a form of being abnormally "other" in very similar ways to the representation of formerly colonized and racialized people.

Similar demeaning or insulting terms are "lilliputian" and "pygmy".

SUGGESTIONS

- "Dwarf"; applicable only in a medical diagnosis or in a descriptive context. Otherwise, use "a person of short stature," "little person" or 'someone with dwarfism."
- "Dwarf" and "pygmy" can be used in a historical or descriptive context. In this case, use quotation marks.

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "Eskimo" (Esquimaux) refers to the diverse Indigenous peoples of Arctic and sub-Arctic North America, Greenland and Northeastern Siberia. The term has never been commonly used by community members to describe themselves in their own language, as they would use their own indigenous terms.

There is no general acceptance on the linguistic origins of the term. Some regard the term as a French or English version of an indigenous term. Today there is better acceptance of the term in Alaska than in Canada or Greenland, where other terms are preferred and Eskimo is seen to have a pejorative meaning.

The term has now largely passed out of official use. Deciding on another broad term that describes all groups who live in the circumpolar north is not straightforward, although Eskimo-Aleut is used to describe the linguistic group.

SUGGESTIONS

Adopt the terminology used and accepted as respectful by the people themselves.

Examples include:
- the Iñupiat peoples of northern Alaska
- the Inuit peoples of Canada
- the Kalaallit of Greenland
- the Yup'ik: i.e. the Central Alaskan people of the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta, the Kuskokwim River, and coastal Bristol Bay in Alaska
- the Alutiiq (or Suqpiaq) people of the Alaska Peninsula and coastal and island areas of southcentral Alaska
- Yupighyt: the Inuit of Siberia

Ethnicity

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Ethnicity" refers to the shared social, cultural or historical experiences and practices of a group of people, for example, language, religion or dress, and usually a national or regional background. "Ethnic group" describes the people having these shared features.

While it may seem a neutral category it often is used to describe something or someone different from the norm or foreign, for example in "ethnic food" or "ethnic music." When used to describe people, the term is normally associated with minority groups, although everyone has an ethnic identity.

"Ethnicity" is sometimes confused with race and is incorrectly used by many as an alternative term, sidestepping the reference in race to biological differences.

SUGGESTIONS

- "Ethnicity" and "ethnic groups" should be used with caution. The term should not be confused with. The term should not be confused with race.

Exotic

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

This term is derived from the Ancient Greek word "*exōtikós,*" literally meaning "from the outside." It entered the Dutch language with the meaning of foreign/alien, which it still has today. The term has become intertwined with ideas about the (racialized and sexualized) Other.

The term "exotic" is commonly used to describe plants and animals, but is also used for people (usually people of color), where it has a connotation of being different from the norm, especially in reference to appearance and name (for example "what an exotic name!"). Sometimes it has a sensual connotation.

SUGGESTIONS

- Applicable when referring to plant and animal species. It is, however, contested to use the term to describe people.

Gay

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Gay" is a commonly used term to refer to non-heterosexual sexualities, especially men. "Gay" is preferable to the more medical and legal term of "homosexual" (see also "Homosexual").

While "gay" is adopted by some people as a form of self-identification, the term is in some day-to-day contexts used in a derogatory way. Additionally, *"homo"* is used as a curse word.

SUGGESTIONS

- The term is appropriate when used respectfully.
- Use terms and pronouns that people find acceptable and respectful for describing themselves.

Gypsy

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "gypsy" is generally used to refer to a member of a travelling or itinerant people, specifically Roma people.

The Roma people are divided into different groups. Associated with itinerancy, due to their history of (forced) migration, negative stereotypes of Roma as thieves and vagabonds continue to exist today.

For the Roma people the term "gypsy" is derogatory. Consequently they collectively and officially adopted the term "Roma" in the 1970s.

SUGGESTIONS

- In general, "Roma" can be used.
- Groups and subgroups, however, have their own preferred names (e.g., Sinti) so it is advised to use these when known.

Half-blood

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

This term, like "full blood" and "half-breed," emerged in association with 18th- and 19th-century ideas of racial difference. In this period, racial sciences, based on the idea of biologically different races, were at their peak (see also "Race"). Blood, it was thought then, was also regarded as carrying hierarchical traits, with some blood being superior to others.

The term is usually applied to someone of mixed White European and Non-White descent.

This term is similar to other terms (in this list) such as "mulatto" and "mestizo".

SUGGESTIONS

- In the US and UK contexts, "mixed race" is used in place of this term. This is, however, not common in the Netherlands.
- Identity markers such as "mixed heritage" and "mixed ethnicity" or "of mixed descent" are more appropriate.

Headhunter

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "headhunter" has two distinct meanings. The term has come to describe a professional recruiter who finds candidates for specific jobs. In this context it is not regarded as sensitive.

Historically the term has been used to describe someone who participated in the ritual practice of taking trophy heads, for example during times of war. This practice was done in many places and by many peoples across the world including Europeans. In the Netherlands, the term was first used in the 19th century.

Headhunting has long been represented in popular books and films, often to give the impression of primitive, wild, cruel and bloodthirsty tribal peoples of the jungle. This portrayal misrepresents the significant ritual role it had for the proper functioning of those societies that practiced it.

The use of such terms and ideas reinforces the idea that certain peoples are essentially unchanging and "primitive" (see also "Primitive" and textbox Kunst).

SUGGESTIONS

- In the first context the term is acceptable.
- When referring to how the term has been used historically we suggest the use of quotation marks.
- When describing diverse ritual practices it is better to avoid using the term. Choose rather to explain the specific practices, using their Indigenous names, and ritual importance/value.

Hermaphrodite

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Hermaphrodite" is regarded as outdated and stigmatizing term that pathologizes people born with sexual organs from both sexes (see article Steinbock).

SUGGESTIONS

- The umbrella term "intersex," for example "intersex condition" or "intersex person" is preferred.

Homosexual

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Homosexual" is a medical and legal term to refer to non-heterosexual sexualities. The term as such was invented in the mid-19th century as an abnormal identity category to distinguish a person who engaged in sexual acts with another of the same sex.

Homosexuality has been and continues to be considered sinful, a mental illness or even criminal in several places across the world. The term, and its abbreviated form *homo* is sometimes used as derogatory or curse word.

SUGGESTIONS

- To avoid stigmatization of non-heterosexual identities and to do justice to the plurality of sexual diversity, using community-derived descriptors like "lesbian," "gay" and "bisexual" is preferred.
- Choose culturally specific names such as Two-Spirit (see Steinbock, this publication).

Hottentot

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

This term refers to the Khoikhoi people, who live in the western part of South Africa. It is a Dutch colonial term, first used in the 17th century, and was based on an imitation of the sound of the Khoikhoi language.

The term "Hottentot" connoted culturally backward or primitive, stereotypes that were created in the early colonial period. In the 19th century, Khoikhoi people were violently exploited. They were also put on display, as an example of a primitive type, initially as entertainment but later as part of scientific colonial knowledge.

One well-known example was the so-called Hottentot Venus, Sarah Baartman, who was displayed in Europe from 1810–1815. Her remains were displayed in a French museum until 1974. Baartmans remains were returned to South Africa in 2002.

SUGGESTIONS

- Khoisan (people)

Inboorling

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"*Inboorling*" was used in the Netherlands from the 13th century onwards, and shares a basic meaning—someone born in the land—with the term "native." It is, however, a more exaggerated form of native, having the connotations of primitive and wild.

In the early 19th century, it was used by some to describe all Indonesians, but it later was ascribed only to so-called tribal peoples in the Dutch colonies. In the Colonial Exhibition of 1883 in Amsterdam, the term "*inboorlingen*," for example, was used to describe peoples both from Indonesia and Suriname. In Surinam itself it was never used to describe the Indigenous peoples.

Today the term is mostly associated with people who are considered to be primitive.

SUGGESTIONS

- The term is old-fashioned, and therefore it is not recommended for use in contemporary context.
- The term can be used in a descriptive or historical context, in which case we suggest the use of quotation marks.

Indian

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

In the 16th century, Christopher Columbus, on encountering the Americas, called the inhabitants "Indians," as he was under the impression that he had arrived in India. The misnomer "Indian" was soon used as a term to describe Indigenous peoples of North America.

There is no consensus for the use of the term. While in the US "American Indian" is a term with a divisive history, it is nevertheless used as a form of self-identification by individuals and communities and remains a key term for the US and Canadian Federal Governments.

In the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America "*índio*" is widely seen as problematic and is irregularly or not used by Indigenous people themselves. This is different in Brazil, where "*índio*" is less contested.

SUGGESTIONS

- Adopt the terminology used and accepted as respectful by the people themselves.
- In this entry Indian does not refer to Indian as used to describe people from India/South Asia. In this context Indian is correct.

Indigenous

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

In recent decades the term "Indigenous," which was originally used to describe flora and fauna, has increasingly become a legal category describing various peoples colonized by Europe.

The term itself describes a specific group of people who identify with a place as an original homeland and have developed longstanding traditions in that place. Under diverse colonial projects these peoples were dispossessed of their lands, which led often to (cultural) genocide.

The term 'Indigenous' is one of empowerment, due in part to the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

"Indigenous" encompasses those peoples traditionally referred to as "Aboriginals", "First Nations" and "Indians" among others.

SUGGESTIONS

- The term is appropriate when referring to plant and animal species.
- When talking about specific peoples it is preferable to use the name they call themselves, rather than the generic 'Indigenous'.

Indisch

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "Indisch" has changed meaning over time. While the term is not always sensitive, there is often confusion about its use.

In the 19th century it referred to anything Indonesian, such as Indische houses, Indische dances and Indische population. In the 20th century it started to refer to Indo-European people and cultures (see also "Indo") and sometimes to a European who lived for a long time in Indonesia. At the end of the last century, however, this meaning was considered too ethnic and rejected by some people.

Today the word "Indisch" refers to anything coming from the colonial period in the former Dutch East Indies.

Indisch is often confused with Indonesian (food, ethnicity and culture) because of the 19th-century use.

SUGGESTIONS

- The term can be used, but should not be confused with "Indonesian".

Indo

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"*Indo*" is an abbreviation for Indo-European. The term emerged during the colonial period to describe people of Indonesian and European descent (not restricted to the Netherlands). Arguably, the first known example of its use in the Netherlands dates to 1898.

The term rapidly lost favor due to its ethnic and colonial connotations, but has recently been adopted as a term of pride and empowerment by people identifying as being of Indo-European heritage living in the Netherlands.

SUGGESTIONS

- "Indo-European" is the appropriate term, and should not be confused with Indonesian.

Jappenkampen

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

This term generally refers to the Japanese camps in Asia during WW II and to the camps in the Japanese-occupied Dutch East Indies in particular.

The word "Jap" is a pejorative abbreviated form of "Japanese."

The term *Jappenkamp* is also contested by some victims and their descendants, who feel that the term focuses more on the Japanese perpetrators rather than on the cruelties that happened in the camps. For this reason "Japanese concentration camps" has been suggested as a possible alternative.

SUGGESTIONS

Multiple alternatives exist, including:
- Japanese camp
- Japanese internment camp
- Japanese concentration camp
- Japanese prisoners of war camp
- Japanese military prison camp (in Burma and Thailand)

Kaffir

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term Kaffir derives from the Arabic term "*kafir,*" meaning one without religion. In South Africa, it was originally used in the 16th century to describe Black non-Muslim people and later to identify Bantu-speaking people, especially in the wars of conquest of the Eastern Cape.

In Afrikaans as in English, it soon became a label for Black people of African descent in general. The term gained its derogatory connotation during the apartheid era and is now understood as hate speech.

The exception is a group of Sri Lankan peoples with shared ancestry from Portuguese traders (or more broadly European) and enslaved Bantu peoples who refer to themselves as Kaffir.

SUGGESTIONS

- The term "Kaffir" can be used in a descriptive or historical context, in which case the use of quotation marks is suggested.
- It is appropriate when used to refer to the Sri Lankan Kaffirs, as it is a term with which the group self-identifies.

Maroon

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "Maroon" is used to refer to Africans (and their descendants) who escaped from slavery in the Americas, and settled in the inaccessible, interior/mountainous regions.

The term itself derives from the 16th-century Spanish word *"cimarrón,"* meaning runaway cattle and is, thus, regarded by some as derogatory. Simultaneously, however, the term is used as one of empowerment as the Maroons have been celebrated as a symbol for the continuous resistance to colonialism. These differing views add some complexity to the use of the term.

While in Suriname the term is accepted by some and not by others, in Jamaica, for example, there is more unanimity about the positive use of the term.

SUGGESTIONS

- Generally acceptable to use the term.
- In the context of Suriname, however, it is better to use the specific names for each Maroon group: such as Saamaka, Matawai, Aluku, Kwinti, Paamaka.

Medicine Man

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "Medicine Man" is used to describe traditional or spiritual healers among some indigenous peoples in different parts of the world. Skilled in the healing powers of natural/herbal remedies, these persons are highly respected members of their communities. Traditional healers are consulted to heal both physical and mental illnesses of individuals and the social, cultural or environmental issues within a community.

The figure of the medicine man has been represented in numerous films, novels and other popular media often in sensational and eroticizing terms. Such representations have denied the complexity of the knowledge associated with healing, as well as the important role traditional healers played in many societies. Within the last few decades the term has been regarded by many as pejorative.

SUGGESTIONS

- Traditional or spiritual healer
- Where known use the term that the group to which the traditional healer belongs regard as acceptable and respectful.

Mohammedan

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

Mohammedan was a commonly used term in the past. Originally, it referenced to someone who worships of the Prophet Muhammad. Many Muslims, for this reason, object to its use because Islam teaches the worship of God alone.

The terms "Muslim" and "Islamic" are more common today. This term can most commonly be found in museum databases and not in daily language.

SUGGESTIONS

- Muslim

Mongoloid

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Mongoloid" is an outdated and offensive term used to describe both a so-called racial type and a person with the genetic condition *Down Syndrome.*

As racial type, the terms emerged from 18th and 19th century studies of racial difference. The Mongoloid or Mongolian race was the umbrella term used to describe diverse indigenous peoples from East Asia, South East Asia, and the Artic region of North America. Like the other two presumed large racial groups, Caucasoid (Caucasian) and Negroid (Negro), this term is outdated and in general regarded as derogatory.

The term is also used to describe people with the genetic condition *Down Syndrome,* due to the presumed similarity in facial features to the so-called Mongolian race.

In modern day usage the term is used as a curse word to describe someone regarded as retarded.

SUGGESTIONS

- In relation to the first definition, use specific national or cultural terms when describing persons.
- In relation to the second definition, the term is derogatory. Use "someone with Down Syndrome."
- The use of "mongoloid" or "retarded" to describe someone with a disability is offensive.

Moor

This is a controversial term. Its meaning has changed over time. While the term has been used to describe different groups of people it is commonly understood to describe Muslim people of Arab and Amazigh descent from North Africa and Southern Europe.

At the same time, the term is said to be derived from a Greek term meaning "black, blackened or charred" and has been used in Europe since antiquity to describe Black people from Africa.

In the Netherlands, as elsewhere, the term is used as a derogatory term for Muslims from North Africa or for a Black person.

SUGGESTIONS

- This term is derogatory and is therefore not recommended for use in contemporary context.
- There is no acceptable alternative for this term.
- Can be used in historical or descriptive sense. In this case we suggest using quotation marks.

Mulatto

Since the 17th century, "mulatto" refers to first-generation offspring of a non-White person and a White person. The term derives from the Latin word "*mulus*" (mule), the hybrid offspring of a horse and a donkey.

Like the racial sciences from which the term emerged, it suggests an incommensurability between two so-regarded different species of mankind. Like the mule, then, this results in an abnormal offspring, presumed infertile. Mulattos were deemed to represent the "horrors" of miscegenation (see also "Half-blood"), but because of their so-called White blood they were believed to be more intelligent—and often more attractive—than Black people.

Today such ideas still remain in subtle ways in daily speech.

SUGGESTIONS

- The term "mulatto" can be used in a descriptive or historical context, in which case we suggest the use of quotation marks.
- See suggestions for half-blood.

Native

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "native" derives from the Latin word *natus,* and has been used to describe people born to a particular place.

While it was commonly used historically, the term has been criticized for not only reinforcing colonial hierarchies—natives were regarded as inferior to the civilized colonizer—but also (contradictorily) for implying an exclusionary racial and ethnic right to a place by a specific group.

The term is currently used by some, for example, Native Americans, in their political claims for sovereignty. Within Europe this concept is increasingly used in xenophobic politics.

Within the Netherlands, "native" is most commonly used to describe Indigenous Indonesians.

SUGGESTIONS

- Should be used with caution.

Negro

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

This term derives from the Latin word "*niger,*" meaning black. In the Netherlands, the term has been used since the 17th century to refer to Black people in and from (sub-Saharan) Africa. Not much later, it came into use to describe enslaved people, and became associated with the racial sciences of the 18th and 19th centuries (see also "Caucasian" and "Race").

In the 20th century, "*Negro*" was used in a racial typology that supported stereotypes about Black people, but functioned simultaneously, even contradictorily, as part of emergent anti-colonial struggles and increasing Black consciousness.

Nowadays, the word is widely regarded as derogatory including by Black and other activists, academics among others.

SUGGESTIONS

- Black
- This term is not recommended for use in contemporary context.
- The term can be used in a descriptive or historical context, in which case we suggest the use of quotation marks.

Oriental

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

This term derives from the Latin word "*Oriënt*", meaning east. Historically, the term came to be used in Europe to describe people or things from Asia.

"Oriental" gained widespread critique after the 1978 publication of Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism,* which critiqued Euro-American patronizing representations of the (Middle) East.

While the term is contested for being geographically Eurocentric, and especially for its romanticizing and stereotypical image of Asian people as mysterious, "exotic" and foreign, it is still widely used.

SUGGESTIONS

- "Asian"
- The use of more specific terms for the countries, languages and cultures from Asia and the Middle East is suggested.

Politionele actie

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

This phrase refers to the large-scale military operations carried out by the Dutch army between 1945 and 1949, to prevent Indonesian Independence.

The Dutch government at the time refused to speak in terms of war, as for them this was a legitimate suppression of a rebellion. They in turn employed the term "Politionele acties."

"Politionele actie" is now considered misleading by many, including the descendants of victims, as its use of euphemistic vocabulary obscures the physical and structural violence that was perpetrated and reduces the victims of this violence to rebels.

SUGGESTIONS

- There is no consensus on alternative terms. "Agresi Militer Belanda I & II" are used in Indonesia.
- In the Netherlands "First and Second Dutch-Indonesian Wars" has been suggested.

Primitive

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

Primitive derives from the Latin word *primitivus*, meaning the first-born or first of its kind. In European thought, it became synonymous with the racialized and temporal "Other" and was applied to cultures that were imagined as existing in a distant past (see Marijke Kunst and Simone Vermaat in this publication) that lacked qualities that were seen as European, specifically progress and rationality.

The term is before still used today to denote someone or something as simple and uncivilized.

"Primitivism" is a movement in art that connotes the beauty, natural qualities, or romance of a simpler way of life, in contrast to a more advanced, industrialized Europe.

Both the term "primitive", like the artistic movement, have received significant criticism from diverse quarters including academics.

SUGGESTIONS

- The term is not recommended for use.
- The term can be used in a descriptive or historical context, in which case we suggest the use of quotation marks.
  For example: *There was an artistic movement called 'primitivism'.*

Pygmy

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Pygmy" is a term used in anthropology to describe diverse peoples, especially from (Equatorial) Africa and Asia (i.e. New Guinea), the adult males of whom are regarded as of unusually short stature. Beyond the term's use to refer to the physical features of these diverse ethnic groups (and which in part makes it derogatory for some) the term is also used negatively as an insult to critique someone's intellectual capacities. Some indigenous peoples, for example in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have reclaimed the term as neutral and therefore non-problematic.

SUGGESTIONS

- "Pygmy" is derogatory and should therefore be avoided.
- When referring to an individual or group of people it is better to use the specific ethnic or cultural terms that the people find acceptable and respectful.

Queer

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

Particularly since the 1980s, "queer" has served as an umbrella term for sexual interests and identities that challenge social norms for sexual behavior.

The term is not only shorthand for "LGBT" but also the full range of human sexuality, for example people with sexual fetishes or who practice polyamory.

"Queer" has been reclaimed as a proud political and sexual identity from earlier etymological usages that meant strange, aslant or curious.

The term, however, is still used as a slur against people perceived to be sexually deviant.

SUGGESTIONS

- LGBT
- Use terminology and pronouns that are regaded as respectful by the community themselves. See Steinbock for suggestions.

Race

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Race" is a debated term that refers to the categorization of humans based on physical features, including skin color. In racial thinking the color of one's skin is regarded as a sign of incommensurable difference between groups, including a hierarchy in aptitude, abilities, even behavior and development.

According to 18th- and 19th-century racial sciences, humans were divided into different groups, arranged hierarchically. These typologies reinforced colonial ideologies of difference, with the White European at the top of a racial hierarchy (see also "Caucasian" and "Negro").

While race is not a biological fact, it has social consequences, for example in discrimination, prejudice and inequality. Racism, therefore, should be understood as a form of prejudice and discrimination based on the presumed superiority of one group over another.

SUGGESTIONS

- There is no easy alternative for this term. The term is used by some in quotation marks to acknowledge the controversy surrounding the term.
- Racism is a valid term to use, as it acknowledges the discriminatory practices of racial thinking.

Roots

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Roots" has become popular in daily language, as a way of describing one's identity. The term is used to refer to the place from where one originally comes, whether literally or figuratively.

"Roots" is often tied to feelings of displacement or loss (to search for one's roots), especially associated with diasporic communities.

In recent years, the term has come under criticism because of the way it references, often in nostalgic ways, a stable and fixed identity to which people could return.

To ask someone about their roots may be problematic for some, as it presupposes that they do not belong or that their roots are the sole or predominant defining factor for their identity. This is further compounded by the fact that the question is mostly asked of non-White people.

SUGGESTIONS

- Generally, it is not considered problematic if people choose to speak of roots when referring to themselves. Some people, however, experience it as an intrusion or disrespectful to be asked this question by others.
- Recent scholarship has suggested that it might be more useful to refer to routes (as in the cultural and social bopgraphy of people) than to roots.

Servant

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

"Servant", like other terms such as "Page", "Footmen" and "Baboo", are frequently occurring terms in many museums databases and can most often be found in the descriptions of paintings and photographs.

These interrelated terms describe a person employed in another's household to do diverse domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning, or to be someone's attendant. The terms do not in themselves suppose gross exploitation, even if they describe a hierarchical relation in class and power, sometimes marked by exploitation. The multiple and complex relations that servants may have with their masters makes any too easy judgement of the role of the servant or conditions under which they lived an incautious one.

"Page" describes a young male servant or attendant, working for a nobleman, or from the Renaissance as servants for fashionable women and men.

Referring to someone as servant or page today is regarded as demeaning or insulting in some circles. Maintaining the term in the description of historic paintings and photographs may however be recommended in some situations, especially when the person's name is not known, since it conveys the power relations more transparently.

SUGGESTIONS

- Use the person's name if known
- The use of "servant" can be a transparent representation of power relation.
- The use of "page" is very infrequent in the present-day and its use should be avoided. (see Eveline Sint Nicolaas in this publication)

Slave

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "slave" is used to describe a person who is the legal property of another and is forced to obey them by law and/or by force.

The term itself refers to different forms of un-freedom, with different meanings and consequences over time and place. In the 6th century, for example, "*sklabos*" (Greek) meant an un-free person of Slavic descent, while in medieval Latin "*sclavus*" more generally meant "a person who is owned by another."

Today, the term is more generally used to describe people from Africa who were bought/captured and enslaved by Europeans and forced to work on plantations, often under inhumane conditions, within European colonial projects.

Increasingly "slave" has become contested by activists, scholars and the public alike, as it is argued that using the term is to normalize the category "slave" as an inherent identity of a person, thus ignoring that this identity was created not by choice but through violent force. The term also denies the humanity of the person, reducing them to being no more than the property of another.

Recently the term has been used to describe the victims of contemporary human trafficking or forced labor.

SUGGESTIONS

- "Enslaved" or "enslaved person" (see Richard Kofi in this publication)

Third World

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

While still used in everyday speech, the term "Third World" is regarded as a vestige of Cold War politics, when the world was divided into three groups based on political and economic orientations or alliances.

"First World" describes the United States and its allies, including Japan, Canada and countries in Western Europe, while nations that were part of the Communist Bloc, including China, USSR, Cuba and countries in Eastern Europe comprised the "Second World."

The term was first used (Alfred Akfred Sauvy 1952) to describe countries that were politically aligned with neither the First nor the Second worlds. "Third World" also became an economic categorization, used to refer to the poorest countries and regions of the world. This included countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, many of which were formerly colonized by Europe.

An increasing number of people agree that the term is no longer appropriate, as it is not an accurate description of the complexity of the world and because it reinforces a division of the world into Western superiority and non-Western inferiority.

SUGGESTIONS

- "Developing nations" as well as "low-income countries" have been suggested as alternatives. These terms, however, are also contested, for the same reasons as Third World.
- It is preferable to name the countries and thus be as specific as possible.

Traditional

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term itself is not problematic, but can take on a negative connotation when used in opposition to other terms such as "modern" and "progress." Several scholars have argued that this dichotomy emerged as part of a Eurocentric intellectual and colonial project, which reinforced the idea that non-European cultures were pre-modern and static as opposed to a modern, progressive Europe.

This belief established a hierarchy of cultures and peoples, where West was equated to modern and non-West to traditional. This divide still exist today as used in terms such as "traditional arts and cultures" and is commonly associated with ethnographic museums.

SUGGESTIONS

- When writing about traditions, or objects understood by their makers to represent traditions or traditional styles, be as specific as possible about time, place and intention.
  For example: *"In the 18th century people used this, in 2018 they use that...."*
- In some cases the term can be replaced with "historic."

Trans

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

This is an umbrella term used to describe transgender or transsexual sexualities.

"Transgender" and "transsexual" describe people whose gender identity and expression differs from what is understood to be typical to the sex they have been assigned at birth. As an overarching term "transgender" can describe a variety of gender identity and expressions, for example cross-dressing.

"Transsexual" is the preferred term by some who intend to, or have permanently, changed their bodies in alignment with their gender identity.

SUGGESTIONS

- Use terms and pronouns that people find acceptable and respectful for describing themselves.
- The term "transvestite" should be avoided unless someone identifies themselves as such. This term has been replaced by the term "cross-dresser."

Tribe

Western

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The term "tribe" is often associated with so-called non-complex societies with simple political organization. While this is itself not contested, the term has come to connote "primitive," "simple" and even "wild," and is predominately associated with non-European peoples and cultures.

The complexity of the term emerges because some cultural groups have come to embrace the term as a legal and group identity—for example Native North American Tribal Councils. "Tribe" also appears in the Qur'an and has therefore always been an accepted term in the Arab world. Even then, this term is still contested for its negative connotations.

The term has very infrequently been used to describe ethnic groups in Europe, for example the Sami people or historically to describe Celtic peoples.

In recent years, it has gained positive use within fashion or popular culture, to refer to style, e.g., "fashion tribes."

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

The West is an ideological, historical, economic and geographical concept, the meaning of which has shifted over time.

The term represents both a mental and physical division of the world that categorizes and contrasts people, cultures, religions and regions, placing them in a hierarchy. It is often contrasted with "*niet-Westers*" (not Western).

Other terms with similar connotations include "Third World" (see also "Third World"), "developed"/"undeveloped," etc.

SUGGESTIONS

- The term should be used with caution.
- When the people themselves find it an acceptable and respectful term for describing themselves, it is appropriate.
- It can be used in the context of fashion and popular culture, but only when referring to oneself.

SUGGESTIONS

- Be as specific as possible in terms of country, population etc.

White

HISTORY, USE & POSSIBLE SENSITIVITIES

This term has long been used to describe a racial identity, based on skin color, and usually describes certain groups of Europeans and their emigrant population across the world. The term is associated with with the racial sciences of the 18th and 19th centuries.

As an ideological category associated for example with Europe's imperial expansion, White has come to connote progress, sophistication or cultured.

Since the latter part of the 20th century there has been sustained critique of the social construction of Whiteness as norm, arguing that it is an identity category that emerged to justify or reinforce discrimination against non-White people.

Within the Netherlands, in addition to increasing critique of Whiteness are discussions about whether one should use the word Wit or Blank as descriptor (see also "Blank").

SUGGESTIONS

- "White" is increasingly used as an alternative for "Blank".