TOWARDS NEW NARRATIVES OF THE MULTICULTURAL NATION:
NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCE IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
COLOMBIA

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of
Leicester

By

Cristina Lleras Figueroa
Department of Museum Studies
University of Leicester

April 2011
TOWARDS NEW NARRATIVES OF THE MULTICULTURAL NATION:
NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCE IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
COLOMBIA

Cristina Lleras Figueroa

Changes in the concept of nation, accentuated by the challenges of globalisation and increasingly trenchant calls from minorities demanding representation, participation and inclusion, have prompted national museums in many parts of the world to review their mission and develop new cultural narratives of the nation.

Whilst many museums have sought to represent previously excluded communities in more inclusive and equitable ways, there is nevertheless only a budding understanding of how the tensions and complex challenges that arise from museums working with these groups can be resolved. Moreover, there is relatively limited research exploring how diverse audiences (majority and minority) perceive and engage with the new narratives that result from such initiatives.

This thesis seeks to contribute to these gaps in knowledge and understanding by examining in detail issues of production and reception around a single case study: the temporary exhibition Velorios y santos vivos. Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palequeras at the National Museum of Colombia (2008), developed by the museum in response to growing demands from Afrocolombian activists for inclusion in the national narrative. This central case study is used to explore, more broadly, the role that national museums might play in fostering access to cultural rights in the multicultural nation while dealing with demands for historical reparation.

Based on a mixed methods research design, the analysis encompasses both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection with an emphasis on semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Results suggest that deeply entrenched stereotypes of minorities can be stubbornly resistant to change and that attempts to introduce new forms of representation can run the risk of essentialising or simplifying different cultures. At the same time, in-depth analysis of audience responses suggests that, despite these challenges, museum exhibitions can create arenas for productive intercultural exchange and serve as grounds for the observation and promotion of cultural rights for previously excluded groups.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I am indebted to all the participants in this study: the anonymous interviewees, focus group participants and survey takers, and most especially the production team members and museum staff that collaborated in the exhibition, *Velorios y santos vivos. Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palequeras*, held at the National Museum of Colombia in 2008.

My supervisor Richard Sandell was crucial not only in leading me through this process but also in maintaining dialogue and discussions that bridged academia into my realities as a museum worker. I am also very grateful for the thoughtful reading, suggestions and recommendations received from Sheila Watson, my second supervisor.

A close reading of all the papers and drafts of this thesis was done by Alejandra Sofía Velez-Shafi, who I convinced of “sharing” this PhD process with me. I also would like to thank Daria Campion for important time spent in proofreading and professor Jaime Arocha and Sofía González for their comments as well as permission to use the photographs that accompany this text.

A word of acknowledgement for my colleagues in Colombia as well as those at NAMU and ICMAH (ICOM) who allowed me to engage in thoughtful conversations on museum practice and theory that developed into ideas for this text.

Last but not least, thanks to my family who endured my many absences over the past few years and to Dominique for her patience and unconditional support.
Daniel Spock, who worked at the History Center Museum in Saint Paul, Minnesota, said that a worthwhile exhibition first had to transform the perspective of the curator to be able to have an impact on the public. This has been the case of both exhibition and thesis, which are inextricably tied.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Introduction: Representing difference in national museums</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Paradigm, methodology, methods and initial results of research</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The exhibition as intercultural exchange</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Afrocolombian identities and the exhibition</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Reloaded multiculturalism in the museum</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Conclusions: What the past holds for national museums</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1A Survey questionnaire (S)</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1B Survey questionnaire (E)</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2A Interview protocol questions (S)</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2B Interview protocol questions (E)</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3A Letter and consent form (S)</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3B Letter and consent form (E)</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4 Description of interviewees</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 5A Protocol for group interview with staff (S)</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 5B Protocol for group interview with staff (E)</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 6A Questions for production team (S)</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 6B Questions for production team (E)</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 7A Protocol for focus groups (S)</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 7B Protocol for focus groups (E)</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

1 Vestibule of the National Museum of Colombia after the end of the exhibition. Photo Sofía Natalia González. 67

2 First space of the exhibition. Photo Carlos Gustavo Suárez. 68

3 Entrance to the second space of the exhibition; view of the African pieces that represented rituals to the ancestors. Photo Sofía Natalia González. 70

4 A closer look at the African pieces from the donation of William Bertrand. Photo Sofía Natalia González. 71

5 View of the objects that represented the second phase of the funerary rituals (Death). Photo Sofía Natalia González. 72

6 Ordinary objects acquired sacred status in the exhibition. Photo Sofía Natalia González. 73

7 Altar from San Basilio de Palenque elaborated by Moraima Simarra. On the left, an altar used in the eight evenings after burial and, on the right, its transformation for the ninth night. Photo Sofía Natalia González. 74

8 Ninth night altar from Guapi elaborated by Ligia Elena Pinillos and Rosa Amalia Quiñones. Photo Sofía Natalia González. 75

9 Altar for “San Pacho”, designed by Madolia Dediego and elaborated by Miguel Ángel Cuesta from Quibdó. Photo Sofía Natalia González. 76

10 Altar for Baby Jesus elaborated by María Eusebia Aponzá from Guachené. Photo Sofía Natalia González. 77
11  Altar for Our Lady of Mount Carmel elaborated by
    Wisman Tenorio from Tumaco. Photo Sofía Natalia González. 77

12  Father Emigdio Cuesta leading participants through
    the ceremony of closure on November 3, 2008. Photo Jaime Arocha. 78

13  Father Emigdio Cuesta leading participants through
    the ceremony of closure on November 3, 2008. Photo Jaime Arocha. 79

14  Instruments such as the “Pechiche” (big drum) or
    the “Alegre” (on the right) as well as the “Marimbula”
    of African origin might be used at certain funerary ceremonies.
    Photo Sofia Natalia González. 80

15  The recreation of a house during mourning in the
    Archipelago of Saint Andrews, Providence and Saint Catherine,
    elaborated by Vastay Dilbert Bryan. Photo Sofía Natalia González. 81

16  Altar for the death of a child elaborated by the community of the
    Palenque of San José de Uré. Photo Carlos Gustavo Suárez. 82

17  Last part of the exhibition; explanation of the novenas
    and the ninth night of praying and chanting.
    Photo Sofía Natalia González. 84

LIST OF TABLES

1  Research questions and data collection methods 58

2  Survey collection schedule 88
1 INTRODUCTION: REPRESENTING DIFFERENCE IN NATIONAL MUSEUMS

National museums represent how we perceive the concept of nation, but they also generate our ideas of what a nation is or should be. These institutions have been tied to the imperatives of the societies they aim to represent and interpret, thus they act as micro-mirrors of a macro-reality. The National Museum of Colombia is no exception. It was created in 1823, immediately after the country gained its independence from the Spanish Empire and became a nation-state. Today the museum and its history can be read as barometer that gauges the state of the relationships among the different communities that make up Colombia.

National museums provide an insight into the perpetual crisis of the concept of nation, considered since the latter half of the 20th century as elusive, fluid, constructed and difficult to grasp. Nations are not easy to define; they can be thought of as historical processes that combine politics and culture, objective and subjective factors and are never truly finished (Gómez 2004, Özkirimli 2005). If we consider this ever-changing particularity of the nation, the museum that aims to represent it is never truly completed either. Such is the case of the National Museum of Colombia, the focus of this study.

When museums represent notions of what the nation is, they embody narratives of national identity and material heritage that become a manner by which to confirm a

---

1 The author has translated all texts in Spanish.
particular origin of the nation’s past and present (Mozaffari 2007). Museum displays are constructed, transformed, and even manipulated to portray a specific cultural identity (Chen 2007, Knell et al. 2010). In the case of Colombia, as this text explores, until a new Constitution was written in 1991, cultural identity was centralized around the idea of one race, one religion and one language and this ideological conception can still be traced in the Museum’s collections, as well as in the permanent exhibitions inaugurated in 2001 and never fully renovated, despite the voids and problems with representations of historical and artistic narratives that have been identified (Ministerio de Cultura-Museo Nacional de Colombia 2003).

Though historically national museums have been called on to take a stand in nation-making processes, many times highlighting one strong identity against others, recently they have also become symbols of reconciliation. Existing literature refers to the case of South Africa, where national museums have been called on to sanction a new democratic project (Crampton 2001). Te Papa Tongarewa in New Zealand (Williams 2005) and Australia’s National Museum – created ten years after the creation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (Sculthorpe 2001)– constitute attempts to further the role of museums in historical reparation, a term that applies to acknowledging the oppression and wrongs of the past in order to rebuild the communities that have been affected and continue to suffer the legacies of such past. They are also key examples that illustrate unresolved tensions between ethnicity and nationality and the role of minorities in narratives of the nation.

These institutions –and other high profile examples around the world, such as the National Museum of the American Indian, in Washington D.C.– have demonstrated
that it is possible to change representations of minorities and multiculturalism – although these have sometimes been hotly contested. In the particular case of Colombia, the National Museum has attempted to tune into the changes that have brought about multicultural legislation since the new Constitution was signed in 1991. Despite such transformations taking place around the world, nations and, thus, their museums, have only a budding understanding of how tensions that arise from working with previously excluded groups are resolved and how museums are perceived and appropriated by minorities. There is also little information available on how wider audiences engage with these presentments and, more particularly, how transformed notions of nation are interpreted by museum visitors.

In addition to our need to comprehend the impact of appropriating new narratives of the nation in museums, there are current, worldwide circumstances that demand that national museums revise their representations of multiculturalism and their ways of celebrating diversity: decrees on cultural diversity; essays on intercultural dialogue, policies, and conventions; as well as recurring manifestations of xenophobia, racism and interethnic violence make it clear that states are continually grappling with the issue of how to recognize that nations are made up of numerous, distinct, communities. Colombia also has unresolved issues such as racism and discrimination, especially of Black and indigenous people, that are equally important. How are national museums responding to persisting inequalities in social, economic, political and cultural spheres? Can museums transform stereotypes and prejudices? In which ways are national museums responding to the perceived needs of previously marginalized communities?
In this context, the aim of this project is to look at the role of national museums in fostering access to cultural rights in the multicultural nation while dealing with demands for historical reparation and inclusion. This research will grapple with some of the issues national museums face today as they increasingly become engaged with problems held by disenfranchised groups that claim respect for cultural difference and, at the same time, continue to reinvent the ways in which the unity of diverse nations is represented. In this sense, differentiated rights of minorities based on performance of culture and multiculturalism still create challenges for national museums which cannot be overlooked. If nations are performed in the museum as “acts of cultural symbolism” (Knell 2010: 4), what role do these institutions play – inside and outside of its walls– in fostering democratic conversations and the renewal of social contracts?

The observation of cultural rights, for instance, has been recognized by theorists as a gateway to recognition and integration (Stevenson 2003), but negative responses to such policies coming from people in government have rested on claims that the implementation of politics of difference is a threat to the cohesiveness of national identity (see Message 2008). Can museums stage unity and difference at the same time? Are these institutions prepared to work with specific communities who have demands regarding the recognition of past crimes, such as enslavement in the case of Afrodescendants?

In this research I will face these questions as I examine the ways in which the National Museum of Colombia has recently begun to interpret the multiplicity of the nation. My particular interest in this topic is a result of my position as the Art and
History Curator of Colombia’s National Museum, which I have held since 2004. I intend to reflect on the context in which the institution is set, as well as on my own practice. The intention is to be able to better understand how institutions such as national museums can work with marginalized communities and how multicultural policy can better serve them. But I am also interested in looking for ways in which wider audiences make sense of exhibitions that are about people with whom they have had little contact or who have been marginalized historically or discriminated. As a museum employee, I would like to make sense of my experience of working with minorities in order to understand the potential and the challenges that museum staff and audiences face. Often, museums are discussed in abstract terms without examining the contingencies that staff face. In the words of Lidchi:

[Staff] work to deliver a tangible product—an exhibition, collection, public event—in the midst of competing demands and a more complex framework of accountability—to their profession, to the people they study, to communities (local and worldwide), as well as to the institution of which they are part.

(2006: 109)

Hence my intention here is to analyze and be self-critical of my own participation in Velorios y santos vivos. Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palenqueras (Wakes and Live Saints amongst Black, Afro-Colombian, Maroon and Islander Communities), a temporary exhibition about Afrocolombian communities.

2 The Afrodescendant communities are diverse and use different categories in their process of self recognition: Black communities (used by those who place emphasis of their struggles against racial discrimination), raizales (people from the Archipelago of Saint Andrews, Providence and Santa
at the National Museum of Colombia (August 21-November 3, 2008). The exhibit will be used as a single case study in order to address a series of linked themes that are relevant in a wider museological context. This particular exhibition was chosen because Afrocolombian activists and scholars have strongly demanded that the National Museum respond to claims of historical reparation and alter its current narratives and collections by means of consultation and participation.

In order to pose questions on the impact of the exhibit, I will look at production and reception of the exhibition inspired by the circuit of culture described by Du Gay et al. (2003). Their model for description and analysis of cultural artifacts is composed of simultaneous processes that are articulated in order to explain the meaning of an artifact. The parts of the circuit are: representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation (Du Gay et al. 2003: 3). The study of this exhibition takes production and consumption as its main axis because, as Du Gay suggests:

While producers attempt to encode products with particular meanings and associations, this is not the end of the story or ‘biography’ of a product, because this tells us nothing about what those products may come to mean for those using them.

(Ibid.: 5)

Catalina in the Caribbean) and palenqueros (descendants from one of the first sites of rebellion against enslavement). The terms Afrocolombian (which highlights the memory of Africa), Afrodescendent and Black will be used throughout this text to make reference to them. The term “people of African descent” was acknowledged in reference to the descendants of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade at the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban (South Africa), 2001.
What I would like to look at is the political significance of exhibiting (representation) as well as how meanings are exchanged and transformed in the act of communicating with audiences. Citizenship is a political identity introduced by staging different communities in the museum, but is also determined by what people take away from their experience of coming in contact with these presentations. Thus, issues related to identity (primarily ethnic and national) will also be examined as well as how representation is produced and interpreted.

The particular research questions that guide this study are:

a. How do national museums appropriate and communicate conceptions of multiculturalism?

b. What are the challenges for national museums in working with communities marginalized both in the museum and broadly in society?

c. In what ways do members of the communities represented engage with an exhibition designed to change narratives of the national?

d. How do general museum visitors interpret exhibitions that aim to transform representation of minorities as nation-members?

e. How do audiences engage with the concept of a multicultural nation in a national museum?

Literature points to a lack of understanding of how nation impacts people and how they see themselves and others as nation members (Thompson 2001). In this context, this research project aims to further our comprehension on the role of museums in how people make sense of multiculturalism and how national identities might be
extended to include previously excluded groups. Studying audiences and the discourses they elaborate around the exhibition can give us insight into how museums create inclusions and exclusions as to who belongs in the national community. Citizenship is extended or negated when taking about the other. For Smith (1997), in the case of nationalisms based on territory, citizenship can either separate or help to overcome rivalries between cultural identities, such as ethnic divisions, by way of inclusion and equal assignment of benefits. Answers regarding how visitors, both Afro- and non-Afrocolombian, imagine an ideal national museum, as well as how people experienced contact with each other, will be useful in understanding how the nation and its members are perceived and constructed.

**Structure**

The remaining part of this first chapter will introduce three themes directly related to the research questions: *narratives of the nation, multiculturalism and representation* and *citizenship and heritage*, and will set the stage for the ways in which these concepts will reappear in the chapters ahead. In order to describe the case study, a context will be given to understand present day Colombia. Though the country has characteristics that are unique, it also has similar challenges shared by other settler societies and countries in Latin America. In particular, the ways in which exclusion and restricted citizenship of minorities such as the descendents of enslaved Africans remain in place even after legislative changes have affirmed a multicultural character of the nation.
The second chapter looks at the paradigm, methodology and methods of data collection for the case study. Quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in order to obtain a wide range of data that allowed for an analysis of perception of both the museum and the exhibition by different actors as well as a description of the population that visited the exhibition and, by implication, an insight into non-visiting groups. Personal experience and ethnographical methods of observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Afrodescendents as well as surveys—to get a sense of the demographic characteristics of the visiting population—were the main sources of information. Other sources such as informal conversations, documents, media portrayals, were used throughout the analysis in order to include legislation, representations and discussions that are relevant to the main problems being addressed here. This context sets up the scene to introduce the characteristics of the case study: an exhibit on ancestry, funerary rituals and saints of seven Afrodescendent communities at the National Museum of Colombia.

The third and fourth chapters will aim to analyze interpretations of the exhibition, its impact and communication across cultural differences. The third chapter will examine how non-Blacks perceive Afrocolombians to be part of the national community through the ways they talked about the exhibition. I will look at similarities and differences that people highlighted in interviews as well as the concept of change and the limits of transforming representations. A central concept in the discussion will be stereotypes, which will be used as a means to understand the way visitors use previously existing categories of understanding to make sense of contents. The fourth chapter will look at how Afrocolombians viewed themselves in the national community, again, through the exhibition. I will examine issues of
representation: who has the power to represent and how patrimony is used as a mirror to reaffirm identities but also as a lens to assert certain elements of such identities. This chapter also explores the relationship between exhibitions and historic reparation.

The fifth chapter will draw on the previous discussions on the particular problem of differentiated rights, cultural citizenship and construction of nation in the National Museum to further problematize them. The question that guides this chapter is: what does an ideal national multicultural national museum look like for visitors and staff? The problem of representing the painful past of enslavement will also be introduced. A theme to be included is the place of conflict between different nation-member communities and whether spaces such as museums can include topics that are outside very limited notions of culture, many times detached from economic and political realms. The possibility of engaging with broad understandings of culture is crucial in a process of historic reparation and appropriation of cultural rights. A central matter to be discussed is whether national museums are able to really question and move the center of their narratives and not simply change the tools used to tell their story and whether the core of the narrative can be considered from diverse vantage points.

The final part of this text looks at the conclusions reached which encompass the limits of research and identifies areas for future development. The intention of this last part of the thesis is to recognize limits and possibilities of national museums in representing multicultural societies as well as to draw some lessons from the case study analysis to enrich discussions in the museum studies’ context.
KEY CONCEPTS

Nation and its narratives

In order for nations to be, they need to create a sense of community that can be shared by its citizens. They must possess “common myths and a shared history, a common public culture, a unique economic system and rights and duties that affect all its members” (Smith 2004: 28). In this sense, the idea and representation of a common shared past becomes a key element to generate cohesion. Different stakeholders bring communities together through the use of ceremonies, festivals, and museums. The State, for instance, invests considerable resources in order to promote and maintain adhesion to the nation and a homogenous culture with the intention of creating loyal citizens (Smith 1997). For Özkirimli: “national communities are constituted by belief; they exist only when their members recognize each other as belonging to the same community, and believe that they share certain characteristics (following Miller)” (2005: 18).

There are different theoretical traditions that can be introduced in order to understand how nations impact people and how people “create” nations. Authors such as Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm and Michael Billig, amongst others, stress subjective variables and ideological processes that give way to national identities, hence implying that there are no objective or natural factors. Anthony Smith is also part of this group but differentiates his position by arguing that there are preexisting cultural motives and thus nation-making processes are a reconstruction of sentiments that previously existed (2004). He disagrees with Hobsbawn´s notion of invented traditions because he thinks that elites do not simply fabricate propaganda and ritual
and impose these on the ignorant masses. Rather there needs to be an understanding of the interrelation of past and present traditions and how the past is reconceived in order to echo preexisting popular sentiments. He also differs with Anderson and his concept of narrated nations as “imagined” communities because it leaves the nation with no reality of its own, only a mirror of representations. Smith defends loyalty and belonging that people experience and the tangible reality that it produces. For this study I believe that Smith’s theories are the most suitable since I am in agreement with his notion that nations are “profoundly felt and imply action” (2000: 248). The nation is complex in its creating and sustaining narrations, symbols, myths, values, memories, loyalties, habits, traditions, laws and routines.

This nationalist discourse operates, in part, through institutions: “National identity has to be learned and internalized through socialization. Furthermore it has to be reproduced daily in myriads of small ways to retain its power” (Özkirimli 2005: 33). Along those lines, for Hall, we should be discussing the nation as a “symbolic formation”, a “system of representation”, “which produced an ‘idea’ of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ [following Benedict Anderson], with whose meaning we could identify and which, through this imaginary identification, constituted its citizens as ‘subjects’” (1999: 38). For Smith (2004), these are lived and felt communities whose members share a territory and a culture. National museums are such institutions that reproduce the space of the nation. They create narratives of the past and present of the nation, they include and exclude, give voice and silence, represent and misrepresent citizens from this narrative and craft notions of national identity by means of the presentation of heritage (McLean 2005).
As social spaces that create belonging and identification with a political community of institutions and a shared code of rights and duties, national museums are key actors in the process of representing nations and crafting a national identity. But national identities many times crush ethnic differences that cannot be assimilated or they sacrifice the liberties of certain groups (Smith 1997). Notions of a unitary identity were key in the development of nation-states in which a State, as an administrative judicial unit, is “legitimated by the principles of nationalism, whose members possess a certain degree of national unity and integration (but not of homogenous culture)” (Smith 2004: 32). When we talk about nation-states, we mean that a sole dominant group organizes life in common, so that it reflects its history and its own culture (Walzer 1997). These projects maintain public education, symbols and ceremonies of public life, the State calendar of festivals. The nation-state is not neutral with respect to histories and cultures. In the maintenance of nation-states, forced or invented traditions may have unwanted results. For Smith (2000), many problems seen in African and Asian states make one think of the absences of shared myths and traditions at the state level that inhibit the process of integration of heterogeneous populations.

The problems of nationalism and national identity are made apparent in the exclusions they create. Nationalism operates creating an “us and them”, positioning identities on either side; it hegemonizes, “it is about power and domination. It legitimates and produces hierarchies among actors” (Özkirimli 2005: 33). National identities hide inner fragmentation and domination of other discourses. There are insiders and outsiders in the symbolic representation of the nation: “The message of identity is directed differently to members and to outsiders – the former invited to
share in the symbolic wealth, the latter maintained as onlookers, or partially integrated, whether connoisseurs or tourists” (Clifford 1999: 454). National narratives rely on exclusion. Following this idea, in the past, public museums invited people to conceptualise a sense of national or racial difference from others; and to experience their own worlds as relatively and reassuringly governed ones…. They helped to instantiate a ‘scientific’, ‘objective’ way of seeing—a gaze which could ‘forget’ its own positionedness. They helped to think of identities as bounded and coherent.

(Macdonald 2003: 5)

A sense of exclusion transcends the cultural sphere to other economic and political spheres. If the nation does not include me, why should I have an attachment to this particular identity? Why should I not have a higher allegiance to my own cultural group above all others? Uberoi adds, “little attachment could be developed to the shared political life that all groups possess because, at least from the perspective of the minority cultural group, no shared political life exists” (2007: 144). In terms of the political body, this adherence is important to foster citizenship, social justice, resolution of conflicts and in order to have working democratic institutions (Ibid.).

Groups that base their identity on the notion of a different culture and do not see themselves included in national narratives have challenged national identity and solidarity in the nation-state from below. Simultaneously, large groups and associations that surpass the nation-state also threaten its cohesion (Smith 2004). But
nation-states are still in place and both supra and infra groups have to proceed through it. For Hall:

There is no question, then, that the relative decline of the centralized nation-states, with their incorporating cultures and national identities, implanted and secured by strong cultural institutions, which claimed to be able to subsume all differences and diversity into their imagined unity, opens up profound ambivalences and fissures within the discourse of the nation-state and thus presents unprecedented opportunities for smaller nationalisms to realize their aspirations for autonomy in new, more effectively self-governing arrangements.

(1999: 38)

Bhabha supports this sense of fracture when perceiving the strength of internal counter-narratives of the nation: “The political unity of the nation consists in a continuous displacement of the anxiety produced by a modern space undeniably plural” (2002: 50).

**Multiculturalism and representation**

While the nation-state tried to silence or ignore dissonant accounts for most of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, the voices of pluralistic societies burst out in the second half of the twentieth century. The conditions under which nations and national museums had been operating since their inception were challenged. Post-Second World War responses to atrocities included the legislative recognition of the
rights of cultural minorities (Bonilla 2006), while redrawn boundaries, changed dynamics of capitalism, migrations, increasing poverty and authoritarian governments, amongst other factors, contested the concept of the nation-state. The tension between the nation-state and the reality of its culturally diverse population found an apparent solution in multicultural legislation, which acknowledged the rights of different communities within the state.

Most discussions on multiculturalism can be traced back to the 1970s among diverse settler societies around the world (Burnet 1979; McShane 2001; Simpson 2004). In Latin America, it was indigenous communities and movements that had the most impact on policies and multicultural constitutions that came about at the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s. New social movements and the development of civil society were strengthened with the organization of indigenous groups aiming to defend their collective rights (Gros 2000).

These policies as well as changing conceptions of nation and history had consequences for the construction of historical narratives, as Urry argues: “Museums are concerned with ‘representations’ of history, and what has happened is a remarkable increase in the range of histories worthy of being represented” (1999: 227). For him, transformations in the museum are a product of changes in the way people gaze, how they participate and an interest in the ordinary, which is reflected in the proliferation of the vernacular and a pluralisation of history.

Such widening of history is also a byproduct of the surge of memory. Since the 1980’s, discourses on memory have intensified as a consequence of previous
decolonization and social movements “which sought alternative and revisionist historiographies” as well as the debates on the Holocaust (Huyseen 1995: 14-15). But memory is not a substitute for history or justice (Huyssen 1995). Though they are different, LaCapra (1998) considers that memory is an essential source of history and that history includes elements that are not exhausted by memory. He states:

a critically informed memory is crucial in the attempt to determine what in history deserves preservation in living traditions, either as something to be criticized and avoided or as something to be respected and emulated. Conversely, history serves to question and test memory in critical fashion and to specify what in it is empirically accurate or has a different, but still possible significant status.

(1998: 20)

Nevertheless, this opening up of the past has not automatically meant a drastic change in representations. Much work is yet to be done in order to give a true account of fractures, fragmentations and difference in national narratives. Cultural diversity has to be constantly negotiated, not overcome (Bhabha 2002). This theory can be useful when thinking about “the other within” who becomes a stranger in his or her own land. In this sense, for Hall:

The capacity to live with difference is, in my view, the coming question of the twenty-first century. New national movements that, in their struggle against old closures, reach for too closed, unitary, homogeneous and
essentialist a reading of ‘culture’ and ‘community’ will have succeeded in 
overcoming one terrible historical hurdle only to fall at the second.

(1999: 42)

The ability of nations to last will be determined by whether their images and 
narrations have evoking power over people and if these in turn can contribute to the 
process of reconstructing the nation (Smith 2004). Elites will only be able to 
influence people if they can “re-present” an image of nation that is accepted and 
inspiring.

In the exercise of defining multiculturalism for national museums and individuals, 
one finds that meanings are diverse and, therefore, multicultural policies and the way 
heritage is perceived vary. For Kymlicka, “multiculturalism” does not allow us to 
differentiate between the necessities of diverse social and cultural groups and thus 
proposes that it be used to refer to minorities. He divides minorities into two groups: 
ethnic groups that are comprised of voluntary immigrants and national minorities 
that make up a historical community with a language and common culture (Bonilla 
1999). Other definitions include all communities and refer to multiculturalism as “a 
shared commitment in multicultural society to recognize, maintain, and to accord 
respect and value to the different cultures that coexist within a territorially defined 
space, be it that of a nation, city, region or locality” (European Institute for 
Comparative Cultural Research 2008: 14).

Multiculturalism also has a different impact in local or global contexts, and varies 
across time: it can take on several forms, as analysed by Ashworth, Graham and
Tunbridge (2007). Multiculturalism will also have different meanings for institutions and audiences. In this particular case study, the discussion on multiculturalism will be set in the Colombian context. Colombia has developed, since the early 1990s, a highly sophisticated constitutional and judicial framework and set an example for other countries in the region (Bonilla 2006). Though there has been a move forward, it is clear that twenty years after these changes began, promoting laws or declaring a country as pluriethnic has not immediately changed oppressive practices directed at groups, altered practices of discrimination or resulted in the implementation of specific rights. This lack of simultaneity between theory and practice has resulted in the continuous mobilization of groups such as Afrodescendents and Indigenous communities to define their distinctiveness and differences against other national groups in terms of their cultural identities. This assertiveness is the reason why the issue of cultural rights and citizenship becomes central to programs and exhibitions held in national museums.

**Citizenship and heritage**

Citizenship is a key element of nationalism because it is a political identity that allows a transit from the self to the collective. It differentiates between “us” and “them,” and in that sense it can be an agent of exclusion, but it can also allow us to overcome rival identities and permit the distribution of benefits, independent (or not) of ethnic origin (Smith 1997); therefore, issues of how individual and collective identities are perceived by the self and others will be relevant to understand how citizenship “works.” Under the nation-state, citizenship was (and sometimes still is) thought of as complying with a set of rules imparted by the State, for which
individuals were guaranteed rights: “What is noticeable in this is that the language of citizenship and learning is taken over by the state and defined according to a set of rigid categories” (Delanty 2003: 599).

Citizenship has a historic dimension that is intrinsically tied to the way citizens see themselves included or excluded from their nation’s past. Due to its own history, the meaning of citizenship has become widely contested in the multicultural nation precisely because it has been regarded as a source of exclusion since citizens are not all equal. An important debate arises and two positions create a dichotomy: on the one hand exists the defense of universalism, that is, all citizens are equal and deserve the same rights; on the other hand exists differentiation: citizens are not equal because some of them –though judicially equipped– have been subjected to discrimination, poverty, subjection and, in other extreme cases, they have been victims of crimes against humanity.

As opposed to modern citizenship, which entailed an allegiance to the nation, and which was of the universalizing type –set above identities of race, gender, age, sexuality– present-day democracy requires that citizenship take in identities and differences (Martín-Barbero 2007). Citizenship also depends on social and cultural practices that give citizens a sense of belonging and make people feel different even though they might share a language, organizations and necessities (García Canclini 1995). Therefore, we need to take into account particular identities that are historically marked. Contemporary citizenship has to confront the exclusions of its own past, “the effects of its sole histories that supported unitary national homogenous projects; marginalization or exclusion…” (Serna 2007: 216).
In order to understand the role of museums that deal with history and memory in creating exclusions and inclusions in a national narrative, we need to ask what relationship is being carved between citizens and their past. For Cavalli, there is an inherent tension between history and memory, though both are selective, because the first is oriented toward “truth” while the second is oriented toward “identity”. He states:

The claims of identity will inevitably tend to overwhelm the claims of truth, and historians will tend to become the ideological arm of the ruling elite(s). Only in pluralistic democratic societies will the claims of identity and the claims of truth be able to converge, though they will never coincide.  

(2005: 181)

Since memory and history compete, and often one group will impose their version of history and memory on others, the relationship between citizens and their past is never stable. When history has had as its central element forgetting, then it becomes problematic because it means forgetting the victims and endorsing an “official history”, the history of the “greatness of peoples” and “conquerors” (Ricoeur 2006: 3).

Serna provides us with a useful model to understand the relationship of people with their past. On one hand, Harmony is used as the metaphor that describes the relationship between nationality and citizenship, where there is a series of continuous agreements. On the other, the idea of conflict distances the citizen from the nation, creating an image of rupture. Both metaphors give different meaning to the past: in
the former, heritage is the base of belonging to a political community; in the latter, it is not, restricting the idea of citizenship to political, legislative and judicial imperatives (Ibid.).

Winning over civil, political, economic and social rights has been constrained in the quotidian life made up of inequalities and subordination. The transformation of the political sphere is not enough; therefore, the cultural sphere must be transformed as well (Serna 2007). Stevenson concludes that “Inclusive forms of citizenship are as much a matter of symbolism as formal rights” (2002: 3.3), therefore, in order to weave a relationship between the conscience of the past and the citizen as the legitimate inheritor of a national community, a particular public sphere has to be composed.

As a response to the decomposition of the representational system of politics, new social movements create referents that necessarily include their own identities and the cultural dimension is extremely useful for this (Gonzalez 2007). Stevenson turns to Hall in order to explain how cultural identity becomes crucial in determining “…what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves” (2002: 2.6). Cultural rights might be demanded in order to have access to other rights as well. For this researcher:

The context of increasing cultural diversity and globalisation brings to the fore questions of cultural rights…. These rights go beyond rights for welfare protection, political representation or civil justice and focus on the right to propagate a cultural identity or lifestyle.
Gijs van Oenen takes the argument further to suggest that it is cultural identity which allows people to be “turned on” to their citizenship (2002). Cultural background can become an asset in the process of recognition, which in turn will have an impact on one’s participation in the public sphere. Identity politics turns differences into “sources of empowerment” (Ibid). Recognition challenges the majority or dominant framework and allows for a transit between the private and the public sphere. Stevenson argues: “The view of citizenship that is being advanced here is that it should become as concerned with questions of recognition and difference as it is with the politics of justice and income distribution” (2002: 3.5).

Cultural differences must not be used or conditioned to create exclusions on the rights of citizens (Hall 1999). This idea creates a particular challenge for the multicultural State because it has to redistribute power, resources, etc. and assume a form of positive discrimination to give minority groups buy-in into the collective national identity; a State has to recognize collective rights and protect individual, civic and political rights in the national sphere as a whole (Gros 2004). In this scenario, how communities perceive their own cultural heritage and the heritage of others determines the ways in which they craft their political identities and how they decide to participate in the national community.

If, as we have seen, exclusion is an integral part of a national narrative, and hence of national museums, what is the place of citizenship in a national museum? And how can the museum work with previously excluded communities and individuals, not
only in immediate products such as an exhibition but also more broadly in an ongoing process of renovating representations? Discussions regarding representation of Afrocolombian communities will enable an understanding of the complex issues regarding culture and politics in the museum. For Ashley (2005), a horizontal space she calls the public forum is needed in museums in order for citizens to encounter and interact in “constructivist dialogues” and in order to overcome the essentialization of what a citizen is or ought to be. The right to be heard and the right to speak constitute ways in which these communities participate in the public sphere.

**Colombian context. The project of the nation-state**

Smith argues that nations are made up of the reconstructions of preexistent ethnic ties (Smith 2004) and defines an ethnic group as a “human community with its own name, associated with a national territory, that has shared myths about its ancestors, that shares a historic memory, some elements of a shared culture and a certain degree of solidarity, at least amongst its elites” (Ibid.: 28). In Latin America, the Creole elites initiated nation-making processes without a definite ethnic group and had to forge a strong and unitary national identity.

In the case of Colombia, which is similar to that of other Latin American countries, Independence from the Spanish Empire in the 19th century gave way to nation-making processes, in which white Creoles formed their identity by excluding and “othering” different social groups such as the Indigenous population and Afrodescendants. Their exploitation of rich natural resources became one of the elements to invigorate that particular group’s identity (González 2007).
The foundation of what was to become the National Museum occurred during this early period (1823), and was a response to a belief in progress and in the advantages of science in a region that was considered rich in natural resources but poorly administered by the Spanish crown. A French commission of scientists was hired to build and install a school. Originally, the Museum was meant to complement a school of mineralogy where lessons concerning geology, chemistry, anatomy, zoology, entomology, botany, drawing, and other sciences would be held (Rodríguez 2008).

Natural science museums were instrumental in creating a national identity in other Latin American countries as well. One such country is Brazil. For Sepúlveda dos Santos, while European museums constructed a narrative that included ancient civilizations, Brazil created its nationhood based on nature. She states:

Museums of natural history had served as instruments for nation-states as they gathered and classified samples of the entire world. Later they served their nations by ordering objects from the past to the present, from antiquity to modernity, from indigenous populations to civilized ones, and from fossils to skeletons of the human species, and presenting them to an increasing and massive public.  

(2003: 195)

Regardless of this early emphasis on education as part of the nation-making process, the elite’s project was patriarchic and elitist and excluded not only women but indigenous peoples, Blacks, enslaved people, illiterates, and in most cases, people
without property (Achugar 2002). A *citizen* was, then, a person who adhered to the elite’s ideological project and a means to exclude any reference to race (Melo 1992). Merging contradictory memories was necessary to create an official memory, because recognizing contesting ones would constitute a threat to the survival of the young and frail nation (Roldán 2000).

Black and indigenous populations, principally, were considered barbaric; with miscegenation it was thought possible to improve these “lower” races (Arocha and Moreno 2007: 596). Those of diverse origins resulting from the mixing between whites, Indigenous and people of African descent (mestizos, mulattos and zambos amongst other categories) were still inferior to Whites but superior to Blacks and indigenous people (Helg 2004). So “uncomfortable” was race in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century that the Constitutional texts created inclusions and exclusions either by not mentioning race or by creating “special” legislation for indigenous and enslaved people, many times to their detriment (Ibid.: 27).

Miscegenation appears as the discourse of democratization that produces one class of citizens (Arocha and Moreno 2007) but in reality wishes to eradicate or hide difference, diverse ethnicities, and the realities of the population. The myth of the *mestizo* (“mixed” people) still contributes to hide the historical and cultural specificities of Afrocolombians and supports the negation of their ethnic rights, as contemplated in international legislation (Arocha 2004: 165). For some historians, miscegenation permitted a more flexible social structure that allowed upward social mobility. Melo gives a realistic account and characterizes Colombian culture as *mestiza*, for better or worse, differentiated regionally (1992). Indeed, in terms of the
Introduction: Representing difference in national museums

One of the challenges of working with marginalized communities is the belief of a unitary sense of nationhood held by of those outside of these groups. In this sense, the study of general museum visitors is as important and relevant as understanding and working with minorities. If, historically, Colombia has defined itself as a country of mestizos with a strong culture, how has the “new” discourse of multiculturalism, diversity and respect for differences impacted discourses and general conceptions of the Nation?

**Becoming multicultural**

Elements related to culture and identity, such as the use of native languages and distinct methods of education, as well as respect for their religious beliefs, were instrumental in the fight for indigenous collective rights in the latter part of the twentieth century (Gros 2000). At this point, law finally recognized the evident diversity of peoples in Latin America. These changes meant that:

---

modernity can coexist with the presence of different groups that share different cultures…. that these groups have a future, and that the State does not need to work for the disappearance of the Indian, the Black and in favor of miscegenous culture, but on the contrary, has to recognize their particular rights, education, territory, their own forms of government.

(Ibid.: 359)

Colombia is a nation made up of descendents of original inhabitants, of enslaved Africans and of immigrants (Spanish, Jewish, Arab, among other, smaller, groups) who have intermarried but who have also kept their communities separate in order to preserve their structures. The end of the mestizo nation in Colombia, at least on paper, would be signed by the drafting of a new Constitution in 1991, which acknowledged its multiethnic and pluricultural character. For the first time in the history of Colombia, voters chose the composition of the Assembly that would rewrite the country’s Constitution. The 74-member Assembly was representative not only of the traditional parties (that by now included women), but also most notoriously –and perhaps symbolically– of indigenous people, former guerrilla members, evangelicals and leftist parties. Groups of women and Afrocolombians participated in processes of discussion prior to the meeting of the Assembly (Wills 2000: 399-400).

Not only was the Constitution-writing process an interesting case of exercising citizenship and participation, but also the content of the document changed the terms by which the nation was described. In its 7th article, the Constitution declares: “The State recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian
“Introduction: Representing difference in national museums.” Though there has been a move forward, twenty years after the signing of the Constitution, there is still oppression towards minority groups, practices of discrimination and few results in the practice of specific rights for different communities.

Nevertheless, vindication of rights, even if they still have not permeated every aspect of practice of the State and the understanding of all citizens, have expanded notions of citizenship, such as the notion of collective rights based on cultural diversity and they have changed the country’s conception of national unity (Hooker 2005). The emphasis on culture rather than race is the reason why discussions in Colombia are based around the issue of ethnicity. Authors such as Hooker have detected that there is less reliance on a discourse of anti-racism (though this has changed in Colombia in the past few years) and a wider relevance of a politics of cultural difference “that emphasises the African cultural roots of Afro-Colombian identity and the historical ties of black communities to particular territories” (2005: 308). The issue of race remains a taboo for many governments, which refuse to acknowledge problems of racism, as is the case in Colombia. Therefore, debates surrounding culture might be easier to address but, at the same time, they hide social and economical injustices that are in fact race- and class-based (Bonilla 2006, Hooker 2005).

For at least three decades, many Afrocolombian communities have been vindicating their African roots as a marker of difference sustained by anthropological research led, primarily, by scholars Friedemann and Arocha. Nevertheless, a stronger emphasis on culture began in 1991 with the constitutional text that declared the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Colombian nation. This was later reinforced with
Law 70 of 1993, a by-product of transitory article 55 in the Constitution, which defined in cultural terms the way in which Afrocolombian communities have to describe themselves in order to access collective rights and land property. The second article in Law 70 defines a Black community as the group of families of Afrocolombian descent that posses their own culture, share a history and have their own traditions and customs in a populated territory that reveal and preserve a conscience of identity that is distinguishable from other ethnic groups.

This definition has similarities to the one provided by Smith for ethnies: “Ethnic groups are defined as a community with a name, associated to a national territory, which holds common myths of ancestry, shares a historic memory, elements of a common culture and certain degree of solidarity” (2004: 28). A Black community is recognized by its cultural distinctiveness and its ability to prove an ancestral claim to a territory. This definition creates problems for Black people who are not part of an ancestral community and promotes a sole recognized way of being black.

Despite the fact that both indigenous and Afrodescendent groups suffer discrimination, multicultural citizenship discourse has been able to include indigenous people because they have been able to convey their cultural distinctiveness (Hooker 2005). The use of cultural difference to gain access to collective rights leads to a possible danger: “[the] privilege [of] issues of cultural recognition over the struggle against racial discrimination as the basis of political mobilization” (Hooker 2005: 307). This risk involves representation in national
museums that may incorporate cultural differences in a sanitized way and that, therefore, neutralizes their political content (Ibid.: 310), a theme that will be developed when discussing how people imagine multiculturalism in the museum.

Positive aspects of emphasizing ethnicity, such as valuing cultural diversity, were at the core of the Velorios exhibition, the basis for my empirical investigations of the impact of representing minorities in the museum. The objective was to highlight the cultural distinctiveness of Afrodescendents. But, for some Black people who do not share these cultural markers, the exhibition essentialized Black culture, as we will discuss in chapter four. These reactions point to the complexity of representing minorities without legitimising one way of being or belonging to a certain group. What this means is that members of minorities represented will engage with exhibitions which aim to represent them in several ways and museums cannot expect to automatically find consensus and an overall positive reception. A multiplicity of interpretations of an exhibition also indicates that multiculturalism is not a stable and solid element that can easily be represented.

**Differentiated rights**

Multiculturalism does not necessarily reconcile the tension between unity and difference. In the case of Colombia, the Constitution reveals two sets of principles: the first is constituted by the rights granted to minority groups so that they might guide their lives according to their traditions (not necessarily in accordance with liberalism) and the recognition of the multicultural character of the nation; the second is constituted by the values of unity and sovereignty as well as a view of
universal human dignity, which should make up the minimum denominator that
unites the Colombian people (Bonilla 2006). This last set of principles is in
accordance with liberalism, which defends the neutrality of the State and the equality
of all its citizens. Under this political philosophy, the State should treat all citizens
with equal respect and should not use its resources to promote individual values
(Ibid.). But as the history of national narratives has shown, the State is not blind to
culture. It promotes certain festivals, languages, curricula and national symbols
which are not necessarily embraced by all.

Understanding differentiated rights, which are a result of the vindication of minority
differs, is pertinent to discuss how people see the place of other cultures in the
national sphere. Drawing a parallel between the space of the nation and the space of
the museum, it is also crucial for national museums to determine how to reconcile the
rights of citizens to be represented with the positive discrimination that certain
groups have fought for in order to neutralize their disadvantages. Differentiated
rights have as an objective to:

- protect a cultural horizon that gives meaning to individual liberty and its
  exercise, as well as the possibility of belonging to a cultural group –
  considered fundamental for the construction of identity– and promoting the
  disappearance of inequalities that affect cultural minorities.

(Bonilla 1999: 38)

The interpretation of the Constitution regarding the tension between the rights of
minority groups and the rights of all citizens has privileged cultural unity over
pluralism and difference (Bonilla 2003). Bonilla asks whether the moral and political perspective of cultural minorities should be respected, even if they are in conflict with individual rights of the majority of citizens. This question is pertinent in the realm of national museums as well because it addresses the tension between elaborating an encompassing narrative that represents all citizens equally versus giving preference to certain groups, thus upholding differentiated rights. The theme of the museum as democratic engagement will be further discussed in chapter five.

Should museums privilege the rights of certain minorities—in this case, the rights of Afrodescendants—over those of the majority, when resources and space are limited? Can we guarantee that all citizens and groups will be accurately represented in the museum? This concern is tied to the issue of reparation, which will be further discussed in chapters four and five, which instils a notion of specific demands of part of the Afrodescendent population.

The National Museum of Colombia has defended the idea that a larger space is needed in order to portray a truly diverse nation. In 1994, an expansion project was approved to contemplate the historic 19th century prison building it currently occupies as a “Pavilion of the History of the Nation” and as a sort of “time tunnel” from where to access the other two pavilions, one for art and the other for anthropology. It was stated that the archaeology collections would remain in the history pavilion and the anthropology building would be dedicated to ethnographies of indigenous and Afrocolombian communities. This last measure was a direct response to the challenges of the 1991 Constitution (González and López 1995).
The plan is yet to be realized and has elicited much discussion amongst the current museum team due to the way it separates history, art, and anthropology. The question remains whether this kind of separation will benefit representation of diverse identities and interculturalism, and whether this is an effective means of reparation, or whether it will further promote fragmentation and exotization. This leads us to the question of whether there can be one single place or repository of memory or whether different memories by definition establish different sites (Achugar 2002).

For McCarthy (2004), addressing past injustices is a priority over issues of equity or issues of other disadvantaged groups that are not victims of a past injustice. What this means for America and countries where there was impact of the Transatlantic slave trade, including Colombia, is that reparation (cultural, economical, social) of Afrodescendants should be a priority, due to the weight that this crime against humanity still has on the present.

The same concerns apply to museums that have a multicultural mandate. How to display and create narratives that are respectful of minorities whose rights have been systematically ignored, but also, how to respond to the issue of the unity of the nation? National museums have had to adapt to changing discourses on nation but have also found manifested resistance to transformations. The National Museum of Australia, which reopened in 2001, took into account issues of multiculturalism in its reconceptualization. Initially, there was a space devoted exclusively to First Australians, though they were also incorporated in the rest of the exhibitions. Nevertheless, the museum’s narrative raised polemical issues and a review panel emphasized the importance of reconfiguring the collective and cohesive story of the nation (Dean and Ridder 2005). Similarly, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa
Tongarewa that opened in 1998 was developed in accordance with diversity policies, stressing inclusiveness and egalitarianism (Message 2005).

**Description of case study. The National Museum of Colombia**

As was stated earlier, the National Museum of Colombia played a part in the elaboration of a national narrative in the aftermath of the country’s Independence and, therefore, in the process of political unification and construction of the nation-state. Still today—in spite of the changes that have been introduced into the narrative—it promotes a unifying story of national identity. The Museum’s narrative has a chronological narration that encompasses the four collections it holds: art; history; ethnography and archaeology. The first floor starts with the vestiges of early human presence in the Colombian territory and the script ends in the third floor with a summary of political changes until the 1960s. The 17 permanent exhibition galleries also hold small spaces for temporary shows and galleries that do not strictly follow the chronology and a temporary exhibition gallery is located on the first floor.

Criticizing the narrative, Sánchez notes that:

> The Museum gives objects-documents-monuments an imagined unity: a national narrative [...] The museum-nation is a *mise-en-scène* of a memory that defines who the great men are; what the great events are; what is valued: talent, fortune, heroism; what is privileged: the artistic; the scientific or the political. It is the tension between a museum-gallery and a museum-society.

(Ibid.: 28)
The narrative was developed out of the collections. But what did the collections hold? In essence what can be described as:

poems, visual images, anthems, currency, prints, and monuments [that] were part of the labor of constructing a series of symbols necessary to establish this ‘ritual order’ that operated as one of the central elements in the foundational effort to constitute a national imaginary that would, in time, end up being the object of remembrance and be objectified in the official national memory.

(Achugar 2002: 79)

These symbols of identity-for the most part- obeyed the logic of an elitist minority.

Historically, the discourse of nation that has predominated in the Museum has privileged the victorious, the political and economical elites, and (predominantly) heterosexual white men. Notwithstanding some exceptions, museum permanent exhibitions have privileged hegemonic memories. According to Ingrid Bolívar, when looking through the Gramscian concept of hegemony:

The central idea is that the construction of the nation cannot be achieved through the imposition of the interests and perspectives of the dominant classes, i.e., through coercive ways, but also through the constitution of consensus. Hegemony will be precisely the combination of coercion and consensus that maintains the validity of a specific form of political domination.

(2002: 13)
Just as the nation is a community where not everyone participates in equitable conditions, those who partake in the elaboration and circulation of such discourse bias the representation of that community.

With these limitations in mind, the Museum initiated a series of discussion panels at the end of the 1990s that challenged its mission and took into consideration the Constitution of 1991. The results were documented and implemented in a *Strategic Plan 2001-2010. A Foundation for the Museo Nacional of the Future*. A general diagnosis and a critical view of the collections state:

> the collections and permanent exhibition galleries register enormous voids in happenings, social processes and other key themes of the history of Colombian culture and are distant from reflecting the multiethnic and pluricultural character of the nation….

(Ministerio de Cultura-Museo Nacional de Colombia 2003: 29)

To correct the situation, the Strategic Plan stipulated the creation of working projects that would construct multiple narratives of the history of cultural processes in Colombia. In theory, the process welcomes the participation of different sectors of society and regions and tries to build bridges between the Museum and the academic community. In practice, the Plan does not take into account the Museum’s lack of human resources, budget, and infrastructure, a situation that slows down reaching such goals. Though it places an emphasis on being able to bring in children and young visitors as well as low-income audiences, it does not set up priorities in terms of representation.
The idea that the Museum can reach such broad goals is, in theory, desirable. In practice, it makes the construction of these narratives contingent on specific situations. In the specific case of the (mis)representation of the Afrocolombian population, the first time I became aware of the situation was in 2004, because Ana María Calderón, a history student, analyzed the discourse the museum builds as it relates to Afrocolombians. She criticized what she saw as a reproduction of stereotypes related to the slave trade, music, and exotic instruments and the conformation of rebellious groups in search of liberty (Calderón 2004). For her, these elements gave a sense of picturesque, servile and exotic beings. She supported a deeper regard that includes aspects that permit a better understanding of the African past and how it survives in the present.

A small but incomplete effort had been made in 1994 to incorporate elements of a proposal made by historian Adriana Maya, who pointed to the importance of understanding the connections between Africa and Colombia. Based on Law 70 of 1993 that had sanctioned the rights of the Afrocolombian population, she argued that the museum needed to include elements that would allow the visitor to understand the process of construction of identities and the autonomy of these communities, even including ethnographical elements in the art and history permanent exhibitions, in order to understand the present-day situation of these groups (Maya 1994). Some of the themes she pointed to were added to the texts that referenced the transatlantic slave trade, gold mining, the origins and names of the people enslaved as well as a small reference to forms of resistance and freedom fighting. A selection of late 20th century pieces from Central Africa that had been donated to the museum in 1998 by
Dr. William Bertrand was introduced in order to highlight—rather superficially, due to our lack of information and understanding—the origins of these communities.

In 2005, scholars in the field of Afrocolombian studies reintroduced the concern for the misrepresentation of Black communities. Two meetings were held between representatives of the Ministry of Culture, the National Museum, and Claudia Mosquera and Jaime Arocha, professors at the National University of Colombia who at that time led the Group of Afrocolombian Studies. The core of the debate was centered on the construction of a separate pavilion or gallery for people of African descent. For Mosquera, the issue of reparation was key in understanding the need for specificity, not sufficiently met by inclusion in an all-encompassing narrative. In a later interview, Arocha stressed the importance of the construction of a special and separate space for the representation of the Afrocolombian communities as the main reason for his participation (interview December 10, 2008).

The idea of mounting a temporary exhibition was my first solution to the heated discussions that revealed different ways of coming to grips with the main problem: the absence and misrepresentation of Afrodescendants in the Museum. Though we agreed on the urgent need to retell, create and narrate the particular histories and stories of Afrocolombians, there needed to be more information gathered and objects collected in order to determine what the final product (gallery? pavilion?) should look like. The problem of differentiation and/or assimilation of cultural minorities that appeared in these first debates will be a central point of discussion in this thesis.
As a result of the first agreements, a permanent committee (Ministry-Museum-Professors) started meeting regularly in 2006 to discuss the possibility that Mosquera and Arocha had presented of staging the temporary exhibition on the funerary rituals of several Afrodescendent communities in the Pacific and Caribbean. This initial theme was a means to group together a large number of sub-themes that reveal the richness of the symbolic universes of these groups. As discussions on this subject got started, I became aware of the context of the demands being put forward on the Museum. Though the Constitution of 1991 and Law 70 of 1993 had pushed the agenda developed by the Afrocolombian communities –to which the museum had hardly reacted– it was the implication of the Durban Conference in South Africa (2001) that declared the transatlantic slave trade a crime against humanity, which gave our passivity graver meaning. This information led me to the conclusion of the ignorance that the vast majority of us have of our own responsibilities in this matter.

In one of the meetings, Claudia Mosquera shared a text she was soon to publish on the responsibility of State institutions –such as the Museum– in the search for reparative justice in the light of the Durban declaration: “Why not demand that the State rewrite the history of the Black presence in the country since the transatlantic slave trade?”(Mosquera, Barcelos and Arévalo 2007: 16). Mosquera calls on rejecting essentialism and exoticism of Black culture and questions the multicultural character of the nation that has not initiated actions towards reparation (2007: 221). In her view, the State has promoted a politics of silence and forgetfulness on the institution of slavery (and its present day consequences) (Ibid.: 237) and she is critical of institutions because they continue to hide the memories of enslavement that are already dispersed and fragmented.
Mosquera also contends that the State cannot support a “neutral” memory, which should be composed of a multiplicity of narratives, even contradictory ones. Hence, a new narrative must be written (Ibid.: 220). Concerning the Museum, she argues that affirmative actions must be extended to cover reparations in the symbolic realm. She sees the application of affirmative action as the establishment of a permanent gallery of Black and raizal culture which holds dialogues with Africa and its descendents and initially gives credit to the establishment of the permanent committee (Ministry-Museo–Professors) for having started to work on this issue (Ibid.: 254). The consequences brought about by the Durban declaration as well as the pressure from these academics are the main reasons to bring the issue of reparation into this study. Further discussion of the repercussions of taking on such a challenge is debated in chapters four and five.

The Durban declaration, as well as the emphasis made by scholars such as Mosquera and Arocha on representations of the nation, assumes that transforming these representations will contribute to the process of reparation and acknowledgement. Such change is much needed due to the subrepresentation of Black and raizal communities, both in the collections and in the permanent exhibitions. Both academics and community representatives were appalled by the absence and misrepresentation of Afro communities and made claims that directly checkmate the current narrative structure. Several participants in the two meetings held on the topic of representation of Afrocommunities in the Museum in 2007⁴ expressed that the Museum is just as excluding as the nation is. Why expect the museum to be different

---

⁴ February 22 and 23 and September 13 and 14, 2007. 28 representatives and scholars met to construct a diagnosis of the museum.
to the reality of the communities? However, the museum not only mirrors a reality but, when it invokes a reality of the national, it is actually producing it as such (Bolívar 2002: 27).

In terms of the consequences this situation has for a national identity, Uberoi states:

national identities that possess elements repugnant to certain minority groups are also likely to only reflect the values, traditions and history of the cultural majority. The national identity will still be unable to foster security or belonging amongst many of the individuals and groups that comprise the polity because it is still not a reflection of the diverse cultural groups that comprise the polity as a whole.

(2007: 149)

With the absence of the representation of cultural or ethnic groups, such as the Afrocolombian communities, there can be no place for the recognition of the self, individual or collective, in the construction of the polity. Hence my interest in analyzing the consequences of working with minorities in terms of the impact that the products of this collaboration might have in the longer term.
Velorios y santos vivos

One of the main arguments against the State coming from the Afrocolombian communities has been its unwillingness to consult the groups affected by its unilateral decisions. In the case of the Afrodescendent communities, Colombian law mandates that they be consulted prior to the initiation of any project impacting their communities—especially regarding uses of territory for productive projects—because they are recognized as an ethnic group. They are included in the Convention C169 of the International Labour Organization concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, subscribed by Colombia. This Convention determines that ethnic peoples be consulted in measures that affect them directly. Previous consultation is a fundamental right conceded to tribal peoples and communities in order to guarantee their cultural integrity but it has not been properly observed (Rodríguez et al. 2008).

In order to move forward with the proposed theme for a temporary exhibition as well as our adherence to the philosophy of prior consultation, in September of 2006 Afrocolombian men and women knowledgeable of their communities and rituals joined the permanent committee, which continued discussions in 2007 and supported the production process in 2008. Leocadia Mosquera from Quibdó (Chocó), Carmen Paz from Puerto Tejada (Cauca), Ruby Quiñónez from Tumaco (Nariño), Luis Gerardo Martínez from Palenque de San Basilio (Bolívar) and Dilia Robinson from

---

5 The title encompasses the idea of the period of mourning known as the wake and the idea that saints are “alive”. Both notions are related to ancestry as a way to conceive dead beloved ones as saints and saints as close family members, thereby integrating life worlds that are considered separate in Western societies.

San Andrés (San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina) accompanied the project through the end of the exhibition.

This group allowed research to advance with an understanding of the complexities of many things that were known and quotidian to them but new and extraordinary for the rest of the group. Their participation (rather than mere consultation), as well as the results of fieldwork undertaken by Jaime Arocha and assistant Lina del Mar Moreno, Juliana Botero, Alejandro Camargo and Sofía González –along with the Afrocolombian group– and many people who contributed onsite made the exhibition a particular curatorial challenge. One of the regions involved stated that it did not want to be represented by its funerary rituals but, rather, by the rituals to its saint. The consulting process on the design, which included other Black leaders, allowed the team (anthropologists, Museum, community representatives) to constantly receive useful critiques that forced us to continually question the clarity of the ideas being communicated. Allowing outside opinions to change the theme of the exhibit widened the narrative to incorporate a notion of *ancestry*, which was key in developing Arocha’s theory of the remaining connections or traces of memory between Africa and Colombia. This theory was first developed by Nina S. de Friedemann who worked with Black communities in Colombia and argued that there are marks or vestiges of an African past that have been reinterpreted and recreated by Afrodescendants and that these have persisted centuries after the Transatlantic slave trade ended (Arocha 2008).

---

7 The catalogue of the exhibition gives a full account of the process of fieldwork and other challenges such as doing research with communities that have been living the consequences of a long internal conflict (Arocha *et al.* 2008).
Curatorship, design and museological knowledge may make museums seem as places of intellectual privilege (Hein 2000). In the particular case under study, opening up meant working by a different standard for the Museum: “participatory museography,” a term coined by the museum’s exhibit Designer Amparo Carrizosa. It was certainly a new experience for museum staff that was, fortunately, understood by all to be necessary. As an experience of democratization of the museum practice and of finding consensus, the exhibition process was a learning ground for all. The staff felt the impact of the exhibit both as museum professionals and as visitors, an issue I will discuss in chapter three. Despite these advancements, and having maintained dialogue and conversations throughout the process, it was incomplete. Arocha and I critiqued the fact that community members did not make the final decisions regarding the theme and the design of the exhibit; it was rather the museum staff and the anthropologists who looked to community members to validate certain decisions that had already been made. The complexity of “participation” in museums is taken up by Stuart Burch who is critical of the victorious discourse and literature generated on this matter:

This literature has two consequences. In the first instance it generates a sense of evolutionary improvement, the implicit message being that, as national museums are becoming professively more participative, they are as a result growing increasingly democratic and their audiences evermore empowered. Yet this welter of material has an additional corollary: it obscures the evident limits to audience involvement and fails to really address what is meant by the very word “participation”.

(2010: 227)
In chapters four and five we will return to the issue of who can represent a community and who can be included in processes of elaboration of narratives in the museum.

In the future, there would have to be more negotiation and means of direct participation. For any museum, the democratization of its activities, ranging from decision-making to interpretation, is key to its transformation. Nevertheless, participatory mechanisms should lead to incorporation strategies so that these become permanent.

**Can representations be modified?**

One of the aims of the exhibition was to give visibility to what African captives and their descendants have brought to the nation’s formation in the fields of spirituality, social organization, aesthetics and symbolic universes. It was also thought that this inclusion would acknowledge the Museum’s complicity in making Afrocolombian communities invisible and that by recognizing both instances this action could contribute to the process of reparations required by the international community. These objectives responded to Jaime Arocha’s concern with the lack of representation of these communities. On this matter he states: “I’d rather have the academic or the empiric representation, even if they might be static, because they can be corrected and filled with new contents and we can enter a debate” (interview December 10, 2008). Stereotypes, in his view, are contents that can be modeled, corrected, debated. The total absence of representation means that no conversation can be started.
This idea of stereotypes and the ways in which they can be transformed is also a central part of this study, as is discussed in chapter three. What did non-afro audiences make of the specific signs and symbols, images, music and objects through which the exhibit that represented the concept of a rich and antique system of religious beliefs of a people and their descendents who were stripped of all forms of material heritage and suppressed? These objects were a representation of resilience as well as the imminent danger of not being able to overcome the threat of the disappearance of these practices. These communities are seeing their rituals displaced, changed or eliminated as a consequence of violence and modernization (Arocha, González and Moreno 2008). The exhibit legitimised not only a people as nation members but also their history –many times tragic– as part of the national community.

If, according to Hall, representation is about giving meaning, were we able to convey our intentions and contents to audiences? Our desire was to highlight differences but also stress that these communities are part of a shared culture. Did we manage to “share sets of concepts, images and ideas which enable [people] to think and feel about the world, and thus interpret the world, in roughly similar ways”? (Hall 1997a: 4) Was the exhibit successful in encoding, translating and de-exoticising the unfamiliar “and transform that which is alien into that which is comprehensible”? (Lidchi 1997: 166) Some answers to these questions constitute the analysis given in later chapters.

Finally, how optimistic can we be about the power of a museum exhibition? Smith, for instance, is cautious about the possibilities of reinterpreting the nation: “Political
solidarity requires the harvest of some myths of origin, historical memories and collective symbols” that must find a broad echo in sectors of the national community so that people have a sense of belonging and participation (2004: 154). If representation or meanings of nation have changed, have citizens transformed the way they interpret the nation? The central question that engages with all the analysis proposed for this thesis is whether representations can be altered, both in the elaboration of narratives (process of production) and in the minds of the people who visit an exhibition (interpretation). In chapters three and four we will see what it means to introduce old excluded protagonists to new exhibitions, how stereotypes play out in the interpretation of exhibitions and what understandings audiences took away from the representations they encountered.
2 PARADIGM, METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND INITIAL RESULTS OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out the framework of data collection and analysis as well as provide an overview of results. My intention here is to explain the point of departure for this study; that is, the paradigm which indicates my assumptions about what I learnt and how (Creswell 2003) as well as my expectations of the impact or limits of research. Understanding the objective of the study and how change occurs in the museum will also be of importance in order to further explore the impact of representation. Demands made by scholars and communities to justly represent Afrodescendants led to the exhibition project that is the focus of this dissertation. In turn, a need to understand what was occurring with the exhibition in the context of larger questions of representation as well as my own practice led me to do this research project and propose a way forward in this line of work. A main assumption that this study makes is that exhibitions do transform audiences, even if these changes have limits.

This chapter explains the study’s methodology and methods of data collection. Based on a case study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to get a wide range of data representative of different stakeholders. One of the sources used is personal experience as a way to highlight where the researcher stands and discuss problems of race and ethnicity, such as the possible challenges faced by a white researcher dealing with issues faced by Black communities. Ethnographical methods such as observation and a description of the exhibition set the scene in order to get a first notion of visitor behavior in the gallery. Methods used are explained: surveys;
interviews; focus groups and documents; as well as possible response effects and ethical concerns. Lastly, I briefly consider how data were analysed before moving on to the chapters that interpret and analyze these findings.

What is being researched, and for what purpose?

National museums and their relationship to multiculturalism, cultural rights, inclusion and reparation are being researched because there is a need to establish what can be done, based on a diagnostic of what has been done. In this sense, I am looking at the possibility of real transformation in/of the museum and the limits of change therein (Dash 1999). We have to recognize that research cannot lead to self-understanding alone: it has to locate the problem “in the contexts which have produced situations of marginalisation in the first place” (Truman 2000: 27). Hence, in this project there is an emphasis on theory and the explicit experiences of production and reception of the temporary exhibition Velorios y santos vivos but also on the practical problems that arise in institutions when different stakeholders interact with each other and issues of exclusion and power are at play.

The possibility of doing research inside the museum allows the researcher to take into account the views of multiple interested parties, thus becoming a meeting point for several –and many times discrepant– possibilities of imagining an ideal national museum. Despite this insight, this project privileges the knowledge created by the people that are not represented in the museum and are therefore at a power disadvantage. In developing a methodology, there is a need to highlight the realities of marginalized communities, to get a sense of the negotiations that must take place
in order to advance their inclusion and to “generate proposals which are doable, and credible and persuasive to policy-makers” (Chambers 1998: 112-113).

Who benefits from the knowledge produced by an inclusive multiethnic museum exhibit? First, the researcher in understanding the impact of the enterprise she has participated in; second, the museum in seeing the possibilities and limits to its actions and driving projects that can have future impact; third, production team members in understanding our expectations and how they are transformed and limited by the reaction of audiences and other production coworkers; fourth, communities in being able to get a sense of the working conditions of museums and the challenges posed by institutions as well as audiences; fifth, future audiences who will come in contact with new narratives of the nation.

Giving social sciences a role in producing knowledge that directly transforms societies places this research amongst a different range of paradigms, like emancipatory, anti-exclusionary or transformative research, as well as Participatory-Action Research (P-AR). This last paradigm influenced the working conditions of the investigations done for the exhibition in combining academic and popular knowledge, in the multi- and interdisciplinary group of people that made up the production team and in breaking asymmetry between subjects and objects by building conditions for researchers and those researched to learn from each other and build trust through dialogue (Fals Borda 1998). This study follows P-AR philosophy of change of “individual and collective practices, social structures, and social media

---

1 PAR was developed by one of Colombia’s leading scholars: Orlando Fals-Borda.
which maintain irrationality, injustice, and incoherent and unsatisfying forms of existence” (McTaggart 1999: 498).

As for emancipatory research, it looks into the oppressiveness of social structures and questions ideology and history in the control and maintenance of such oppression; hence, knowledge is insight into the nature of such structures. The paradigm is described by Mertens in the following terms:

1. it places central importance on the lives and experiences of diverse groups that have traditionally been marginalized;
2. it analyses how and why inequalities based on gender, race/ethnicity, and disability are reflected in asymmetric power relationships;
3. it examines how results of social inquiry on inequalities are linked to political and social action (i.e., empowerment of marginalized groups); and
4. it uses an emancipatory theory to develop the program theory and the evaluation approach.

(2000: 112)

Following some of the characteristics of both P-AR and emancipatory research as paradigms, this particular research project follows certain premises such as: establishing non-hierarchical processes; starting a dialogue and becoming a facilitator of people’s experiences rather than speaking for them; trying to look to the members of the research team for concerns and breaking the division between the known and the unknown by looking at research as a learning process; the place where the researcher speaks from is all-important, for it reveals possible biases and
also becomes a source of data. Lastly, this project attempts to be explicit about the
tensions that arose in the project as well as those that might remain and tries to link
research to wider questions of social justice (Humphries, Mertens, Truman 2000).

**Understanding change and transformation**

How we understand the experiences of the parties involved will be crucial in the
analysis of the transformative power of the exhibition. This research project is
inscribed in interpretivist theory in research which contends that “in the social realm,
there are multiple realities that cannot be fully or objectively understood, partly
because they are constantly changing in relationship to one another and also because
they always are observed through a cultural lens” (Lindauer 2005:143). In order to
understand how audiences construct meaning out of their experience of one
exhibition, the methodology “sets out to explore the range of ways in which visitors
are engaging with an exhibition (which may involve cognitive, affective, and/or
personal understanding)” (Ibid.; 147). In this approach, the evaluator does not seek to
find whether specific information was understood but instead “to identify educational
experiences in which visitors engaged” (Ibid).

Rather than assuming that there is one “correct” way to interpret the exhibition, or
that there is a “concrete reality that exists beyond the human mind or experience”
(Ibid. 139), which positivism contents, this project aims to “measure” the
meaningfulness of the experience of the exhibition by different parties, including
Afrocolombians and museum staff. Learning is understood as experiences that
become educationally meaningful when they acquire shareable form and construct a
common discourse in the public sphere (Hein 2000; Falk, J. H. and Dierking 2002).
Thus, we have to ask how the exhibition contributed to something visitors already knew and how it confronted them with new knowledge. Audiences may agree with and appropriate the perspective of an exhibition or they may radically oppose and resist it (Sandell 2002). Rather than asking how much people remember from the funerary rituals of a community, audience evaluation looked at ways in which they were/ were not moved affectively, which perceptions of minorities were/ were not altered, ways in which audiences perceive the place of minorities in a national narrative and how Afrodescendents saw themselves represented in the exhibition.

**Case study design and mixed methods in research**

Methodologies should allow turning an object of study into something intelligible so that we can explore the behavior of others without imposing our own suppositions on meanings (Reguillo 1998). Hence, the methodology and methods selected were crucial in allowing a wide range of data collected on the perception of both the museum and the exhibition by different actors. With this necessity in mind, a case study methodology was chosen in order to pose questions that were explanatory and to use a wide variety of sources of evidence. For Yin, case study is appropriate when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (2003: 9). This unique single case of the temporary exhibition *Velorios y santos vivos* contributes to understanding issues of production, representation and interpretation that could not have been generated at any other museum or exhibition. The study also draws emphasis on the context made up by the political situation of the Afrocolombian communities as well as the present state of the National Museum of Colombia as avenues to connect the problems of an
exhibition with larger challenges, such as reparation, politics and the place of multicultural policies in the future of national museums.

Since the case study methodology includes several sources of evidence in order to generate rich data, it allows for the implementation of mixed methods, an approach which has become widely accepted in social research as it allows researchers to grasp several dimensions of complex phenomena, sometimes incompatible with each other (Yin 2003), to answer a variety of questions and provide ways to obtain data that are representative of many perspectives (Mertens 2007).

Throughout this research project, I employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, with an emphasis on the former. I applied different methods to different populations, and followed concurrent procedures:

in which the researcher converges quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. In this design, the investigator collects both forms of data at the same time during the study and then integrates the information in the interpretation of the overall results.

(Creswell 2003:16)

Following Kalwant Bhopal, qualitative data allows insight into experiences and meanings created while quantitative data gives information on the characteristics of a population and processes occurring within (2000: 68). Being able to measure reception –though we rely on what participants share of their interpretation of reality and their context– provides a glimpse into the intersection between the subjectivities
of visitors and the reality of the exhibition and how this affects diverse readings and representations.

Additionally, collecting from various sources also permits triangulation, which “reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method” (Maxwell 2005: 94) and confronts the views of the observer with the reality of the participants (Reguillo 1998); methods applied are complementary, as similar and different perceptions of the same exhibition can be contrasted in order to expand the knowledge we have on the dimensions of the impact of the exhibition.

Methods implemented included the concurrent administration of a quantitative survey and qualitative methods, such as observation and interviews, during the ten weeks of the exhibition. Personal experience and informal interviews with production team members were collected during the production phase and after the exhibition ended. Focus groups intended for Afrodescendents began almost at the end of the exhibition. Staff were interviewed several weeks after the exhibition closed. In my interviews with staff, I looked at their experience both in processes of production as well as reception. It was a way to access the inside of the museum on a more formal basis. Priority is given to qualitative analysis and results from visitor interviews as well as the focus groups.

Though these are the main forms of data collection used, the exhibition also produced a book of visitors’ comments, as well as a wall of messages and reports written by university students and schoolteachers that were considered
complementary data. Other informal conversations with Afrocolombian leaders belonging to different organizations will be mentioned when pertinent, since these views express different ideological stances on the issue of representing these communities.

In order to have an ample understanding of the exhibition’s impact, the sampling strategies attempted to grasp a wide array of visitors and to be inclusive by incorporating people from different genders, ethnicities, ages, families, incomes, characteristics that can be obtained from observation and according to the days of application of the different instruments developed. Race and ethnicity, especially, were determinant factors contemplated in how subjects made sense of their realities and schemes of representation (Reguillo 1998).

DATA SOURCES, TOOLS AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Data sources and methods were selected to enable answering questions imposed by the research problem. The following table has been adapted from the model used by Jennifer Mason (2002) and will make explicit the relationship between the research questions and the methods selected.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do national museums appropriate and communicate conceptions of multiculturalism?</td>
<td>Staff group interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Director interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the challenges for national museums in working with communities marginalized both in the museum and broadly in society?</td>
<td>Personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visitor interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Production team interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do members of the communities represented engage with an exhibition designed to change narratives of the national?</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visitor interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do general museum visitors interpret exhibitions that aim to transform representation of minorities as nation-members?</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visitor interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do audiences engage with the concept of a multicultural nation in a national museum?</td>
<td>Visitor interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methods of data collection will be further described below as will as an overview of initial results that were collected. The upcoming chapters will further analyze results as they look to interpret, first, the experience and impact for non-afro visitors and, second, the conversations and issues raised by Afrodescendent visitors and non-visitors to the exhibition. The need to separate these two constituents is based on the fact that we aimed to impact each group differently with the exhibition. The fifth chapter, however, looks for shared themes and points of convergence on ideas of representation in the museum.

**Personal experience**

Personal experience and involvement can help to convey the insider and outsider perspective on the impact of the exhibition and connected themes. Post-positivist trends in research that reject objectivism in doing science state the importance of acknowledging the connection between researcher, site and participants (Creswell 2003). Feminism has also pulled the investigator into considering how he or she affects research by introducing the importance of autobiography and “‘reflexivity’: the continual assessment of the contribution of one’s knowledge to others, as well as the questions we have asked; the way we locate ourselves within our questions and the purpose of our work” (Woodward 2001: 44). In order to make personal experience of use, I kept a diary to record key events, a method often used in ethnographical analysis (Fetterman 1989).

Despite the advantages of being on the “inside”, there are also disadvantages regarding my own place as a curator of the National Museum and part of the
production team, as well as being the coordinator of the visitors’ study, interviewer and focus group moderator. Such actions represent a deep emotional involvement in the project that has to be acknowledged as a possible source of bias that might lead to a tendency of giving a positive value to the visitor’s experience in the exhibition, idealizing the production experience and not being critical towards the policies of the institution for which I work. Thus, other sources of data are key in order to avoid circumscribing the research project to the experience of the researcher.

The issue of being a valid interlocutor in a project that is interwoven with constructions of race and ethnicity is worthy of being discussed, as it might threaten the positive outcomes of such a project. The question seems straightforward: Can I, a mestizo/white researcher recognized as part of a political elite, be involved in addressing issues of inequality of power, justice and representation of Black communities? In dealing with this question for her own study, Margaret Andersen makes an additional query: “How can white scholars study those who have been historically subordinated without further producing sociological accounts distorted by the political economy of race, class and gender?” (1993: 41) In answering, she sustains that “majority group scholars can develop and utilize tensions in their own cultural identities to enable them to see different aspects of minority group experiences and to examine critically majority experiences and beliefs” (Ibid: 42). She adds that researchers introduce different valid questions and that though minority scholars might experience less distrust and be more understanding of cultural contexts, there is also the issue of “the accountability and commitment of minority scholars to the communities they study [that] pose unique problems for their research practice” (Ibid.: 41).
The white researcher is, then, responsible for examining her own context, the institutions where she is imbedded and challenging the exclusions or racism that she self-critically observes. Additionally, the learning experience of working with a particular community one does not belong to, results in a new awareness and understanding of its claims. In that sense, in order to work with Afrodescendent communities, one must be aware of and understand their historical circumstances as well as their present day conditions. Borrowing from standpoint theory we can conclude that being aware of negative relations mediated by race constructions, ethnicity, class and gender will lead to a consciousness of the need to change these relations (Andersen 1993).

If social structures are oppressive, maintained by political and economic power (Humphries, Mertens and Truman 2001), then having the perceived power to question these structures might drastically reorganise them. Nevertheless, as some investigators have pointed out, power cannot be reduced to a matter of will, and does not lie solely in the position of those empowered (Humphries 2000). In this sense, the power a curator in a public institution may acquire is a dependent variable that cannot operate alone but is defined by a whole range of factors including, for example, the values of museum staff, the perceived image the institution has in the public sphere, the Ministry of Culture, the legislation and other legal documents, as well as legislation pertaining to the Afrodescendent community.

In the context of the exhibition, culture can be understood as a conduit of power and a battle site where “racism of the dominant culture –a racism which both defines people of Colour as negatively different and denies self-worth has given rise to
strong attempts to redefine subjectivity, culture and history” (Jordan and Weedon 1995: 545). And this is valid in carrying out research that aims to be respectful of those involved:

Perhaps the methodological challenge is to find good ways to enable powerful people to gain from disempowering themselves. For the realities of ‘lowers’ to count, ‘uppers’ have to hand over the stick. Changes in dominant behavior entail having respect, standing down, shutting up, and facilitating, enabling and empowering.

(Chambers 1998: 121)

My role as a valid interlocutor was questioned during the exhibition-making process by one of the professors who had agreed to work with the Museum after the first set of difficulties was resolved. Professor Claudia Mosquera published a text in 2007 in which she continued to criticize the museum, claiming that no collective research and work had been done, and called the exhibition a palliative effort. Museum staff were unaware of this conflict because she had distanced herself from the project, alleging other responsibilities. Her early criticism on representation in the Museo (see chapter one) became a personal offense because of the way she referred to the curators (and I am one of the two). She argued that the staff at the Museo is “guardian of the socio-racial order” (2007b) put in place since colonial times that will do nothing to change the racist character of the Museo. Here, Mosquera fails to acknowledge that researchers and subjects are “located in specific social-historical settings” (Andersen 1993: 42). Her views are in tune with considering “whiteness” as something fixed, a social category rather than a mutable social construction (Bonnett
Mosquera later claimed that she had left the project because of political disagreements. She declared in August of 2008 that professor Arocha and I had formed an alliance based on social class, and accused Arocha of forsaking the debate on reparations as well as forcing her out of the production team by excluding Black people from participating.

These were the personal attacks that we had to deal with during and after the project. As far as the Museo is concerned, it has to respond to its more than 187 years of history that still reflect in its collections what the official homogenising, excluding, disrespectful representation has been – thus consciously or unconsciously contributing to pervasive forms of discrimination and racism. Yes; there is a dire need for transformation, but that can only be done with the collaboration and contribution of scholars and communities, through a continuum of projects like the exhibition. The Museo, as other institutions, has indeed to accept accountability “for the social impact of what [it does] in accordance with values that differ markedly from those that guided [its] predecessors” (Hein 2000: 90-91).

**Observation**

Ethnography is a way to immerse oneself in the world under study in order to understand the experience of people in it and to reveal the multiple truths of how different parties interact with the exhibition. Observation, an ethnographical technique, was applied in order to gain insight on the uses of the exhibition. It allowed a wide understanding of the spectrum of visitors’ reactions to the exhibition by collecting data on a range of behaviors. These conducts were recorded on field notes which are described as writing on what is observed as well as on the reflections
of the researcher, interpretation and selection of relevant information (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw 1995). The questions that were kept in mind when looking at behaviours were: Are there different ways in which visitors approach exhibition elements? Are there patterns in the way visitors engage with the components of the exhibition?

The advantage of this method is that it looks at experiences in their contexts. Visitors were observed in order to establish the points of interest or parts of the exhibition that caused the most impact as well as those elements that could have been less acknowledged. Ethnographical description notes were also kept, as a selection of that which was considered worthy of being registered. In order to contribute to the validity of the study, a sustained presence in the setting studied was kept (Maxwell 2005) and the exhibit was visited almost every day, including Saturdays and Sundays (with the exception of three weekends).

Observation strategies included keeping a log of how visitors moved along the exhibition space, how they interacted with different components and media used in the exhibition, as well as a description of who came to the exhibit (for instance, many of the visitors observed were mothers and children visiting for schoolwork). This exercise also allowed me to see that visitors from Afrocolombian communities were scarce.2

The protocol used for observation included the following questions:

---

2 In the 2005 Census only 10.6% percent of people in Colombia recognize themselves as Afrocolombian, afrocolombianos, negros-mulatos, raizales and palenqueros, though the population is estimated around 20%.
In what order do visitors engage with the different parts of the exhibition? Are there existing patterns? Are there parts that are visited with a higher frequency? What parts of the exhibit do visitors spend more time in? What are the spaces that are less visited?

- How do visitors behave in the first space (entrance) and the second, where the altars were built? How do they behave in front of the altars, and in front of the objects?

- How do visitors use the different elements? Which ones are used more? Which ones should be improved or changed?

- What social interaction takes place in the exhibition?

Some of the ethical concerns involved in observation have to do with the fact that people are unaware that they are being watched. Despite this possible danger, visitors know that they are in a public space and their anonymity is confined (Pérez Santos 2000). Possible sources of bias include expectations or anticipations, by attributing beforehand specific behaviours and importing one’s own knowledge of visitor behaviour. Errors may have been made due to the difficulty of defining “interest” or relying primarily on my own set of observations.³

**Visitors uses of the exhibition⁴**

The exhibition aimed at communicating a particular notion of ancestry unique to Afrocolombian communities, which is embedded in their African past and years of resistance to enslavement as well as evangelization. It also acknowledged present

---

³ Students of professor Jaime Arocha wrote an ethnography (2008) of the exhibition which I read after writing my own (Daniel Bermúdez, Raúl Alejandro Delgado, Edna Carolina Mayorga, Ana Mercedes Sánchez)

⁴ For a 360 degree view of the exhibition see http://ancestrosvivos.sala5.tk/
day dangers these communities face, and hence sought to highlight those elements that threaten the practice and survival of the rituals as well as the fact that these communities are not justly represented in the National Museum’s exhibitions or collections.

The exhibition started in the vestibule. Three televisions showed images that documented the construction process as well as scenes from the inauguration. A text in the entrance warned the visitor: *this space has been consecrated to the dead Afrocolombian people who have not had a proper burial due to the internal conflict.*

The title of the exhibit was accompanied by the different names used by the communities to identify themselves. On the wall, people could leave messages on stickers to their loved ones who had passed away; we created a point where the dead and the living could come together, as they do in the altars, irrespective of their ethnicity. Though visitors initially used it, soon the stickers were taken over to write just about anything. There were a scarce couple of disrespectful messages that were covered (Figure1).

---

5 One of the criticisms made by Afrocolombian leaders was that sacred rituals and altars could not be included in an exhibition space. The solution was to have an ecumenical ceremony on the evening of the inauguration and turn the exhibition space into a sacred one.
The exhibition space was divided in two: the *profane* and the *sacred*. Fieldwork showed that the *profane* was the space for relaxation and where people displayed different behaviors from the *sacred* space where the singing and praying take place. This division was questioned afterwards by members of the Afrocolombian pastoral Catholic community, who claimed that such excision should not have been made since both spaces are in the realm of the sacred. Arocha’s students who participated in an ethnographical methods workshop also questioned the division because they saw that the exhibition lacked an explicit connection between its different parts and, therefore, visitors could have regarded the first space as less important.
The first space was dimly light (Figure 2). On the left wall as visitors came in, a projected animation and series of maps showed the different phases of the transatlantic slave trade, the population of African descendants in Colombia and the communities visited and represented in the exhibition. On the right wall, a video was projected with a series of photographs that attest to the changing contexts of violence, modernization, and dire working conditions that these communities face. Though this projection was particularly important to understand the context of the exhibition, most of the visitors did not watch it, as they would immediately enter the second space.

Figure 2 First space of the exhibition. Photo Carlos Gustavo Suárez.

Apart from introductory texts, visitors found plastic tables and chairs and games such as dominos, cards, parcheesi, Chinese checkers and books for further reading. These
tables are exactly the same ones used by the communities when the rituals have started; they are not representations of the furniture. Some visitors who spent little time in the second part of the exhibition sat at the tables and played the games.

A further wall with almost no light had 19 pictures of the different people that participated in the process: people who attended the 2007 diagnostic meetings of the museum, Afrodescendent professionals, communities from the places represented, academics, anthropologists, museum professionals and the men and women who came to construct the altars.

From the ceiling, separating the first and second spaces, hung curtains reminiscent of the importance of such elements in the altars. Initially, the curtains were supposed to “hide” the sacred space from the viewer in order to maintain a level of suspense; but these hid drywall panels that became potentially dangerous to visitors; hence the curtains were later kept open (Figure 3).
Figure 3 Entrance to the second space of the exhibition; view of the African pieces that represented rituals to the ancestors. Photo Sofía Natalia González.

In the second part of the exhibit, visitors were greeted by 12 African pieces that belong to the museum’s collection, most are part of a larger donation of pieces from Central Africa made in 1998 by William Bertrand, an American sociologist and epidemiologist who carried out fieldwork in the 1960s in Colombia and later on went to the Congo region. He found many similarities in the artifacts made by Afrodescendents in these different parts of the world, and thus decided to donate part of this collection to the National Museum of Colombia. During the time of the exhibition, the director of the Quai Branly Museum visited and said that these objects had little value because they were mainly late 20th century copies, most likely made for tourists. Despite the question of the “authenticity” of the pieces, for the Museum they remain a source from which to draw a bridge between Africa and Colombia. A map of Africa on the floor showed the regions where enslaved Africans were brought
from and the panels included texts that linked them thematically to the exhibit, signaling the importance of rites to ancestors in several African communities. Since this was the first “altar” that visitors saw, it remained one of the most significant sites, though its impression did not mean that visitors understood the connection we were trying to make between ancient African beliefs, the importance of ancestors and rituals in Colombia. We printed copies of the map and the information on the uses of the particular pieces so that interested visitors could take them away (Figure 4).

Figure 4 A closer look at the African pieces from the donation of William Bertrand. Photo Sofía Natalia González.

A circle on the floor divided the altars. Words indicated the different parts of the ritual that were differentiated in research: agony, death, set up or wake, burial, novena or nine nights (the ceremonies after burial), ninth night, anniversary (making it clear that the dead continue to accompany the living). These same phases were
developed on the walls of the exhibit space with artifacts, photographs and videos trying to highlight similarities and differences between the communities. The videos were edited from material taped during research and other archives lent by Black people as well as Arocha’s archive from his own research done in 1992. They emphasized how people represented lived and understood these rituals (Figure 5).

Figure 5 View of the objects that represented the second phase of the funerary rituals (Death). Photo Sofía Natalia González.

The design of the exhibit used elements one associates with art exhibitions, such as white walls and platforms for elements meant to emphasize the extraordinary qualities of ordinary artifacts such as cell phones, plastic cans, a display case with crackers and mints, mirrors, a glass of water and other quotidian objects (Figure 6). Most objects were not encased or protected. This meant that visitors were keen to
touch things, many times leading to the guard telling them not to do so. This was especially true for both children and adults at the sight of the musical instruments.

Figure 6 Ordinary objects acquired sacred status in the exhibition. Photo Sofía Natalia González.
Objects were essential in the construction of the altars. For instance, Coca-Cola bottles were transformed into sacred candleholders. The exhibit showed objects as carriers of a social memory involved in the rituals where they are used and the people who make use of them. This is significant because Afrocolombian culture has always been considered “oral” and intangible, but research and the exhibition showed otherwise (Figure 7).

![Figure 7 Altar from San Basilio de Palenque elaborated by Moraima Simarra. On the left, an altar used in the eight evenings after burial and, on the right, its transformation for the ninth night. Photo Sofía Natalia González.](image)

The most emotionally charged elements of the exhibition were the seven altars. Four of them were dedicated to a specific part of the ritual: the wake in Saint Andrews (Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina), the ceremony for a
child in Palenque de Ure (Department of Córdoba), the transformation of an altar from the one used in the novena to the one used in the last night in San Basilio de Palenque (Department of Bolívar), and the fourth one, an altar for the ninth night in Guapi (Department of Cauca) (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Ninth night altar from Guapi elaborated by Ligia Elena Pinillos and Rosa Amalia Quiñones. Photo Sofía Natalia González.

The three remaining altars were located in the middle of the gallery and were dedicated to three saints: Saint Francis of Assisi, known as San Pacho, in Quibdó (Department of Chocó), Adorations to Baby Jesus in Guachené (Department of Valle del Cauca), and the Virgen del Carmen (Our Lady of Mount Carmel) in Tumaco (Department of Nariño). These altars showed that saints are considered ancestors, at the same time that dead loved ones can be considered saintly figures. Visitors read the altars in the language of aesthetics, most of them describing them as very
beautiful. These altars were not unfamiliar to most visitors because many figures looked exactly the same as they would to any Catholic, independent of ethnicity. The difference remains in meaning because the hypothesis that we tried to convey is that African deities were masked under Catholic saints (Figures 9-11).

Figure 9 Altar for “San Pacho”, designed by Madolia Dediego and elaborated by Miguel Ángel Cuesta from Quibdó. Photo Sofía Natalia González.
Figure 10 Altar for Baby Jesus elaborated by María Eusebia Aponzá from Guachené. Photo Sofía Natalia González.

Figure 11 Altar for Our Lady of Mount Carmel elaborated by Wisman Tenorio from Tumaco. Photo Sofía Natalia González.
Though the exhibition was a *representation* of rituals, many people took them to *be* the altars of rituals (Arocha and Lleras 2008). The transgression between representation of the altars and “real” altars is an issue that will be discussed further on. Though we were aware that the altars were not in the space of a ritual, we did have a ceremony of consecration of the exhibition space as well as a special ceremony of closure with a Catholic priest and some of the people who participated in the production process (Figures 12, 13).

![Figure 12 Father Emigdio Cuesta leading participants through the ceremony of closure on November 3, 2008. Photo Jaime Arocha.](image-url)
Close to the entrance of the sacred space were musical instruments, one of them a historical drum which belonged to a prominent musician from San Basilio de Palenque (Figure 14). When people came into the exhibit, they took some time to decide the direction they wanted to follow. Many stayed at the first video station, which showed the community of San Basilio dancing and singing while Simancongo, a prominent elder and musician, was a few days from his passing away. These images can be taken as the signs of a “happy culture”, though dancing here is used in another context related to a deeply felt farewell.
Visitors spent much time in the first altar—which they could actually get into—, a corner of a house in Saint Andrews as it used to exist(Figure 15). Most visitors looked at the first altar and the first two texts and would continue to zig-zag, looking at things on their left and their right, thereby mixing the steps and phases of the rituals with the altars to the deities.
The back wall begins with the altar that most impacted people, which is used in a child burial ceremony. The altar makes use of a tremendous amount of color paper and imitation flowers. Musical instruments are shown in the context of ceremonies for children. According to tradition, mothers should not cry at the sight of their dead children because they have committed no sin and therefore will go to heaven immediately. In some communities, the eyes of the baby are kept open with toothpicks so that the child can see God⁶ (Figure 16).

---

⁶ In a text on African women and the transatlantic slave trade, Barbara Bush notes that funerals were key in the transmission of memories of Africa: “As slaves believed their souls would migrate back to Africa funerals were a source of celebration, not mourning” (2008: note 104). Once on land, “slaves could now bury their dead according to African practices. Pinkcard describes a funeral where ‘females clad mostly in white’ accompanied the coffin singing and dancing to the grave’ and an old slave woman ‘chanting an African air’. African women’s dance culture survived the enforced dancing on board ship. For Europeans African dance was a ‘lascivious’, indecent and ‘offensive’ activity that women were particularly fond of and gave themselves up to with ‘rapture’ and ‘luxuriant pleasure’” (Ibid.: 690).
Figure 16 Altar for the death of a child elaborated by the community of the Palenque of San José de Uré. Photo Carlos Gustavo Suárez.

A historic object demands our attention: it is an elongated wooden “batea” (bowl) beautifully carved with geometric figures such as the zig zag that represents thunder. Across from this corner is the altar to the Baby Jesus. Two nativity scenes are part of
the altar. On the right is a large photograph of children dressed as the holy family. They are all Black except for the Virgin. This particular festivity takes place in February, not in December, and it is also related to a past of enslavement and resistance (see Figure 10).

Back on the wall, there are pictures of cemeteries in different communities and a series of every day objects inside a contour of a coffin, showing those things souls “might want to come back for”. A notebook to determine who will contribute what to the ceremonies is available for visitors to write in. Notably, most of the comments were very positive and included exclamations on the effort made to “finally” include Afrocolombians in the Museum.

Close to the altars from San Basilio for the ceremonies after burial and ninth night and the copy of the cross used there for processions is another object which caught the attention of visitors: a glass case that is reminiscent of the ones used in small shops in towns to sell candy or other types of foods (see Figure 6). In this exhibition, the case signaled the solidarity that is expressed in what people bring to the rituals. The next section, generally, was less visited. On the wall there was an audio station where Leocadia Mosquera, one of the Afrocolombian teachers who joined the production team in 2006, explained the purpose of the *alabaos*, chants that are part of the ceremonies of the novena. The audio files were commentaries made by the people from the community regarding the importance and significance of their ceremonies (Figure 17).
In front of the altar to the Virgin, there is a smaller version of an altar on a canoe made to resemble the “balsadas” or aquatic processions. The spectacular flower arrangements made by the young man who put together the altar, Wisman Tenorio from Tumaco had to be replaced by a local person who had to copy, to the best of her ability, the “real” arrangements. On two occasions I was able to see people blessing themselves in front of this altar.

After the last altar, from Guapi, a panel shows a novena and a poster that announces an anniversary mass. On top of the entrance is an altar to deities as it would be reproduced in a house, but it has a more museum-like aesthetic (not as exuberant as the others). All the flowers, except those in the altar to the Virgen del Carmen had to be replaced by imitation flowers although the communities, in fact, combine the use fresh and fake flowers. Fragments of different types of music used during mourning.
rituals played at seven-minute intervals creating an unknown effect but aiming to disrupt the visit with music that ranged from more traditional tunes to “rancheras” (Mexican popular music).

Interacting with the exhibition

Visits to the exhibit ranged from five minutes to two hours. Shorter visits were not rare during the last Sundays of each month because entry to different cultural institutions and museums is free; therefore, it is possible that these people were in a hurry to visit the rest of the Museum or other institutions. A visitor study conducted several years ago concluded that visitors on this day had lower incomes and, as I gathered from interviews conducted on those days, less schooling.

Allowing photography was key to the exhibition’s success. Visitors took photographs of the altars and, when possible, they included themselves as part of the scene; this was done as part of the process of appropriating the exhibit as a social experience. Sometimes people took pictures of the videos and of the texts, probably for schoolwork. Videos shown in televisions are prominent in the exhibition space, being crucial in each of the phases. They reinforce a concept of solidarity and are used to show people from the regions involved during the research process talking about related themes. School children sometimes paid less attention to objects and exclusively used the audiovisual materials provided.

Labels in the exhibition were written by the anthropologists and myself and were taken from the research text. A special text from Leocadia Mosquera explained the importance of San Pacho for her. Long texts were used for altars and phases of the
rituals. Shorter labels identified objects and images. Another critique made by Arocha’s students and museum co-workers was the vast amount of information available. Though texts were detailed, people used them according to interest and mixed these with the use of the audiovisual material. Visitors took a lot of notes during the exhibition, as a result of school projects.

Regarding the visit of children, some of the guides managed to work with school groups and youngsters, but this was not always done successfully. Once, I was able to hear one of the guides speaking about slaves to a group of eight-year-olds and I wondered whether they would be able to understand such a concept. It was difficult to make these groups engage with the contents, though, of course, there were exceptions, such as some of the projects developed by the five school teachers participating in a joint project with the Secretary of Education of Bogotá as means to support the obligatory curriculum on Afrocolombian studies. These teachers had participated in courses given by professor Arocha, which meant that they were familiar with some of the contents of the exhibition.

Aside from the use of photography, there were different ways in which visitors interacted with the exhibition, one of them being through things they could take away, such as the novenas to the different saints (very popular in a still highly Catholic country) and the information sheets for the African pieces. Other behaviors and forms of participation included playing games on the plastic tables, copying information for schoolwork, listening to the audio clips or watching the videos. Despite the effort we made, I was told that the exhibition was difficult to understand (for non-afros) because it lacked educational devices. Perhaps this is true, but our
main purpose was not to make people understand in the way one might expect visitors to “learn” the phases of the rituals or the names of the saints, but rather to undermine and reassess their preconceptions about Black people.

Survey

The purpose of using a survey was to have a description of the visiting population to the exhibition and to be able to answer the question: Was the participation of people who identify themselves as Black, Afrocolombian or Afrodescendent significant? The instrument was also meant to enable sampling for interviews, as well as to identify possible participants for focus groups (Appendix 1A and 1B).

In this context, 391 surveys were administered during eight of the ten weeks the exhibition was open. Initially, the way the surveys were administered had to follow an itinerary designed by a statistics professor from the National University (Jorge Ortiz) based on the initial response and visits to the exhibition. The following table shows the number of surveys to be applied daily in a week during eight weeks of exhibition to gather 400 surveys, a significant amount. Unfortunately, one of the students conducting surveys did not complete his share of the total amount.

---

7 All instruments to gather data were used in Spanish. In the appendices I include the original version in Spanish and the English translation.
Table 2  
Survey collection schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Surveys 10am-2pm</th>
<th>Surveys 2pm-6pm</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questions on the survey included information on the visit to the exhibition, such as how visitors had found out about the exhibition, who they visited the exhibition with and the score the visitors would give the exhibition, previous visits to the museum and demographic information. For the issue of design and phrasing of questions, literature was consulted (Fowler 1995) and professor Ortiz was also very helpful in reviewing the wording of some of the questions included in the survey.
Questions were piloted in the field during the first week for reliability; that is, their consistency and people’s understanding of the survey.

The exhibition received 32,172 visitors, although we had only estimated 25,000. Of the total, 12,016 directly asked to see the exhibition (entrance was free) and the rest bought tickets to see the entire museum and saw the exhibition as well. From visitor studies we know that a series of filters have to be passed in order for visitors to interact with the message of the exhibition (Pérez Santos 2000). First, the total visiting population of museums is low (the National Museum has around 300,000 annual users onsite of its diverse services; 150,000 visitors saw the temporary exhibitions in 2008). Second, from the total population of museum visitors, 40% did not visit the exhibition. It is important to note that about 21% visited the exhibition by a coincidence, because they were visiting the museum or were passing by and saw the banner on the front façade, thus their intention was not necessarily directed towards this specific visit. This means that about a fifth of the visiting population was not prepared or necessarily previously aware of the contents of the exhibition. This will become significant when discussing visitor perceptions in chapter three. The rest of the visitors found out about the exhibition mainly through friends, their university or school. This population had a direct interest in the exhibition and thus we can say that these are people who might be more open to receive new content or who might have previous knowledge of the communities. We might consider that they are more in tune with multiculturalism if they are willing to come to the museum for an exhibition on Afrocolombian culture.
Two anthropology students, Julian Grueso and Luisa Fernanda Cordoba, who knew professor Jaime Arocha and were knowledgeable of the contents of the exhibition administered the surveys. I also personally conducted a small number of surveys. Julian’s family is from a Black community that was represented in the exhibition and belongs to a group of Afrocolombian students who have their own political organization. His participation stemmed from the idea of involving a young member of the community in the implementation of the visitor study (Sheurich 2002).

Regarding the information about the cultural identity of visitors to the exhibition, I followed the suggestions made by the sociologist Fernando Urrea Giraldo, who is knowledgeable on this matter having conducted studies on the sociodemographic profiles of the Afrocolombian populations (Urrea et al. 2002).

His proposal for the survey included two questions: the first asked the surveyed person to describe his or her cultural identity; the second asked for his or her racial identity. Both were based on a series of options and implied that the person conducting the survey explained the purpose of the question and always provided all answer options to the respondent. These questions allowed the museum to know how people represent themselves in these two dimensions, which many times did not coincide. In Colombia, race and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive. As Urrea explained in a personal communication, race is a social construction that is supported by phenotype but is not wholly based on biological characteristics. The color of one’s skin is a classificatory measure by which we differentiate ourselves from others but also implies characteristics of discrimination or social mobility. Cultural identity will give us information about the way in which a person wishes to be
identified. The English translation of both questions was as follows. I also include the percentage of valid answers for each category:

According to your cultural identity, you consider yourself

1 Afrocolombian 8.4%
2 Afrodescendent 5.2%
3 Member of a Black community 0.3%
4 Palenquero(a) 0.8%
5 Raizal from Saint Andrews Islands 0.3%
6 Cimarrón(a) 0.8%
7 Black 0.5%
8 Indigenous; from which group or community? 8.4%
9 Rom (gypsy) 0
10 I do not belong to any ethnic group 53.4%
11 Other; which? 21.7%

According to physical appearance, you consider yourself

1 Black 6.0%
2 Mulatto 1.8%
3 “Moreno(a)” 18.7%
4 “Mestizo(a)” (Miscegenous) 47.2%
5 Yellow 1.8%
6 White 23.1%
7 Other skin colour; which? 1.6%
Regarding the term *Afrodescendent* as it appears in the first question, some white people might have answered this question arguing that *we all have African blood*, as a young white psychology student explained. If we add the percentages of valid answers for the first 7 options to cultural identity, the result is 16.3%. This number would be representative of the Black population that we described above, but unfortunately these results were biased. When administering the surveys, we attempted random sampling, in which any visitor had the probability of being selected, but at some points the questionnaires were administered based on availability in the gallery. There were problems of internal validity caused by the way people were chosen to answer the questionnaire. The low attendance of Afrocolombians caused a purposeful selection of people who “looked” Afrodescendent and thus the anthropology students administering the survey were biased towards this population. Additionally, the last Sundays of each month are not well represented in the sample (9.2%). This is relevant because the museum receives a large number of people (around 3,500 visitors) and audiences are diverse, including more people from lower income backgrounds.

Another important piece of data to highlight is the high percentage of people who do not think they are affiliated to any ethnic group. This will become relevant when discussing issues of representation of the nation and how people understand it culturally. Responses to option 11 (Other; which?) included the term *mestizo* as a cultural identity (43 out of 83 people), followed by Colombian (9 out of 83) and then a series of identities related to specific places, thus creating a regional differentiation of identity: Bogotá, Boyacá, Costeña, Opita, Wayuu (an indigenous group from the upper Guajira Department).
As Urrea had warned, the categories in which people place themselves do not necessarily correspond. What we see from answers to the second question regarding physical appearance is that there is a very high percentage of *mestizo* people, some of whom had identified themselves culturally as mestizos and others who had not identified themselves as being part of any ethnic group. Also, a high percentage of “morenos”, a term which can be described as being between Black and White but that has not held the negative connotations that might be associated with the term mulatto. As we saw in the first chapter, Colombia has been defined as a mestizo country, hiding or making other identities invisible. What we gather from the answers is that many people identify with this concept.

Another set of interesting answers that are relevant when trying to understand people’s conception of multiculturalism is their place of origin. Out of the 391 people surveyed, 15% did not live in Bogotá. From the total number of people who lived in the capital, 117 were not originally from there. As to their answers regarding the number of years they had been living in the capital, 22.2% had been there between 6 and 15 years, 20.5%, between 1 and 5 years, and 12% between 16 and 20 years. In conclusion, it is significant to note that a total of 45.7% of the people interviewed were not originally from Bogotá. This information is relevant when thinking about the representations of the nation that came out of the interviews and focus groups. About half of the visiting population has a personal history that brings in ingredients from other regions that have distinct cultural markers.

There was other information gathered for the museum as part of the visitor study. Overall, 51.9% were women, 30.2% between the ages of 21-25 followed by 14.6%
between the ages of 26-30 and 11.8% between 16 and 20. Accordingly, 68.8% were single and 19.4% married. 60.9% were either in university or had complete university and 13.8% held postgraduate education. 46.1% were studying, 23.8% were employed and 12.4% worked independently.

Of the surveyed population, 72.3% had visited the museum before. This included temporary and permanent exhibitions. Many did not remember their last visit, while others had in mind big media blockbuster shows such as the terracotta warriors from China, and archaeology exhibitions with much publicity such as treasures from Sipán, Perú and Egypt. The next in line would be a Picasso exhibition in 2000 which gave the museum attention in the public sphere.

Friends or family (34.4% and 25.6% each) accompanied visitors. Most notably, 18.7% were alone and 16.4% were with school friends. The high number of unaccompanied people might also be result of lack of validity as these are people easier to survey. The vast majority gave the exhibition the highest scores (8, 9 or 10) and would definitely recommend it to friends and family.

Face-to-face surveys are advantageous when trying to obtain information from illiterate or nonliterate populations and also if there are questions that have to be explained, such as the questions on cultural and racial identity. There are disadvantages as well, such as sampling problems, or interviewer bias, which we have discussed (Bernard 2006).
The information gathered was compiled in an excel database and the QSR - NUD*IST program was used to analyze the data. Psychologist Tatiana Mosquera aided me in this matter, building the database and revising issues of the survey as well as compiling the data produced.

**Interviews**

Interviews were the preferred method to gain insight into the experiences of non-Afrocolombian visitors to the exhibition as well as staff and production team members. Data collected through this method “explain[s] and put[s] into a larger context what the ethnographer sees and experiences” (Fetterman 1989).

**Interviews with visitors**

A protocol was used to conduct 45 semi-structured interviews throughout the ten weeks of the exhibition. The purpose of using this method was to speak to a wide range of visitors according to different variables: age, gender, visiting group (families, friends, self) and ethnicity in order to gain an in-depth perception of the exhibition. These conversations ranged from 2 to 30 minutes. Since there was a limited amount of time, a protocol allowed an exercise of control but was also flexible so that respondents could speak their minds (Bernard 2006). Using the protocol also permitted a set of consistent stimuli that enables a comparison of results.

The first section of the questionnaire was concerned with the respondent’s personal experience in the exhibition; the second section included questions on the respondent’s perception of the National Museum as a whole (Appendix 2A and 2B).
Questions looked to identify emotions and the ways visitors appropriated and perceived the exhibition; how they conceived the Afrodescendent communities and their relationship to the museum as well as the ways they imagined an ideal national museum. The protocol was piloted and wording changed in order to use concepts understood by all visitors.

Sampling was done on weekdays at different times, especially in the afternoon due to a higher presence of school children and guided tours in the morning, and on Saturdays and Sundays. The goal of the sample was to capture the heterogeneity of the population and a range of various answers rather than a profile of the average answer (Maxwell 2005: 89) (see Appendix 4 for a full description of the sample). Many of the interviews were conducted with couples and some in groups because most visitors were accompanied. Most of the people who answered identified themselves as mestizos, consistent with survey results.

The criteria used to choose people included those who had spent enough time in the exhibition in order to be able to convey a discourse about their experience. Most people who were asked to participate agreed, except on Sundays when families visit many institutions and therefore are in a rush. Though the number of interviews and the manner of sampling cannot confirm that their views are representative of the whole population of visitors, the analysis of themes that emerged out of the data is significant when crossed with other forms of data.

Visitors were approached at the end of the visit and those who agreed were interviewed in the first space of the exhibition. The advantage of this setting was
being able to refer to elements in the exhibition while the survey was conducted. In one case, the presence of the games also allowed for there to be a relaxed conversation and a couple of rounds of dominos. Only three interviews were conducted in my office and one outside of the exhibition space, which proved to be uncomfortable due to noise. The office space might have made interviewees uncomfortable since it could be seen as an “official” dialogue. Interviewees in the gallery received a brochure that summarized the themes of the exhibition. Some people who were particularly interested received a catalogue.

Other interviews

On December 18, 2008, I conducted a group interview with the museum’s Committee for Temporary Exhibitions. This group meets on a weekly basis and has amongst its members people who directly collaborated in the creation of the exhibition. I did not direct questions according to the roles they occupied but tried to get a sense of the culture of the museum as a diverse and interactive social space.

Questions asked were divided into two themes (Appendix 5A and 5B). The first two questions were related to the exhibition and asked about the elements that caused the greatest impact and whether respondents had seen the video with the political and economic contexts of the communities and the place for these themes in museum exhibitions. The second theme had to do with the Museum and asked: “From your perspective, how can the Museum transform itself in order to be more representative of the multicultural nation?” The next question was: “A strong sector of the Afrodescendent population is claiming historic reparation via the reconstruction of the narratives of the nation and a separate space in the museum, as a means to come
to grips with the legacies of enslavement and racism and to make communities more visible. What is your view on this matter?” The last question was: “In your view, what should be the next step the museum takes in working on the representation of Afrodescendent communities?” The director of the Museum, who could not participate in the staff group interview, was interviewed on February 18, 2009.

Additionally, informal conversations with Afrocolombian team members were held both before and after the exhibition on the expectations raised and their participation in the production team. After the exhibition ended, we discussed the results that they felt we had achieved. Though we wanted to make these conversations more structured, participants felt more comfortable in a more relaxed ambiance. Extracts from these conversations were included in the exhibition catalogue in order to reveal the development process of the exhibition. These conversations will be taken into account in chapter four.

A semi-structured interview was held on December 10, 2008, with the anthropologist and professor Jaime Arocha who led the research process and with whom we discussed issues concerning reception of the exhibition (Arocha and Lleras 2008). Questions addressed issues including expectations raised by the exhibition, difficulties faced by the project, elements that caused the greatest impact and elements of the exhibition that he disliked. I also asked him whether he thought the video on the contexts of the communities contributed to an understanding of the situation of the communities, and whether it is possible to repair past injustices with exhibitions such as this one. Finally, we spoke about what should be the next step
Focus groups

From observation and interview process, we knew that the attendance of Afrocolombians or Black people to the exhibition was very low. In order to gather data on the ways Afrocolombians had interpreted the exhibition, three focus groups were conducted after the exhibition ended. This method was used to identify themes shared by people who are part of a perceived collectivity (Morgan 1997), in this case mediated by ethnicity, even if there are fractures within that specific group identity.

In answering research questions there was an interest to explore if and how belonging to the Afrodescendent community changed the experience of the exhibition.

A focus group is described as a “forum in which the participants are viewed as the experts on their own experiences…. the data that are generated are reflective of the concerns of the marginalized group, and not those of the researcher” (Mertens 2000). This method is useful in finding out why people feel as they do using group interaction in a short span of time. Groups produce discourse that has two levels related to identity: as identification (that which is shared and unites), and as differentiation (that which makes visible voids and discontinuities and contradictions) (Reguillo 1998: 33). Hence, the discussions are embedded between the representation of the self and of a community, between individual and collective memory (Ibid). The role of the researcher is to moderate, which means he/she has less control because interaction is turned over to participants and there is less time to
get in-depth opinions of participants individually, though the moderator can influence the group’s interactions.

The exercise started with an introduction by all persons at the table whereby they would share something about themselves. Most of them knew that I was part of the exhibition-making process. As for participants, it was interesting to hear that they all shared information on their place of birth or ancestry, which would account for their heritage as Afrodescendent or Black. Arocha has noted that the functionality of family relations is crucial to Afrodescendents living in Bogotá and is used to find support in overcoming difficulties such as poverty, sickness, discrimination and other crises (Secretaría de Gobierno de Bogotá 2002). Participants also shared valuable information on the circumstances that had led them to move from their place of birth and how they have continued to contribute to their collective communities. Most participants were involved in education, either as school or university teachers.

The first questions that dealt with the exhibition attempted to create an atmosphere in which participants could feel free to speak positively and negatively about the exhibition. Questions to spark the debate were about what had impacted them the most and whether they considered any elements in the exhibition to be negative. I also asked how they felt in the exhibition and to voice some reasons as to why they thought so few Afrodescendents had visited. There was also a question that asked about the presence of politics in museum exhibitions and how exhibitions could contribute to the necessities of the Black communities (see Appendix 7A and 7B).
The second part of the exercise asked them to imagine an ideal national museum: its name, which stories to tell, who they would work with, whether any groups should be privileged, the activities and relationships between people and the museum, and to ponder on the possibility of representing groups separately or collectively.

The initial protocol proved to be too long because each question instigated much discussion. Group composition also influenced discussions. The first group had too many participants (13) because we were unsure of how many would turn out. As Morgan points out (1992), larger groups have problems of productivity because it is more difficult to manage discussions, especially if participants are highly involved. We were not able to get to the second part of the protocol and discuss their ideal National Museum.

The sampling conducted for the focus groups comprised people who had answered the survey and had been asked if they were willing to participate in a focus group discussion. Other participants included Afrocolombian schoolteachers who had worked with the exhibition project and Afrocolombian leaders that we knew had visited the exhibition. Hence, the sample was not randomised. Initially, the idea was to have enough people that had answered the survey as to be able to choose from that pool of visitors. The sample is not necessarily representative of the Afrocolombian population, though the three groups did manage to produce similar discussions and generate a wide range of data on the matters discussed.

The composition of the three groups had as its aim to see if discussions were influenced by generational differences, and to get a sense of the reasons why
Afrocolombians had not visited the exhibition. The three groups were organized in order to have: 1) adults older than 40 (all of whom had visited the exhibition); 2) adults and younger people in their twenties, (some of whom had not visited the exhibition); and 3) young people who had visited and worked in the exhibition. The focus groups were held in the auditorium of the museum using an oval shaped table and the last one was held in a meeting room. Drinks and food were provided, as well as books as a present for their voluntary participation.

Group one was made up of 13 adults, all of whom had visited the exhibition; the group was composed of five Black adult women, one man and two adult White or mestizo women (who had been invited by their Black friends) and two girls who were accompanying their parents (one Black and the other White/ mestizo). Two adult women showed up as we had begun. A Black man who had visited the exhibition many times and his daughter (in her early 30s) showed up almost at the end. The adults knew each other and a few were very much involved in political organizations. Others who were not, found a space to become involved in highly politicised discussions.

Group two was composed of nine people: four Black men, two adults and two younger ones (one around 21 and the other in his thirties) and three women, one of them younger (around 20) who had worked as a guide to the exhibition. There was also one White anthropology student who had come with one of the Black people invited. One adult Black woman joined the group in mid-discussion. The dynamics in this group were different due to less familiarity between participants. There were
also people who had not visited the exhibition, though they were very much involved in the discussions that stemmed from it.

Group three was composed of six young Black people (in their early twenties), three of whom had participated as guides to the exhibition, one had participated in the administration of surveys and another was a political science student. The other young Black man was invited because he had expressed his disapproval and concern about the altars being put up for so long. He was in disagreement and had told me this personally, though we never reached an agreement on how to solve the issue. The participation of this young man was interesting due to the fact that the other students were not in agreement with his particular view on the exhibition, as we will discuss in chapter four.

**Documents**

Documents such as laws, decrees and other institutional texts are being used in this study to comprehend the context that surrounds the Museum and the exhibition since these do not work in a vacuum. They are useful in understanding how themes and issues become relevant in public discourse and how they “enter” the museum top-down and either replicate, complement or stand in direct opposition to the pressure of social movements and communities, visitor’s ideals, as well as the staff’s own ideology.

The introduction of this study highlighted the importance of the 1991 Constitution as well as laws pertaining to the rights of the Afrocolombian communities, such as Law 70 of 1993. Other important documents include the National Museum’s Strategic
Plan (Ministerio de Cultura-Museo Nacional de Colombia 2003), the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Culture (2007) that summarizes its plans and programs, as well as its mission, vision and objectives. These “look to highlight the importance and worth of the different cultural manifestations that make up our culture” (Ministerio de Cultura 2007: 6). Though based on national legislation and previously produced documents, the document also articulates its actions in the rhetoric of UNESCO declarations and conventions, thereby convening a sense of culture as a “cure-all” in state policies (Message 2005: 477).

In 2009, the Ministry released various documents on diversity and the priorities for the Afrocolombian population that will be used in the latter part of this thesis (Ministerio de Cultura 2008, Ministerio del Interior 2009). The Ministry, through its office of Populations, has made an effort to inscribe policy in order to unite the activities that different offices hold with Afrocolombian communities.

Other documents that will be looked at include portrayals of the Afrocolombian communities in the media in order to gain an understanding of what visitors bring with them to the Museum.

Response effects

Issues of credibility, authenticity and comprehensiveness are important for interpretivist research. For Lindauer, credibility “rests upon the evaluator demonstrating that his/her interpretation of what’s happening is grounded in the data—observations, interviews, and written documents—rather than simply personal
opinion” (Lindauer 2005: 143). Authenticity “refers to the researcher’s ability to elicit participants’ opinions, interpretations and values…. the researcher is the instrument for collecting and analyzing data” (Ibid). Comprehensiveness “refers to the evaluator showing that s/he has not based an interpretation or conclusion on any single piece of evidence or simply one visitor’s experience” (Ibid). In the analysis undertaken in the next chapters, these elements will be taken into account.

The sole presence of the researcher already constitutes a factor of change since I am asking different parties to think about their experience of the exhibition in ways they might not necessarily elaborate by themselves. Overall, the different methods used hold some of the same problems in the data they generate, such as response effects that are a result of the impact of race, sex, age and other differences between interviewer and informant (Bernard 2006). Coming in contact with a wide variety of people in the exhibition space when conducting surveys, interviews and focus groups, might have lessened the possible bias caused by being young, female and White.

In terms of the impact of my ethnicity on focus group discussions, it was clear that I was an outsider, not only as a staff member but also as a White/mestizo researcher. Having a Black moderator does not “guarantee that he or she will be trusted and effective” (Krueger and Casey 2000: 182), but there are advantages to having someone from the same ethnic group, including:

Many of these groups have historically been controlled and guided by white people in positions of power and influence. As a result, there may be a
tendency to assume that other individuals from the outside, particularly those who are white, possess power and want information to maintain that influence.

(Ibid.: 181)

One of the disadvantages of working with someone from the Black community is that there are different ideological positions and beliefs inside the community and choosing someone from one side can be unfortunate for the study. Another advantage to being the moderator was that people who participated thought that the Museum had finally taken an important step, so in a way I was trustworthy because I told them this exercise could improve future Museum projects.

Other response effects visible in the methods used include social desirability as the tendency of respondents to answer in ways that make them look better or avoid answers that make them look bad (Fowler 1995). This could be the case with the survey, interviews and focus groups since people are sharing internal states and opinions and we rely on what they say as accurately describing their experience. There is also the deference effect when people answer a question by saying “what you think you want to know” (Bernard 2006: 241). Since questions around the exhibition involved issues of ethnicity and race, any negative attitudes towards Black people might have not come out in the interviews. Some behaviors, such as racism, are socially undesirable and therefore it will be harder for people to accept or openly make racist comments, though there are subtle ways of expressing racist views that will be drawn upon in chapter three. In order to reduce response distortion Fowler recommends confidentiality, clear communication and reducing the role of the interviewer (1995: 30). Focus group reactivity problems raise the concern over a
tendency towards “conformity, in which some participants withhold things that they might say in private and a tendency towards ‘polarization’, in which some participants express more extreme views in a group than in private” (Morgan 1997: 15).

An important issue to discuss is who did not participate in the study: people who did not visit the exhibition due to a lack of knowledge, time and interest in the population represented or even racism; visitors to the Museum who were in a rush or not interested in the exhibition (40% of those who visited the Museo did not visit the exhibition). Last, but most importantly, people who were in explicit and blatant disagreement with the exhibition taking place, except for the young man who participated in focus group 3. This point is in accordance with the issues raised by Bernadette Lynch when she asked whether museums could move into spaces of contestation and not only of consultation. She acknowledged that museums have difficulties in dealing with conflict when related to passions. Participation many times is used to “stamp” projects rather than create debates. For Dibley, “relations of reciprocity look more like those in which the marginal and dispossessed are to be reconciled to the historical structures of their marginalization and dispossession” (2005: 17). The question that arises from this critique is whether this study might also be excluding certain radical views, though it will try to integrate and contextualize them.

Discussion of ethical issues

For Witkin, ethical concerns in research have to include:

8 Lecture at the Museum Studies Department, University of Leicester, October 1, 2008.
human rights issues involved in treating people as objects – receptables for ‘data’ which are ‘extracted’ by research instruments – or in representing participants in ways that distort their experience (e.g., through discounting their language), or in excluding participants from any input into the research process.

(2000: 214)

For other researchers working in the transformative-emancipatory paradigm, such as Mertens, respect for culture and awareness of power relations is critical. In the transformative paradigm:

Respect is critically examined in terms of the cultural norms of interaction within a community and across communities. Beneficence is defined in terms of the promotion of human rights and an increase in social justice. An explicit connection is made between the process and outcomes of research and furtherance of a social justice agenda.

(2007: 216)

With these views in mind, this study identifies ethical issues in the problem statement, the purpose, in data collection, analysis and writing (Creswell 2003) by adhering to the paradigms and the ideal that the study can generate knowledge that will be beneficial to the communities studied.

As the Curator of Art and History Collections, there are ethical issues in disclosing information outside of official research data gathering. During the implementation of
the data collection methods, the study followed the University of Leicester Research ethics code of practice (Appendix 3A and 3B). In administering the interviews, participants were made aware that data collected was part or a larger study of interpretation of the exhibition. To ensure this, consent forms were used and signed (see Appendix 3A and 3B). Focus group participants were also made aware of the objectives as well as staff members and the director. Anonymity and coding of names will be used with every survey-taker, interviewee and focus group participant. Though there are no specific risks for the population involved, discussions on the topic of memory, and especially the memory of enslavement, will be treated with special attention and respect.

**Data analysis and interpretation**

The method selected to analyze the data collected is grounded theory, in which one is grounded in the data to allow an understanding of discourse to come out of the texts. For Bernard, “The grounded theory approach is a set of techniques for: 1) identifying categories and concepts that emerge from text; and 2) linking the concepts into substantive and formal theories” (2006: 492).

Analysis started when collecting the data and trying to find patterns of discourse. Interviews were then transcribed and an initial coding exercise resulted in a series of categories explored further when examining the data. Codes allow turning a specific situation into an analysis and capture a general theoretical dimension. In order to scrutinize discourse, all interviews and focus groups were transcribed and then imported into the QSR - NUD*IST program for qualitative analysis. Themes were
selected to be able to link the personal perspective of visitors with major themes that are present in the study, such as citizenship, multiculturalism and perception of marginalized communities.

Interview results have rich information on a wide array of themes: relating the self to the exhibition through feelings, emotions and memories; description of differences and similarities between “us” and “them”; perception of Afrocolombian communities both in stereotypical and new challenging ways; relationship between culture and conflict, understanding the role of the museum and how it should represent the nation; and conceptions of diversity.

The themes that become relevant in focus groups have to do with how much discussion was raised, how many people talked and the enthusiasm spent on the topics. Group to group validation consists of a topic that is treated consistently across groups. Dialogue from the focus groups was also transcribed and coded similarly to the interviews. Some of the categories that emerged include a personal relationship to the themes in the exhibition, discussions on the political and economic reality of the communities, conceptions of Afrocolombian culture, their views on an ideal National Museum and the presence of Afrodescendents in such narratives.

Fieldnotes were analysed by looking for patterns of behaviour used in grounded theory. In the particular case of the exhibition, fieldnotes were used in order to get a sense of different modes of perception by answering questions that “get at how members see and experience events, at what they view as important and significant,
at how they describe, classify, analyze, and evaluate their own and others’ situations and activities” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995: 147).

Though the inductive process that allows categories to emerge constitutes an interpretation, the following chapters will develop a narrative that is the result of the data collected, the analysis of the results observed and theory. Two moments of interpretation are relevant: first, the configuration of the experience of the exhibition itself and, second, an exploration of the relationship between this unit of analysis with the social world in which it is embedded (Reguillo 1998). In this study these two moments occur simultaneously.

Insight as a “native” will be contrasted with the view of other insiders and the realities of visitors as well as wider discussions and theory in order to keep a balance between interior and exterior views (Ibid). The remaining chapters will look closely at the categories that emerged and will discuss them in a wider context, interpreting the data according to the research problem and questions.
Citizenship in the multicultural nation does not solely consist of making available and widening representations of difference but also lies in the act of communication across plural communities that make up a conceived unity (García Canclini 1995, Stevenson 2002). Cultural rights need to be exercised but also recognized and the public media – such as museum exhibitions – are important sites of participation. Minorities have to be seen and heard, and there has to be an understanding of that which is being “spoken”. For Stevenson, the acknowledgement of otherness and inclusion can only occur in a “democratic conversation” where there are dialogic forms of encounter. This process:

would not so much be orientated around what we have in common, but seek to bring into our common awareness how we differ. It is only when we are able to collectively develop the skills of listening and speaking across difference that we might begin the task of discovering the general interest.

(2002: 4.1)

Though Black people in Colombia are citizens recognized by the Constitution, the reality in many cases is that their rights are not respected or implemented and that their communities continue to fight for collective rights, meaning that citizenship is an unfinished process. If they are partially excluded from the nation-making processes, do others imagine them as members of the national community? (Bond 2006). Forms of exclusion are not solely part of judicial, economic or cultural
spheres; they are also manifest in forms that are not so easily quantified, such as language and quotidian perception of others. In a cultural approach to issues of citizenship, we need to know about visibility, stereotypes, silences and acceptance of rights, because this tells us about how other citizens “make judgments between those who are deserving of exclusion from the public right to speak or indeed who is worth hearing” (Lara 2002: 336).

In this context, the argument that I will pose in this chapter is that the Velorios exhibition created the possibility of engaging in a dialogue of many participants that allowed for both differences and similarities to be staged and interpreted. I wish to examine how non-Afrodescendent visitors participated or “listened” to what the people represented in the exhibition were “saying” through the contents of the exhibition. How were Black communities talked about? Did visitors exclude or include Afrocolombians from their perception of the nation? And, can we expect that visitors will interpret an exhibition in ways that allow them to introduce minorities as “valid” and legitimate interlocutors?

Ultimately, this chapter will address one research question: How do general museum visitors interpret exhibitions that aim to transform representation of minorities as nation-members? The way I approach answers to this question is based on the prevalent themes across visitors’ responses in the interview process. As was explained in the second chapter, audience evaluation tools were designed in order to get a sense of how visitors were moved affectively, their ideas and images of Black people and the ways in which they perceived similarities and differences with the
exhibition’s content. I will look at representations that were and were not altered and ways in which audiences perceive the place of minorities in a national narrative.

The chapter will first look at the ways in which visitors described their experience in the exhibition and how feelings, emotions and recollections played an important role not only in stamping a memory of the experience but also in creating the possibility of relating to cultures described many times as “unknown” or at the very least “different”. The importance of this analysis lies in its potential to shed light on the appropriation devices used by visitors and how these are used in the definition of cultural identities.

I will then explore how similarities and differences play a preponderant part in the construction of identities that are marked symbolically by systems of representation and socially by inclusion and exclusion. Engaging with responses of non-Afro visitors allows us to understand the role of culture in determining the place of minorities in a national narrative. The analysis will then turn to representations of Black communities that visitors talked about and the places where these images and ideas circulate. I will then discuss stereotypes that remain preponderant and how these are key in determining the impact and challenges for national museums which aim at reconfiguring the narratives of the nation. The final part of the chapter examines the limits and challenges to the process of transformation by looking at the role of the staff as well as the museum’s ability to question set canons of representation.
Commonalities and differences in crafting identities

Acknowledging difference is necessary in creating meaning, which is constructed in a dialogue with the “other” (Hall 1997c). For Hall, difference is interpreted in both positive and negative terms:

It is both necessary for the production of meaning, the formation of language and culture, for social identities and a subjective sense of the self as a sexed subject – and at the same time, it is threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression towards the ‘Other’.

(Ibid.: 238)

Relationships of identity and difference are also necessary in the construction of personal identities that take place in museums and exhibitions, as Karp and Kratz argue. For these researchers:

In museum exhibits as much as in other cultural forms, the construction of cultural identity is achieved through two simultaneously occurring processes: 1) the use of exaggerated differences or oppositions that can be alternately a mode of exploration and understanding or an act of discrimination and 2) the use of varied assertions of sameness or similarity between audience and object of contemplation.

(2000: 194)

These formulas can have both positive and negative results. By stressing the first (oppositions) museums have represented cultures hierarchically, thereby reproducing
power inequalities, and exoticizing communities that are seen as distant in time and space. But, by stressing differences museums can also emphasise positive aspects, such as the rich rituals of a particular community. The second formula (sameness) can result in the removal of ethnographical objects from their contexts, presenting them under the light of “art”, thereby submitting them to Western aesthetics (see Price 2007). But introducing non-western art to museums can also have positive results, such as seeking the equivalence of aesthetic worth between productions of different civilizations.

The issue, then, is not the existence of the other that is different, since nations are indeed diverse, but rather how traditions have highlighted what the other lacks (“civilization”, mainly). The formula of exaggerated difference was used, for instance, during the second part of the nineteenth century to dazzle audiences with “a collection of objects [and people] illustrative of the ethnography and geography of the various parts and races of the British Empire, including especially the races of India” (quoted by Shelton 2000: 164). These displays were meant to sustain colonialism and guaranteed the idea of foreign possessions (Shelton 2000: 179).

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries museums have clung to aesthetic experiences in order to create a baseline that allows visitors to engage with cultures that are not their own. Despite the transformation of the intention in exhibiting objects that are representative of other cultures, for Dias:

What is at stake in this notion is the assumption that all cultures can be put on equal footing through the choice, made by Western connoisseurs, of their
masterpieces and of their most representative objects. In other words, equivalence of cultures presumes that art is the best way of approaching cultural diversity.

(2008: 128)

In her analysis, she takes a close look at the Musée du Quai Branly and she concludes that this museum limits its notion of cultural diversity to the shared notion of the artistic experience. The notion that masterpieces of art show that there are no hierarchies between cultures, tends to erase differences and justify their place in the museum without reviewing the past of the objects collected. Thus, stressing similarities obscures real differences, such as the unequal relationship between European and non-European peoples in France.

Today, exhibiting difference in order to promote understanding and respect of cultural diversity is a given theoretical and practical part of discourse in contemporary museum practice (see, for example, Witcomb 2007). Such a redemptive approach can be interpreted as an act of atonement by museums that have excluded or misrepresented minorities in their narratives. The New Museology encouraged a new relationship with communities, one in which museums can give voice to the powerless (Witcomb 2007), but we now know from experience that there is no formula for museums to engage communities. What the evidence shows is that as museum workers, we still have to explore the impact of these presentments and the ways in which people who are not specifically from the groups represented, such as minorities or previously excluded groups, give meaning to that which is not “theirs”.

3 The exhibition as intercultural exchange
My argument here, following Kratz, is that both in processes of production and consumption, exhibitions are about finding equilibrium between similarities and differences, both about finding themes that resonate with our own experience and about exoticizing or othering. Kratz stresses the value of dialogue between visitors and exhibitions: “exhibition experience relies both on what visitors bring to exhibitions and on what exhibitions bring to visitors (already the outcome of the complex process and decisions that shaped the exhibition)” (2002: 94). What visitors find may give them material to:

formulate various aspects of their own identities and values, whether as individuals or members of social groups. People produce senses of identity in relation to objects and subjects on display, in relation to experience they bring to the exhibition, as well as in relation to particular politics of representation.

(Ibid)

In this sense, national museums have to be aware of what it is that their exhibitions are “saying” about previously excluded groups and how people are talking about what they experience. What then were the predominant ways in which non-Afrocolombians engaged with the exhibition?

**NON-AFROCOLOMBIAN VISITOR’S PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXHIBITION**

The aims of the exhibition included both a wider representation of the nation by incorporating in the space of the museum what was particular to Afrodescendent
communities in a temporary exhibition and to challenge representations of Afrocolombians in popular spheres such as television, cinema, and the mass media in general, as well as the museum historical narratives. Despite our optimism, the production team was aware that persisting patterns of socio-racial discrimination could hinder our message from reaching the general public (Arocha and Lleras 2008). Thus, the objects and ceremonies in the exhibition could have been seen as inferior, or as incomprehensible. But the interviews and observation in the gallery demonstrated that people were able to dialogue with the exhibition in positive ways, as we will examine below. We have to take into account that the views collected in the interviews do not represent the views of the totality of visitors but the wide range of people I was able to interview does give a sense of common elements made apparent in the experience of the exhibition. It is also important to note that about a third of the people interviewed were able to interact with the guides (some of them Afrocolombian) or take a guided tour of the exhibition, which would also have an impact on its interpretation.

Amongst the visitors whose views were captured through semi-structured interviews only one woman openly expressed a negative opinion on the contents of the exhibition. She was the wife of a protestant Afrocolombian preacher visiting from Saint Andrews, one of the regions included in the exhibit, though she was not Afrodescendent herself (interview 38). In her opinion, many of the rituals represented were the remnants of pagan practices that have to be overcome because the deities they refer to do not really exist. In the interview, she used the word “santería” to disqualify the different ways of expressing religious beliefs of the Afrocolombian communities. It must be made clear that people in Saint Andrews are
predominantly Baptist or Evangelical, which means that they do not praise images or build altars as other Catholic communities do. This perception of the Afro practices was unexpected and constitutes an example of “oppositional” readings (Sandell 2007), in which the visitor rejects the message of the exhibition with dissatisfaction because it is in deep contrast with a personal worldview.

**Shared humanity and finding similarities**

In contrast to this perception, the vast majority of testimonies attest to very positive experiences. The questions made during the interview process aimed at examining the personal dimension of visitors in the exhibition. For many of the visitors, the exhibit was not about looking at simulacrums of rituals and altars but rather the rituals themselves (Arocha and Lleras 2008). Several visitors responded richly to the question: “How did you feel going through the exhibition? What emotions did it produce?” and for most it was an opportunity to be in contact with the symbols of awe-inspiring sacredness. It seems that the exhibition did manage to deepen the knowledge of these communities through the staging of the altars, as two anthropology students claimed: “It was cool to have the capacity to interact, to feel inside [the exhibition], not to see it through a window case, but to be in it”. For them, the exhibit was “personalized” and thus allowed them to feel immersed in a situation: “A film is good when you are able to feel you are inside the movie” (interview 1). The altars in the exhibition invited people to become more than mere spectators, thus impeding the reduction of the social experience to the visual and disengaged that is often at play in ethnographic exhibitions (Hallam 2000).
This sense of interaction deeply touched visitors and is an example of what Sandell (2007) describes as a use of personal narratives to connect museum content with people’s own biographies, especially in the case of representations of a foreign culture. For a retired schoolteacher, death and sentiment are no different in diverse cultures. In her words, she highlights shared elements:

\[
\text{The death that one confronts, if one compares it with the one they live, it’s the same pain, the loss and the remaining of the spirit, one keeps the image of the person who dies, the spirit always remains, one keeps the image of that person in mind, it is never forgotten. Even if one is not praying, or calling that person, I think it is the same pain.}
\]

(interview 5)

These reactions confirm that, despite the fact that some stereotypes might remain or take new shapes, for white or mestizo visitors the exhibition represented elements of a shared humanity. In this sense, reactions such as the one of the schoolteacher above support our assertion that citizenship is at play in the recognition of the other as part of a common larger group.

Exhibitions such as Velorios can reveal how cultures connect and reveal the “blurred interstices that show that cultures have never been contained or perfectly bounded” (Lidchi 2006: 97). A few visitors made this point explicit by saying: “This shows that they are part of us. The rest of the nation sees them as isolated and this is why no one knows about them, there are few Black and raizal people in comparison with mestizos” (interview 22). The woman who was visiting with the anthropology
student quoted above agreed and added: “despite the fact that they have their own culture, they have influenced the culture we have”. Another visitor from Medellín, the second largest city in Colombia, who considered himself indigenous and mestizo, pointed to the impact caused by the funerary altars of Archipelago Saint Andrews and Providence and San José de Uré, in the Caribbean, “because of the elaborateness of the feeling towards the person they are saying good-bye to. It is as if they were expressing with that how much they felt it” (interview 11).

Other cases point to the ability of visitors to look at things from the perspective of others. Such was the case of the altar from the Archipelago, which had a clock that was stopped at a quarter to 12. A young psychology student asked herself “what would have happened if I had been part of the group of people present at the moment when the person died?” (interview 21). Another feature that caught the attention of visitors was a video which exemplified the first phase of agony as part of the rituals. It showed a prominent elder musician surrounded by the community with women dancing around him. A man in the field of communications, also visiting from outside Bogotá (interview 35) claimed that this was the element that held the most sentiment:

   To accompany the person before his death is really dramatic. And his posture… I thought about that for a while, what is that man thinking? … I’m going to die and everyone is dancing, what would you like to listen to because you are going to die…. 
The ability to look at death through the experience of others made some visitors reflect about their own stance towards death, such was the case of a young man of around 25 years of age who works with people with brain damage who said: “It made me think about the kind of ritual that I would be in” (interview 37), alluding to the Catholic beliefs of his family and how he disagrees with and opposes certain traditions.

**Affect and learning**

These testimonies point to the importance of affect in the process of learning. For Sandell, “the encounter with objects –with ‘the real thing ’– enhanced museums’ capacities to offer especially engaging emotionally intense experiences” (2007: 117). Gregory and Witcomb turn to Dipesh Chakrabarty to argue in favour of “embodied forms of knowledge apprehended by the senses rather than through analytical processes” that privilege the experience of the body rather than solely analytical approaches (2007: 263). Experiences, then, can vary from pleasure to pain. In the particular case of the exhibition, it was able to produce mixed feelings, deeply influenced by processes of nostalgia and idealization. A middle aged man, both artist and anthropologist, visiting the exhibition on the last day claimed that the exhibition brought to mind deaths in the family “and I liked that because I came to visit with an emotional part, not just academic. Also an aesthetic part, and that involves emotions” (interview 45). In the case of Velorios, I do not have enough evidence to claim that nostalgia hindered more critical processes. However, I can state that feelings produced determined taking a position towards what was seen; the presence of these emotions widens the possibility of constructing a shared space and sharing with the other that is foreign to us.
Though one could easily claim that an exhibition on the rituals of death might automatically bring about sadness, visitors described very diverse responses to what they felt during the exhibition. For some it was a mixture of happiness and sadness, even tranquillity and joy at the fact that the rituals are very elaborate and that remembrance is an essential part of the rituals as well (interview 8). There were also those who mentioned feeling nostalgic about their own past or childhood (interview 21). It was common for people to mention deaths of loved ones, a father whose burial was not attended (interview 10), a mother and grandmother whose deaths have not been overcome (interview 14), a song that was playing that reminded them of a particular deceased friend (interview 22), or the forgotten practice of playing dominos with family members (interview 43). For others, emotions were caused by the totality of the exhibition, such as manifesting anguish or sadness because of the disappearance of these rituals, or because of their lack of knowledge about their own ancestors.

More than half of the visitors interviewed gave detailed accounts of their emotions, thus supporting the idea that people do want to:

share and experience in the museum our ‘...stories of the darkness and light, of the night, the longings, dreams, joy, the humour and fears, the labour, the rest, the grief. At its best and most courageous, museum work mirrors this kind of ambivalence and emotional reality.

(Lynch quoting Sandahl 2002: 17)

A young social work student shared her own story:
My grandmother died three years ago but I have not overcome my grief. When I saw the images… I contrasted the hardest moment for me, which was the moment of the burial. For me, the hardest moment was when they lowered the casket […], but for them this is not the hardest part because it’s after the nine nights when they cry…

(interview 23)

Reactions such as the one from a woman in her forties who is a frequent visitor to the museum might point to the fact that we are in need of understanding further the role of emotions and “affective learning” against rational thinking. She responded: “I felt a little sad, I wanted to know more about my ancestors, explore it further, maybe that is why I’m here… no, that’s why I’m here” (interview 3). For Lynch, people arrive to the museum “as seekers, intimidated, looking for something which they may have no language to express – perhaps looking for an affective experience through the objects they are presented with” (2002: 16).

Visitors who went to the museum to learn about other cultures rather than about themselves found that the self and the other are inextricably bound (Lindchi 2006: 107). It was also the case of Afrodescendent foreigners who also found common elements that were transnational. A woman from Martinique visiting with a friend explained that solidarity and the participation of the whole community is also an important part of rituals there. Their rituals were much like the ones represented from Saint Andrews, without altars, there is a novena and the anniversary of the death is also commemorated (interview 31). The rituals were also familiar to people with Afrocolombian and indigenous ancestry, such as a woman from Montería and her
daughter: “Everything was just as it is here” (interview 41). The daughter complemented: “It’s also a way to remember and recreate these traditions that one lived….To recreate one’s childhood. It’s the same tradition”.

On common ground

We did not anticipate that the exhibition was going to create a notion of “us” that was like “them”. Despite the fact that Velorios y Santos vivos showed elements that are particular to the Afrodescendent communities, visitors from other ethnic affiliations (including those who declared to have none) recognized these objects and found them full of meaning. For an American schoolteacher, there was nothing unusual about rituals of mourning (interview 30). Some of the objects in the exhibition reminded visitors of family customs of their own, as was the case for the psychology student who remembered that her grandmother used to cover mirrors on nights of thunder and storms. She was saying this because in certain Afrocolombian regions, when a person dies, all mirrors are covered, otherwise the soul might lose itself in its journey. Other visitors identified the rituals in the exhibition with situations they had lived in their own families or communities without having been part of an Afrocolombian community. The visitors identified Catholic components that are shared by a wider group. And some pointed to the familiarity of certain gestures of solidarity they remembered, such as taking food on the nights of the novena.

The rituals and the altars had many elements similar to practices that mestizo and peasant people are acquainted with, but that have been lost or forgotten. A young anthropology student claimed: “It reminded me of the nine nights, we used to do that
in our family, but not any more, one dies, you pray and then burial” (interview 1). A lady of around 70 years old who frequently visits museums as a social activity with her friends said that she had seen similar things:

for example the corona [crown], I remember seeing my aunt making a paper one for a dead person …and I remember that people used to leave a glass of water so that the soul would drink. Every day and then the next day, supposedly it would be half empty.

(interview 16)

These comments point to instances where cultural specificities are blurred. We can hypothesize that cultural practices of Black people might have influenced other communities and vice versa. A man visiting the exhibition with his wife because their daughter was to receive a scholarship in Bogotá also recognized several elements such as the black butterfly and the nine nights (interview 34). The coronas, the virgin and saints were also elements that drew parallels with the cult to the dead in Mexico. Two Mexicans visiting separately noted similarities. A student of art who was visiting from the Caribbean said that she felt a certain familiarity with the themes due to the fact that there is a large population of Afrodescendants where she lives. Nevertheless, the rituals were a novelty: “One feels identified, despite not having lived it” (interview 36).

In the first chapter, we saw that representation is the act of giving meaning and what we have seen so far is that non-Afrodescendent visitors produced and exchanged meaning and used the altars and other elements in the exhibit in reflecting upon their
personal and group identities. In the words of Hall, “culture is used to mark out and maintain identity within and difference between groups” (1997a: 3). Such ways of identifying oneself with the contents of an exhibition about the culture of others is not unique to the Velorios experience. Witcomb (2007) has also stressed the way an exhibition developed with the Portuguese community in Australia managed to elicit self-recognition because it included the issue of migration, shared by other communities.

**Elaborating on differences: “Us” and “them”**

The responses that people shared when interviewed showed how they established similarities but also differences demarcating an “us” and “them” and “I” and “other”. A young woman from Manizales who was studying in Bogotá claimed that the novenas she experienced were different:

> I have a recollection of the novenas that I had [experienced] not so long ago, but it was a comparison, they [in the exhibition] were very different from the ones I did, and I thought, the novenas that we do don’t have an intermission where people sing.

(interview 18)

In her response, she alludes to possible similarities, as in the celebration of a specific religious rite, but also to the dissimilitude in the ritual. When defining difference it can be interpreted and constructed
negatively as the exclusion and marginalization of those who are defined as “other” or as outsiders…. On the other hand, it can be celebrated as a source of diversity, heterogeneity and hybridity, where the recognition of change and difference is seen as enriching.

(Woodward 1997: 35)

According to responses recorded, the majority of the differences were interpreted positively. People’s readings were based on what they could relate to and what they could not. They reflected and compared their own cultural procedures by examining differences. Three women around the age of sixty who frequently visit the museum were discussing remembrances, and one of them said:

> When my father died, there used to be no funerary business, it was at home. Each day this is lost, but in the towns [it’s different]. We discussed solidarity and differences, yes, the exhibit is different and very interesting. It’s good to find out about these customs.

(interview 16)

Identity is marked by symbols, such as the altars in the exhibition, and is relational; that is, it is constructed in the process of how we relate to others and to objects. My hypothesis here is that the possibility of interaction between different identities allowed visitors the possibility of recognizing the other as similar and different. Whether that inclusion in the national community was highly based on admitting cultural elements that are empty of political and economical significance is a question that I will continue to explore throughout this text, because, as we discussed
in the introduction, issues of cultural citizenship are also tied to recognition in political, economic and social spheres.

For national museums, the celebration of difference to represent diversity is not without problems and does not necessarily mean that discrimination, racism or reparation can be tackled with exhibitions. For Woodward, celebrating difference might ignore oppression and hierarchies and obscure a sense of commonality. She asks:

Howard do we negotiate between my history and yours? [T]he imbrication of our various pasts and presents, the ineluctable relationships of shared and contested meanings, values and material resources? … But could we afford to leave unexamined the question of how our differences are intertwined and indeed hierarchically organized? Could we, in other words, really afford to have entirely different histories, to see ourselves as living—and having lived—in entirely heterogeneous and discrete spaces?

(1997:19)

In this scenario, it is of interest to analyze how visitors interviewed established clear differences between “them” and “us” or “I” and “other” but not necessarily in ways that were exclusive. For instance, a young anthropology student who was not very knowledgeable of Afrocolombian communities stated:

Cultural diversity is large and we have so many things in common, because there are junctions. They conduct their rites in a way and we do in another,
but in the end, the structure is similar; we are going towards the same place
but taking different roads, it’s important to value such difference.

(interview 4)

Another young student of communications used the words “our patrimony”
(interview 26) when referring to the exhibition, therefore pointing to that
ambivalence between what is “ours” and what is not.

Learning solidarity

Without a doubt, in determining positive difference, the concept most used to
characterize Afrocolombian communities was solidarity across age, gender and
identity. A man working with an NGO that does projects in a predominantly Black
community in the Pacific said: “By accompanying death, life is strengthened, the
community, solidarity, and then death, instead of being an absolute loss, it’s about
retaining the dead one in memory, his life becomes a factor of unity, of
accompaniment, of solidarity, or permanence” (interview 13). Visitors admired what
they considered an “homage to life”, the celebration of a loved person. On the same
theme, a mother visiting with her young daughter said:

I find it beautiful, that death brings possibilities of encounter. And that one
can find in this event of death, that so many times is so difficult, an
opportunity of reencounter, of company, of sharing with another, I find this
very valuable.

(interview 14)
An older man educated in Europe said: “These are cultures that teach us and will continue to do so” (interview 6).

When describing the positive impact of the theme of solidarity, accompaniment, the actions of the community, we could say that it becomes a permeable difference where the non-Afrocolombian person questions the vulnerability of her own culture. In many instances, visitors questioned their own cultural practices because they felt they were disengaged. An American visitor who was a teacher at the American high school thought that the main difference occurs:

when a family member dies they will send the body to a funeral home and somebody else will prepare it where the family is not directly involved in that process. While here, the [Black] community and family members seem directly involved in the process and I find it kind of interesting and loving in its own right.

(interview 30)

A woman from another city visiting with her sister and brother-in-law also mentioned the lessons learned from the exhibition: “I liked the way they perpetuate affection for their loved ones that pass away. According to their cultures they had their rites, very respectable, and valuable. Each one expressed these things in their own way” (interview 19).
**Valuing differences**

In answering the question about what visitors thought was the message about the communities, interviewees mentioned positive aspects of culture: recovering memory; admiring traditions; believing in the transcendence of the soul; homage to life; the methodology of the rite; recognizing the particularities of the communities and the influence on our culture. In these descriptions, the “other” was considered exemplary, while the culture of the interviewee was critiqued. A Xerox machine technician who visited with his two sons on a Sunday expressed: “One feels the pain of death, but it is not as traumatic or commercial as it is here” (interview 10). Likewise, a woman with a group from Manizales who was running errands that day said: “It led me to think that their funerals were better than ours” (interview 18). Two males around 21 years old studying communications and cinema also shared their opinions on how they interpreted differences. The first said, “[For them] death is sentimental and does not happen unnoticed. Here, death is common, murders… no one cares. In those parts they maintain the importance of the dead person”. The other complemented: “We see how the town gets together and there’s solidarity, they are united”. Both were in agreement that respect for death had been lost: “it is important to highlight spirituality in death” (interview 26).

Differences and dichotomies are valued and this is a political act (Gilroy 1997). Visitor responses can be classified in the ways they described the communities and their rituals. The “there” (them) was described as “authentic” (still keeps patterns of ancestry), “humane”, “sensitive”, “natural”, “a birth”, “joyful”, “beautiful”, “calm”, “shared”, “respectful”, “expressive”, “autochthonous”, “preserved”. The “here” (us) was talked about as “rigid”, “superficial” (for instance in telling of jokes and
drinking), “tragic”, “cold”, “sober”, “unnoticed”, “modernized”. Two visitors took the opportunity to criticize Catholicism (though the rituals exhibited were rooted in Catholic practice) because, as a male teacher in his 50s said, “death is interpreted so that the people alive die as well, and keep a horrible pain”. He thought that it was important to see that there are friendlier and more humane ways to bury the dead (interview 11).

Stuart Hall has described this way of classifying cultures in binary oppositions. He says that these systems are fundamental in the processes of colonization, modernization, migration and subjugation of peoples inside nations:

people who are in any way significantly different from the majority –‘them’ rather than ‘us’– are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes –good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling–because-different/ compelling–because-strange-and-exotic. And they are often required to be both things at the same time!

(Hall 1997c: 229)

What is of interest in this case study is that people were looking down on their own practices while the other was talked about in a positive way. This phenomenon is of particular significance due to the history of othering where social sciences such as anthropology –especially ethnography– contributed to the creation not only of a sense of difference but also of inferiority, which in turn justified the ‘civilization’ of ‘savaged’ peoples. In colonization this is described as “the disciplinary indices of a
carefully orchestrated relationship between ‘otherness’ and European civilisation
[that] were created not as external contingencies in support of empire, but as part of
its essential internal constitution” (Shelton 2000: 157).

The trend whereby Black people are deemed inferior, as we introduced in the first
part of this thesis, seems to have been reversed in people’s responses when they
value minority culture positively. We will see below the extent to which we can
claim a dramatic change in people’s perceptions, but initially it is of interest to note
that people in the exhibition were in tune with multiculturalism and respect for ethnic
groups. For instance, a man in a group interview who works with a foundation that
benefits Black people claimed: “If we compare it with our own, it’s richer in
sensibility, in humanity, in another way of understanding death as an inevitable step
of every life” (interview 13). A young man in the same group reinforced the idea that
westerners cannot confront death in a natural way: “We are all going to die and it’s
what we fear the most” A third person in the group intervened to say that he
considered it important for exhibits to show that there are different worlds and that
these have cultures and richness that can be shown to the rest of society.

Visitors to Velorios went to see the customs of Afrocolombian cultures “but they let
us see what has been lost to us. They are not foreign to us but it seems as though they
lived their lives in other ways, despite the fact that they are communities that belong
in this country” (interview 28). These ways of understanding the other are interesting
and at first sight they might lead us to conclude that people are transforming
previously existing stereotypes by claiming that minorities are of value and have
much to teach us. Such first and temporary conclusions are interesting to analyze in a
The exhibition as intercultural exchange

wider context because not all museums have taken on the challenge of showing non-European cultures as dynamic and complex (Dias 2007 and 2008).

REPRESENTATIONS VISITORS BRING TO THE MUSEUM

Until now, we have looked at how visitors approached the themes of the exhibition and how they built on their own memories and experiences to confront a symbolic system of unknown cultures. We also established that differences were valued positively, for the most part, and that people were able to negotiate between “us” and “them”. Initially, visitors’ views on Afrocolombian communities can be comforting, in the sense that we described above as very positive acknowledgement of these cultures. Yet, we ask: what lies behind this wholly positive assessment of minority groups’ cultures that have been systematically ignored, mistreated and made invisible?

The hypothesis I will place forth in this section points to the manifestation of stereotypes, their resistance against transformation and the capacity of the museum to fill these types with new content. Looking at stereotypes is a way to see how visitors conceive minorities and whether those preconceptions were challenged by the exhibition. For Hall, types are needed to categorize our world but they reduce people to fixed, simple essentials that create difference that is either acceptable or not. He states: “They are used in social systems to determine what fits and what doesn’t, that is, what is considered normal. Stereotypes fix boundaries and exclude” (1997c: 258). In naming, describing and categorizing there is the exercise of power by which one measures other cultures according to one’s own (Hall 1997c). Spectators might not
be conscientious of their own views or how they have integrated or created stereotypes; their views on Black cultures might bring in desires and fears.

In order to discuss possible answers to questions regarding a museum’s impact in changing representations of the national, I will briefly look at two elements. First, I will explore images about Black people in mass media during the exhibition and, second, how visitors described Black and Afrocolombian groups when asked: “What ideas did you have about these communities?” (see protocol in appendix 2A and 2B) during the interview and the information they claimed they had access to.

**Representations in the media**

As many studies have shown (Hooper-Greenhill 2000), visitors do not leave their preconceptions at the coatcheck. What this means is that interpretation of the exhibition will depend on the knowledge and experiences we bring and how television, magazines, news, and school, amongst other possible media, mark our notions of people of African descent. Before and during the time the exhibition was open, I kept a log of newspaper articles that would let me have an insight into some of the ideas visitors might be bringing into the museum and events that could have shaped some of the ways in which they interacted with the exhibition.

One of the most peculiar sets of news during that year was related to the impact of Barack Obama’s presidential candidacy. In the town of Turbaco, in the Atlantic coast, the mayor opened a “political commando” to discuss issues related to his campaign (“Polémica por foto de Obama en una lotería”, in *El Tiempo*, October 23, 2008). Other news highlighted discussions by young Afrocolombians on the issue of
the election of Obama, mixing this particular interest with the poor conditions of these communities. (“Ese man debe ser presidente” in El Tiempo, September 15, 2008). In reaction to the interest raised by a Black candidate for the presidency of the United States, the newspaper El Tiempo conducted a survey of 700 people with the question “Do you think that Colombia is prepared to have a Black president?” to which 60% answered no, 32.5% yes and 7.5% did not respond (January 11, 2008). A quick reading of the news points to the fact that Colombia lacks more Black political leaders, and therefore young Black people have to look elsewhere for them, but also that people think Colombia is not “prepared” to have a Black candidate, which might mean that a majority thinks that Black people are not adequate for political action or responsibility.

During that time period, Black people were also protagonists of sports victories. There was news related to the participation of Colombians in the Beijing Olympics and, notoriously, the members of the weightlifting team (most of whom were Afrodescendants) were highlighted. Other positive images related to sports included pictures of the players of a local football team (Boyacá Chicó) that won a major tournament in July, which is also interesting considering that the particular region they represent does not have an ample Black population but most of the team members were Black. That year, there was another interesting media contribution to stereotypical notions of Black people. An upper-class monthly magazine (Soho) portrayed a well-known Black football player naked on its cover. This emphasis on the body and sexuality of Black people has historic roots, as Hall has analysed (1997c).
There were also several reports published that described the difficult situation in the departments where there are major Black populations, such as Nariño and Valle del Cauca. These reports point to the issue of poverty and poor living conditions, as well as violence and corruption. Articles might highlight the contrast between the extremely unfit living conditions and the beauty and traditions that these communities manage to keep alive or the amazing landscapes they inhabit.

**Representations in the museum**

For some museum visitors, such as the five women participating in a librarian’s congress, the exhibition reinforced the idea that communities are still in a situation of poverty that has not changed (interview 2), and that these communities are not only poor but also isolated (interview 21). Two students of social work claimed: “They [the Afrocolombian communities] are still the poor ones, the ones that need all their necessities solved, the ones that are exploited for money or food” (interview 23). For a female retired schoolteacher, there was a relationship between the exhibit and seeing these cultures as distant, because indeed they are far and forgotten. She stated:

> I am from the interior [of the country] and have never been to the Pacific. You see them there, it seems as poor little ones, that they live in a zone with no roads, always as inferior, in every sense, education, health.

(interview 5)

A young student of psychology stated: “In the part of Chocó it seems that there are no airports or anything” (interview 22).
Such ideas about poverty and lack of infrastructure are not unrealistic. Visitors who had been to the Pacific, an area mainly inhabited by Afrocolombian communities, spoke frankly about the changes in the economy that they perceive as ruining the communities:

The African palm harvest is finishing off these people, crushing them, there is a lot of African palm on both sides and these miserable towns next to the highway, Blacks and indigenous and the uribista [Uribe was the president’s last name at the time] paramilitary, it’s terrible. The advance of mafia capital.

(interview 17)

A few visitors acknowledge the combination of poverty, modernization and violence but few rarely talk about the causes. An older sociologist remembered the altar made for a child who was murdered due to a paramilitary killing in Córdoba (interview 33), and a woman working in judicial matters was well aware of the increasing violence in these regions. Even a Black visitor from Tumaco, acknowledged these problems in this response about the exhibition: “We haven’t been able to live in a dignified way” (interview 13). The Afrocolombian visitor from Saint Andrews highlighted the issue of violence amongst young people and how it was men between the ages of 14 and 24 being buried today: “Tradition has changed, before people got ill, they were taken care of while they were sick and now death comes because of violence…” (interview 38).

Despite the fact that some people were aware of the difficulties faced by Afrocolombian communities, the reasons adduced remain unclear. This is perhaps
one of the failures of the exhibition. We included a video at the entrance that explained the context of modernization and political and economic problems that threaten these communities and their rituals, but visitors rarely saw it. It would have been desirable to have more spectators, though it was not our intent to overemphasize what the communities lack (interview with Jaime Arocha, December 10, 2008).

Two visitors who did see the video as well as the projection that included a description of the routes of the transatlantic slave trade and ethnic origins of Afrodescendents made connections between the two projections. A social worker who was still in school said:

First the map, the routes that were followed to extract these populations from Africa to bring them to the new continent and to exploit them and exploit the new world. And the video [on the other side] projected how that exploitation kept going in more modern terms and with technology, but they are still part of that exploitation.

(interview 23)

The retired female schoolteacher also made a connection between being abruptly taken in the past and how their descendents are being displaced, thus connecting a past injustice with the present (interview 5). Other interviewees did not find a connection between political and economic realities and funerary rituals because they considered the second to be a cultural expression not bound to other contexts.
Void representations?

The most popular media portray basic and rather superficial images: Black people are rich in culture but poor in economic and political assets. There is an absence of debates around political mobilization or other perspectives on Afrodescendent cultures, except for a discussion on legislation on racism that will be mentioned further on, or the coverage of a sugar cane worker’s strike. Overwhelmingly, the articles refer to “culture” as a way to overcome social problems (“Con Chocquibtown somos Pacífico” in Página, num 139, Manizales, November 1-15, 2008). The theme of traditions in gastronomy and musical groups was also very popular. Many of these articles highlight the importance of their African origins. Following this line of what is marketable about Black culture, a series of collectible art works was released, one of which represents a group of girls from Palenque (one of the regions represented in the exhibition), painted by a white artist.

In these representations, the impact of cultural practices is cleared of political connotations, hence if popular representations excınd culture and politics this should make us wary of people expecting otherwise from the museum. As an example, the Black Minister of Culture, perhaps the only notorious Black figure in politics during this period, discusses the use of the word “Afrocolombian”, and she states: “The term allows us to develop self-esteem because of knowing that we have contributed fundamentally to the culture of this country, the music of this country, the sport of this country, even to [its] megadiversity” (“¿Le molesta que le digan negra? La ministra de cultura, Paula Marcela Moreno, con María Isabel Rueda, El Tiempo, Septiembre 1 de 2008). I would like to highlight the fact that she does not broach the subject of politics.
The past as the present

In this section of the chapter I wish to analyse how visitors’ preconceptions might help and hinder getting across the message of the exhibition in terms of the contributions of Afrodescendants to the construction of the nation. We saw earlier in the chapter that media representation both grows out of and feeds stereotypes. Visitors read the exhibition’s content through the paradigms of their own culture and through previously existing stereotypes of Black people. Thus, the positive effects of the exhibition that we discussed at the beginning can be read as part of a phenomenon of condescendence towards difference that does not entirely eliminate notions of a hierarchy of “civilizations” (Arocha and Lleras 2008). For instance, in some of the interviews it was possible to get a sense that visitors feel that these cultures are closer to “nature” and that they have not been “corrupted”. Because they are less educated, lack work in business or live far from “the modern world” they have more time for rituals and to develop a different and better process of relating to death (interview 28).

In this sense, some interviewees considered that the rituals “safeguard ancestral patterns” (interview 1). A student of literature who came to the exhibit because his professor recommended the visit said: “I know that in these communities people live in different ways, weather conditions, customs, food, and I think that they are not so far from our culture, but they are [showing] where we come from” (interview 43). This notion is based on the idea that these cultures are rooted in and guard an ancestral knowledge, which they are protecting (even if in reality these rituals are changing). This image can be looked at as an updated version of the “noble savage”, because it refers to how people perceive Afrocolombian cultures to detect a
knowledge that has been lost to other cultures. By doing so, these cultures are idealized and, at the same time, limited to “natural” (rural and premodern) contexts. In the case of the group from Manizales running errands in Bogotá, a man said:

The mining tradition is being lost, that natural way of living that they previously had with mining, agriculture, all of that is being lost because big enterprises are coming in to absorb them and use them as employees of the multinational companies, the culture and autonomy is being lost, and if culture is lost, then hunger comes in.

(interview 18)

This visitor highlights the reality of the damage caused by multinationals and their mining companies but also idealizes the procedures and way of life of the communities.

We might interpret these comments in a similar way as Scott describes the persistence of a racialised ideology in the United States in the context of enslavement and abolitionism. Culture and nature became interchangeable for describing Black people while, for Whites, culture was about overcoming nature. There, too, was a distinction between “civilization” as White and “savagery” as Black. Scott describes this as:

the link between the Black ‘races’ and whatever is instinctual –the open expression of emotion and feeling rather and intellect, a lack of ‘civilized
refinement’ in sexual and social life, a reliance on custom and ritual, and the lack of developed civil institutions, all of which are linked to ‘Nature’.

(2007: 243)

From this description of the association of Blackness and Nature we can interrogate and be more critical of those notions of a world that is described as “natural” and traditional, hence more spiritual and connected to nature (interview 43). On the one hand, these views are in tune with a critical stance towards westernized models of culture. On this matter, anthropologist Jaime Arocha notes how postcolonial studies have recently turned to the philosophical systems of African descent that do incorporate nature and culture (interview December 10, 2008). On the other hand, accepting this equivalence between culture and nature limits the ways of being Black. Thus, many Afrocolombians are proud of their heritage but they do not necessarily identify themselves (or want to) with this connection to nature, tradition or ancestry.

“We all come from Africa”

Despite the differences in contexts between the United States and Latin America, people’s interpretations of the exhibition lead us to think that some of the same underlying notions are at play. Some of the evidence I have for this claim lies in the survey. Twenty people answered that they considered themselves Afrodescendent, out of which nine also answered that they were either White, mestizo or “other skin color”, meaning that almost half of Afrodescendents responding were not Black. As a young psychology student explained to me, “we all come from Africa” (interview 21). This notion of “uncorrupted” cultural emblems could also be tied to a notion of
Africa as the starting point to the process of modernization of cultures or to our evolutionary past. Scott’s research highlights how “Africans were often incorporated as the functional equivalents or living embodiments of their [interviewees] European past” (2007: 29). In regards to the present, Scott concludes that “African people today are still often envisioned as embodiments or analogues of African ancestors” (Ibid.: 34) and she states that the notion of Africans as “our past” is drawing tourists to Africa to “reconnect” with their evolutionary roots. Other evidence for this claim comes from visitors who wrote in the exhibition visitor book that they were grateful because of the opportunity to know Black cultures to which some people referred as “our roots” or “our ancestors”.

The presence in the exhibition of African pieces elaborated in the 20th century, which alluded to an African past, could have reinforced this notion of the past as uncorrupted or natural. Two communications and cinema students connected the African pieces with the idea that “these are traditions that arrived many years ago from other parts of the world, we see Africa, and they started with the drums and all of that…” (interview 26). A physical education student said that he had connected the pieces with the “ancestral quality of the Africans and the Black communities” (interview 28). In this particular case, only one of the people interviewed, an anthropology student taking a class with professor Arocha, was able to explain how he saw that these cultures can combine tradition and modernity. “Let’s say that it’s allowed to use artificial flowers but it’s not admissible to use, instead of a batea, a pot”1 (interview 1). In order to represent Afrocolombians more accurately, the

---

1 The batea is a traditional concave artifact used in the recollection of gold in the rivers. It is also used in rituals for the death of a child.
museum should also look for ways of “creating new associations between darkness and modernity” (Scott 2007: 65).

“Joy, what the Black has in his blood is joy”

The most serious misrepresentation of Afrodescendants was not necessarily the positive relationship with tradition, but rather how visitors were unable to understand the relationship between death, music, mourning and dancing. The association of joy and Blackness was very common, as the title of this section suggests: “Joy, what the Black has in his blood is joy” (interview 29). This description was given by a mother visiting with her husband and little boy who studied in one of the five public schools that participated in different projects related to the exhibition. During the presentation of their projects on December 4th, 2008², it was made explicit that the students interpreted the exhibition using their own relationship to religion and the context of their family’s relationship to faith. When researching these particular cosmologies, they concluded: “The Afrodescendants, they don’t cry death, they praise it, because they sing in the wake, they sing and praise children”. What was relevant and interesting to these adolescents was that “the rituals are cool because they are not normal, they enjoy that part of life”. In another presentation, a young girl discussed a recent death in her own family, and narrated how her teacher made her class watch a film on slavery and racism (as something relegated to the past). She concluded: “While we are crying, or mourning, they are playing dominos, cards, they are dancing… they have a very different way of expressing their feelings”.

---

² The quotes from this presentation were taken from the audio recording of the event. No names of students or schools were taken into account when analyzing this data.
Some of the students in these presentations (none of them Black) made a direct allusion to racism: “I was impressed by the fact that we treat Afrodescendents poorly, we should not reject them. They don’t spend their time crying, but have a sentiment of joy, because these people are going to be better off”. Another one added that “We shouldn’t call them Black but Afrocolombian because they are people who feel”. And they were all in agreement that the burial of a child should be a joyous occasion because a child has committed no sins. There was also an emphasis in cultural aspects such as dancing and singing, except for one group that discussed the Law 70 of 1993. Few presentations were more complex and managed to make the students inquire deeply into Black culture. Through these projects, despite the limits of questioning stereotypes, students were able to relate these practices to their personal lives and it was also an opportunity to bring their parents to the exhibition. Nevertheless, Arocha considers the negation of one’s own racism as equally important and grave. He sees these attitudes as prevalent in school-age students and university students as well (interview December 10, 2008).

The interpretation made by the students of the relationship between music and joy was not unique to them. It was quite prevalent to find comments related to the issue of pain and music with the intent to overvalue Black practices. Visitors also looked at the musical instruments in the exhibition as elements that confirmed such a hypothesis. For non-Afro visitors it was difficult to understand that chanting and dancing were not necessarily associated with happiness. What this meant was that some visitors thought that Black communities were not able to feel pain, or that it was lessened. A mother visiting with her 10-year-old daughter was talking about what differences they saw between the funeral of the grandmother and the exhibition.
The child responded: “I thought that when there was a death one cried and it was all tragic, but it’s not like this in this community” (interview 14). A female around 20 years old who works at a school and was visiting with her grandfather, who is a sociologist, also mentioned that “one has this concept of pain, and to see that they are singing and saying good bye can be impacting when one is used to [seeing] that it’s a very painful thing” (interview 33).

Some people had a similar reading regarding pain but saw the absence of crying as a positive thing. In a family interview on Heritage Day, which fell during the exhibition period, the mother said:

one has to be happy and at peace because [the person is] left to be with the Lord. There’s no need to cry death but rather enjoy people when they are alive. When death comes, one shouldn’t cry or stamp one’s feet, it’s more like a party, that person is off to be joined with God, our Lord.

(interview 40)

This notion of the “happy” Black person could be related to stereotypes that have survived into the 20th century, such as the notion that though Black people might be enslaved, insulted (violently killed, displaced, submitted to corrupt governments, lack of education, etc.) “they keep the faith” (Hall 1997c: 251). The consequence of thinking that Black people cannot feel pain means that we run the risk of thinking that violence, death and poor living conditions they face is a “natural” state and that it might matter less because they are “happy” under distress.
Why is it difficult to understand different ways of expressing pain? Since our knowledge of the history of these groups is so poor, we are not aware that the use of music, especially the drum, is directly related to the enslaved past. During the exhibition, we held two conferences on October 9, 2008 by international experts Ángel Quintero and Javier Laviña, who included a reference to the relationship of mourning and music which explained paradigms that are not our own. As Quintero said, slave owners would group people from different origins together in order to prevent them from communicating so that these people were negated the use of the word and, hence, relied on the use of rhythms and corporal expressions. Laviña also mentioned that drums and festivals served as communication devices to plan uprisings and to remember the continent they had been brutally taken from.

Quintero’s presentation revolved around the notion of sadness in salsa music, which would make no sense under a western conception where dancing and corporal expressions are banned from orthodox Catholic religious practices and are strictly taken for entertainment and expressions of joy. But, as he explains, music and dance are used to transform the sadness caused by the pain of mourning into a rehabilitative energy for life. Mourning is required to renew life and so the static (usually associated with death) is transformed into the energy for a “new” life. Mourning is manifested in energetic and collective ways: “time was embodied in the space of the dancer”. And the erotic elements of dance used in the rituals of mourning are related to the beginning, to birth and to the triumph over death.

The prevalence of mindsets, paradigms and stereotypes as well as our difficulty of understanding other cultures because we attempt to do so through our own standards
was evident in the impact caused by the altar for a dead child. At least one third of the people interviewed, across age, gender and education, were deeply impacted by this altar in both positive and negative ways. Present-day religious beliefs held by Afrocolombian communities are deeply marked by the legacies of enslavement and this is made apparent in that particular altar. The use of coloured paper, the toothpicks that held open the doll’s eyes and the description of a ritual for a child that inhibits the mother’s tears, are present-day elements of a transatlantic tradition that signalled that the death of a slave was a joyous occasion because it was believed that the soul would migrate back to Africa (Bush 2008: note 104). And as tradition holds, the death of a child, in similar terms, was a moment of celebration, as the soul would directly see god, thus also escaping enslavement. Though music and chanting are part of this ritual, their performance differs from other festive occasions.

_Burying without tears_

As I highlighted at the beginning of the chapter, we relate to the unknown in two ways: one ignores cultural distance and thus tries to domesticate the exotic according to standards of that which is familiar to us. The other turns that culture into the complete opposite, thereby creating dichotomies. Regarding the ceremonies for children, people tried to make sense of the unknown by their own standards: “My attention was caught by how they bury children, I hadn’t seen that, that joyous ritual, like festive” (interview 3) claimed a Colombian man around 45 years old who lives in the United States and was visiting the museum with a friend. Similar reactions were recorded from visitors who saw that this particular ceremony was special (interviews 13, 14, 40). For some visitors, it was seen as positive not to take “death as something tragic” and to acknowledge that children “go directly to heaven”
(interview 32) because the Catholic religion “is about how to clean the sin that one comes stained with since birth” (interview 37).

Two visitors talked about children in their lives and the reason why it caused such great impact. A female around 20 years of age visiting with her grandfather said:

Maybe because I have a little sister who is 3 years old and it would cause a great impact to see her there, full of flowers. I can see that they handle a higher level of maturity towards death, than what we handle. Why am I taking [death] to the extreme, if it can be handled differently?

(interview 33)

For a Mexican photographer around 50 years of age visiting the exhibition, the issue touched on his own fears as well, because of his 6-year-old child, his parents who are older and even his own death.

I can’t look at the issue [of a child’s death] with coldness…. But I also love the fact that this is not a problem that can be solved but that culture can be of use to manage, to accompany.

(interview 39)

A male school teacher was explicit about the difficulty of understanding difference: “you could say that it shocks with the perception that one has, the ways of looking at a child’s death…usually the child’s eyes have to be closed” (interview 42). For two visitors, their reactions were physical: laughter and shivers (interviews 18, 21). Two
male students of psychology who spent much time in the exhibition were aware of the limits of our understanding by acknowledging that people would be confused by a real wake conducted in this manner: “They would be far from understanding the meaning of this, they would take it as a deviation or a wrong use of the elements of Catholic religion adopted by them, but without understanding the logic of why it’s done” (interview 37).

One of the curators at the National Museum of the American Indian expressed this same concern over the position of the museum towards its audiences “because museums traditionally are not about challenging visitors’ most deeply held beliefs” (Chaat Smith 2008: 136). Chaat Smith introduces the concept of cognitive dissonance “defined as a psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs and attitudes held simultaneously” (Ibid.) to describe how visitors feel when the museum confronts their deeply held paradigms. With the Velorios example, we confirm that changing paradigms is no small feat and that visitors often resist these transformations.

**Ignorance and understanding the other**

As a general observation, we can state that for a majority of visitors, the exhibition was a chance to get closer to unknown cultures. Despite one young man saying, “they are not extraterrestrial”, the fact is that about half of the people interviewed claimed that they had very little information about these groups. Two people even commented that they were disappointed because they had not had the chance to interact with Afrocolombian people. One young girl who works in a school was
visiting to inform her boss about the possibility of bringing the children to the exhibition. She claimed that her feeling was that Black communities mistrust society because they had been discriminated against, but was unsure because she had only learned about them around the issue of enslavement (interview 33). She concluded: “These are cultures that one doesn’t know and might be difficult to assimilate”.

Most of the interviewees talked about the impact of the novelty of the exhibition, “one doesn’t imagine all the ceremonies they have” (interview 16). Some people visited out of curiosity because the customs of Black communities seemed exotic or mysterious (interview 17) or because they were interested in a theme they knew nothing about (interview 22). Other visitors claimed that Afrocolombian cultures are forgotten (interview 20) and that there is rarely any deep or meaningful contact with them (interview 23). Along the same lines, visitors were grateful because of the opportunity to see positive aspects of an unknown culture: “It’s very important for Afro people and us, non-Afros, to understand more, not with just discourse” said a member of a group visiting with a foundation that works with Black people in the Pacific (interview 13). One visitor questioned the knowledge one could have as a non-Afrocolombian. This young lawyer said: “One can have a genuine interest of knowledge but I don’t know if one can really know it, because it will always be on the margin of one’s context of birth and living conditions” (interview 27). This statement implies that getting close to another culture is a partial process.

The answers point to a void in information and ignorance as a major factor of the misunderstanding of Black communities. Colombians are not necessarily aware of the situation of Afro Colombians and this might imply a “mental” segregation where
groups might be closed off and hence unaware of each other’s practices. One strategy incorporated by Law 70 of 1993 was the implementation of Afrocolombian studies in schools precisely for this matter. Black activists have contested education and history books because the representation of Black people is relegated to slavery—and even then it is an incomplete representation. This critique was confirmed by two visitors who directly mentioned the lack of discussion of the role of Black people in the history of Colombia after enslavement: “but what happened to them? No idea, what was their final destiny, how do they live, how do they die, no idea” (interview 12).

**Discrimination in the museum?**

Lack of knowledge is directly related to discrimination and racism, though those are not the only factors. One particular interview is of interest here because of the honesty of the people interviewed. In this conversation with a family, both parents were around 40 years of age; he had a primary-level education and was a peasant who was displaced about 15 years ago, and she had a secondary-level education. They came with two daughters who were six and ten years old. Both identified themselves as indigenous and mestizos. When asked about the message of the exhibition, he replied:

> I don’t know, a nice message, those people, one thinks of them, how should I tell you… I never have been involved in that world and to see it, it changes how one thinks about the Blacks, it changed the image that I had of them.

(interview 40)
I then asked if he could describe that image, and he said “That the Black, I don’t know…” to which I insisted by asking whether it was a negative image and since I did not get a direct response I asked whether the exhibition changed his image of Black people to which he replied “Yes”. His wife then added that the negative image is created by the difference in traditions but that “by looking and getting closer” one sees that there are similarities.

Few visitors were interested in discussing the issue of racism or prejudice, and only the people quoted above openly admitted to having arrived at the exhibition with prejudiced views on Black communities. Similar to the research done by Sandell (2007) on prejudice, museum visitors claimed to be open receivers of messages of tolerance who are willing to learn or reconfirm their liberal values. This behavior is in accordance with Scott’s findings as well. In her own research in museums on views of evolution and Africans, she posits that people were conservative in expressing their thoughts on race and kept a differentiated implicit and explicit view: “When asked directly, visitors usually intellectualized race to suggest that it held little or no biological significance for them while emphasizing the influence of culture on human difference” (2007: 98).

In my own research, only three people alluded to the racism of others. A student of physical education visiting with a friend expressed the following:

It’s always caught my attention on why the segregation towards them, even though we are in the year 2008, there is evidence of racism here and in other
parts that I don’t know why it exists. I’ve interacted with Black people and I can’t see the difference.

(interview 28)

A couple visiting from Magdalena mentioned discrimination directly: “Apparently, there is no discrimination but there is (wife nodded at this affirmation). I remember as a child that they would scare one talking about the black dog or associating a Black child with the Devil, that’s discrimination” (interview 34). A couple of young people who came to music events related to the exhibition and who had taken the guided tour recognized that part of the situation of discrimination was due to a lack of education and information.

The man who visited with his two children and does Xerox machine maintenance responded to the question of what he thought the message was by stating:

That these communities must be taken into account, and not marginalized or isolated, that the government has to watch out for them because it maintains them very isolated, and us as citizens, we have to continue to eliminate racial discrimination that we still have… they are better in the way they work, they fight more than one does.

(interview 10)

On this issue of responsibility, the schoolteacher, who had participated in a class given by the anthropologist who worked on the project, said:
It is my duty to come here, because I know that a part of Africa which was rooted here has been suppressed since it got here, it has had no liberty of expressing itself and even its ways of interpreting life, death… everything it has had to do in hiding, occult, repressed. This is a society that practically has denied them a right to exist.

(interview 12)

He insisted that the White man had only brought about disputes over the land, fear and “they harvest whatever brings terror and death. Coca, maize for biofuels. Who said maize was for feeding machines when people are dying of hunger?”

None of the interviewees mentioned an important piece of news that occurred during the exhibition, related to a sentence by the Supreme Court of Justice in favor of Edna Martinez, a young Afrodescendent who was not allowed into a disco in Bogotá because of being Black. A similar event had already been sanctioned in Cartagena, a city with a vast Afro population. An editorial on this matter pointed to the responsibility of the government in presenting a law with preventive actions and sanctions to discriminative measures in Colombia (Editorial El Tiempo “Discotecas racistas” October 17, 2008). As Sandell (2007) notes, racism in the 21st century takes on different shapes. It need not be the overtly and explicit prejudiced practices of lynching or segregation because it can be something as “inoffensive” as not being allowed into a discotheque. Today we experience a racism that is seen in the ways in which Black communities are left alone to resist the actions of the paramilitaries or multinational corporations, of corruption and poverty, and it can also hide underneath
the discourse of equality, when, as we have seen, there is no such conditions in reality.

**RACISM AND MUSEUMS**

At this point of the discussion we might ask what the museum’s role is in the matter of perpetuating or combating racism. The museum has enough information to question itself as to how it is contributing to pervasive forms of racism, or what Pnina Werbner has called “banal racism”, which is found in every day contexts. The four forms of “invisible aggression” she describes are:

1a. against the person or subject (through verbal insults and abuse, and deliberate social exclusion);

2a. against equal opportunities and *citizenship rights* (in housing, employment, education, etc.);

3a. against sanctified *cultural icons* (via slurs, and attacks on a group’s culture by the media, or public political demands that the group assimilate or “integrate”);

4a. through a silencing of *group voices* in the public sphere…

(1997: 237)

In the local context, I noted at the beginning of this research that the absence of history of Afrodescendent communities in Colombia from the educational system, museums, the media, or their misrepresentation is a “serious blow”, just as Albert Memmi, North African Jewish philosopher, describes the process of being removed
from history and from the nation’s affairs is the most serious “blow” given to the colonized (quoted in Jordan and Weedon 1995: 302). As a response, many anti-racist scholars and Black historians are concerned with highlighting the role of Black people as subjects and main actors of a nation’s history. The museum, though, embedded in wider structures cannot be content with telling the story the way it always has been told. It is not only the absence of non-White people but also when “[non-Whites] appear not as subjects of history but as its objects” (Ibid.; 298). Often it is White people who make things happen in history, while Black people are recipients of that which White people achieve: “[they] are given freedom; they are the recipients of a gift; they do not cause history to be made but are affected by the actions of others” (Ibid.: 299).

In the case of Brazil, recent studies discuss the impact of the image of enslavement and its aftermath in issues of exclusion and discrimination (da Silva de Paiva 2007). In her analysis of the Museu do Negro, da Silva references the study by Santos, who compares the narratives of two mainstream museums in Brazil. While the National Museum of Fine Arts silences a Black narrative, the Museum of the Republic represents Black popular culture, which relegates Black practices to samba, carnival and football. The acknowledgement of the Black community’s talents at music and sports runs counter to the idea that they can be politicians, entrepreneurs, and other professions, thus restricting their contributions to certain social practices (Ibid.: 217). Groups of Afrocolombians were well aware that the museum is a space for legitimising groups and practices. Following Jordan and Weddon, when the museum includes cultures, history and art forms it makes claims about who has them and who does not (1995). For Sandell (2007), representation of difference in museums is both
determined and generative. Framing this claim in the present exhibition means that inclusion in discourses of the national is a significant contribution to the political agency of groups; in the case of Colombia, it might lead to the combat of racism and discrimination. The question remains as to what to include and how to represent it and whether we should just fill in previous voids and silences, change misrepresentations or elaborate critical displays that acknowledge representations of the past while at the same time transforming them for the future.

If museums, especially national museums, have represented a skewed notion of who belongs in the national community, if they have created hierarchies, silences, omissions and misrepresentations, can they become forums of empowerment? Data and analysis show that they can, though exhibitions will have limited results that have to be worked through in long-term projects because an exhibition will never be completely free of stereotypes or prejudices. For Sandell:

> The categorisation of discourses and representations embodied within museum displays as either prejudiced and oppressive or –in binary opposition– non-prejudiced and liberatory, obscures the ambivalence and contradiction inherent in all processes of cultural production and reception. (2007: 42-43)

Indeed, the results of this research show that mixed ideas about Black people are a result of how spectators engage with difference in two ways that overlap: through assimilation and through exotisation. The ways in which visitors talked about their experience confirmed that personal and emotional experiences are an important tool
in learning processes in museums because they allow visitors to engage with the unfamiliar through their own worlds. We can state that the Afrodescendent communities were considered nation members, but with limited access to what the nation has to offer. In that sense, difference was not condemned; it was exalted as part of what these groups have to “offer” to the wider community. Value was placed essentially in culture (as in aesthetic expressions), tradition and the ancestral, underscoring other contributions that were less visible. One of the main issues is the lack of political power and representation these groups are seen to have. The persistence of certain stereotypes can lead us to question our ability to change the perception of why these groups are demanding special recognition of their rights. There was a notorious asymmetry between the positive impact of the rituals and their symbolic content in the museum, and a void in respect to comprehending the ethnocide that is the result of modernization, armed conflict, and the responsible parties involved (Arocha and Lleras 2008).

**Challenging museums**

We have seen that museums have the potential to act as agents of social change. In this last part of the chapter, I wish to mention some of challenges that national museums face as they try to (re)present the multicultural nation and respond to the question of how general museum visitors interpret exhibitions that aim to transform representation of minorities as nation-members. The first challenge is set by the museum’s own agenda. It is difficult to know what the lasting results of the *Velorios* exhibition will be, but it is true that if representations in the permanent galleries are not transformed, the impact of a temporary exhibition visited by 32,000 people will be reduced. Sandell has pointed to the importance of “representation of difference
within relatively more permanent, ‘mainstream’ museum displays might serve to more powerfully confer equality and convey a sense of inclusion and legitimisation for marginalized communities” (2007:129). A permanent exhibition also provides a space to continuously deliver content that confronts stereotypes as well as misrepresentations inside and outside the museum. It can also become a tool in the application of Afrocolombian studies, as we tried to accomplish with the travelling Velorios exhibition to schools in 2009 and 2010.

Black people and a mestizo teacher who came to one of the focus groups acknowledged this void in the permanent galleries. The teacher declared:

I did a tour on my own. And this is not just any museum, it’s the museum of Colombian identity, and institutes the symbolic images of that identity. One finds the Spanish armour, some indigenous pieces but the African or Afrocolombian are not part of this museum, and if the museum wants to take this seriously, the exhibition has to pass from the fleeting to the permanent.

Other people who wrote in the exhibition’s visitors’ book also asked for a permanent gallery. The question here is whether it is enough to include diversity by representing Afro Colombians in the museum or whether national museums can embrace multiculturalism critically, something that will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

The staff enacts a second challenge inside the museum. Certainly, practitioners need to respond to the issues that are most pressing in museums. In the case of Velorios, the exhibition’s process and outcome deeply impacted the majority of the staff. They
referred positively to the experience of learning about Black cultures. Carolina, one of the Design assistants, made this explicit in her reference to what had impacted her:

In our space, this is prohibited: we can’t cry a certain way, there’s no way of chanting, and the way they expressed themselves, that marked me. And they noticed it; they know that what they do is different. And maybe some were bothered because we looked with such curiosity at something that was natural to them.

Amparo, the Designer, acknowledged that despite that tension, “our” way of looking was respectful and not exoticizing or undervaluing.

The staff also lived some of the same dichotomies that visitors dealt with in the ways they overvalued Afrocolombian rituals. Hence the experience was not only lived professionally but also personally. The Museum’s Designer shared a personal story related to the illness of her grandmother and her ability to open up and talk about agony because she learned about the fact that rituals have different phases. The altar for a dead child deeply moved the Deputy Director and she found a connection with the corner from the Archipelago due to personal memories and experiences.

The production processes, helping to build the altars in three days and having to alter ways of “normal” production methodologies, caused the greatest impact. The museum’s Coordinator of publications, who collaborated in the correction of the catalogue, said that what had impacted her the most was the process of putting the exhibit together: “I don’t know how to define it: one entered the gallery and there
were people who shared what they knew and others who were learning, it was absolutely generous”. For the Assistant to the Curator of Ethnography and Archaeology, the exhibition generated an “aesthetic liberty” because we put inside the museum space things that would probably not be there otherwise. In the case of Velorios, the positive outcome for staff was possible because of their participatory process and because it moved them affectively. In this case we can say that participation was a form of community agency from different sides, but also meant a possibility of working by different standards more in the line of “partners and mediators” rather than as truth-tellers who impose their own views on material culture (Kelly and Gordon 2002: 156).

Professor Arocha was deeply impacted by what happened at the Museum and with the attitude of the staff. The construction of the altars was deeply moving for all: “to see a sort of pan-Afrocolombia interacting with other Colombias they did not know and that perhaps we did not know as well” (interview, December 10, 2008). He refers to a process of translation that we should have documented and recorded but were not prepared for. What he saw in the gallery was “the absence of ‘hard’ racism, which leads one to disqualify the other or the ‘soft’ paternalistic, condescension that can be so offensive…no, it was between equals and an exercise of patience”.

What this means is that there is a ground set for future necessary work with Black communities in Colombia. Following Andrea Witcomb:

we need to reject the idea of an ‘authentic’ representation, including the belief that community groups must only represent themselves… As many
community gallery curators have argued, the representations that result in community galleries are those of particular sections of the community.

(2007: 154)

For Witcomb, there needs to be a further understanding of the role of curators – and we can say the same for other museum practitioners – not just as supervisors of “inaccurate” representations or completely detached spectators of community representations but to see the museological process as exchanges between different groups.

Yet, the call for museum practitioners to get involved in community empowerment, participation and appropriation of museum practice has only increased in the last decades, and their presence is not a set and given fact in all museums. On the theme of social inclusion, Young asks:

Can those who run or work in national institutions relinquish some of their power in order that others may exercise some? … Can established, high-status institutions readily adapt to the interests and needs of a local community-based project that wishes to approach them to take on the role of the delivery partner, rather than lead body?

(2002: 205)

Museums continue to deal with the possible answers to these queries.
Can we interrogate the canon?

Despite the fact that the exhibition tried to represent Afrocobombrians in a light that would differ from the superficial interpretations of the media, as well as from the typical themes associated with them, such as music and dance, results show that our impact in transforming stereotypes was limited. As Scott and Hall point out, representations are not easily replaced: “Even when new scientific evidence is found, the old images doggedly maintain their momentum” (Scott 2007: 50). Only a few visitors were able to interrogate their own conceptions, such as the Mexican photographer who mentioned how “the way of dying is related to the way of living, I was very moved because I thought I was going to see an exhibit about the funerary rituals of the past, of going back to the origins and that exotic idea of the African past” (interview 39).

The production and themes chosen for the exhibition tried to confront cultural values and beliefs, but people did not necessarily renegotiate their own mindsets: some were actually confirmed. In her doctoral research, Susan Ashley explores the fact that audiences are rarely allowed to view the production processes of an exhibition and this compromises the impact of changing and challenging existing representations. In her study, she concludes that the exhibition Underground Railroad, Next Stop Freedom (2002-2005) developed by the National Historic Sites –a governmental agency – and a group of African-Canadians in an effort to include voices not previously heard did not radically transform people’s previous outlook on African-Canadians (Ashley 2005). In that particular case, the negotiation behind the production of the exhibition seemed more important than the result itself. What was
missing, she argues, was a bridge between the group of African-Canadians and the visitors.

The danger, then, is that museums can become “validators” of previously existing misinformation. In this sense, institutions that want to subvert previously existing stereotypes are facing an unjust battle over representation with other media: the Internet; television; films; schoolbooks and school systems. Whatever stereotypes continue to circulate will become framing devices that can underscore the impact of exhibits that aim to change representations. In the case of Velorios, the impact of the exhibit was highly positive in terms of the ways in which visitors described the message they took from the exhibition. But we should also be aware that overvaluing cultures in itself does not necessarily result in challenging existing paradigms.

In the terms of Stuart Hall, the exhibit’s result can be described as “transcoding” (1997c: 270), which happens when new meaning is reappropriated and, as a result, that which was considered negative is valued positively. Putting Black communities at the center of representation generates new content that fills old structures of interpretation. For Hall, transcoding does not subvert stereotypes. Neither does introducing positive images that celebrate difference. Hall asks: “Do these images evade the difficult questions, dissolving the harsh realities of racism into a liberal mish mash of ‘difference’?” (1997c: 273). These images expand the repertoire of representation but do not displace the negative stereotypes. The third strategy he describes is concerned mainly with form and tries to contest sites that have been negatively oversimplified, such as Blacks and sexuality (Ibid). It does not avoid difficult terrain but rather addresses it directly. This last formula is not without
problems, because the “sites” that have to be tackled are scars of a painful past, such as enslavement for Afrocolombians.

The question remains as to what the museum can accomplish. Sandell defends the transformative possibilities of museums that lie in the interpretative processes:

Agency is exclusively attributed to neither exhibition nor visitor but rather distributed between them with the potential to generate and disseminate ways of seeing, thinking and talking about difference that are both informed by the ethical constraints established by the museum and simultaneously filtered through individual and social frames.

(2007:101)

For him, exhibitions should be thought of as “resources” that “can be appropriated in ways that facilitate and support the articulation of (non-prejudiced) accounts and interpretative repertoires” (Ibid). How to facilitate these processes remains a main question and challenge for national museums.

In the study cited by Cameron, people interviewed were of the opinion that museum audiences should receive less digested information in order to:

resolve issues in their own minds. By raising awareness of issues, empowering people to educate themselves on important topics, to determine their own position around these subjects and to become socially active, museums can have a role in social transformation.
Museums should act as “knowledge brokers as opposed to authorities” so that audiences can make up their minds (Ibid.: 33). Looking back at the results of the Velorios exhibition, we can ask whether it is enough for museums to give audiences information or whether they have to be more proactive in challenging paradigms and stereotypes.

What is at stake here is our ability to really understand and respect what is truly different from our own culture. Dias, quoting Charles Taylor, points to the fact that the standards we have of our own Western civilization limit “judgments implicitly and unconsciously [because they] will cram the others into our categories” (2008: 148). In discussing the National Museum of the American Indian before it opened its new venue in Washington, D.C., Penn argued that though objects were fitted into the western canon of great art, the museum did not interrogate the canon. She questioned displaying ethnography as art since it makes objects of material culture commodities and depoliticises them or, worse, puts them under the light established by European imperialism. She criticized a version of multiculturalism that remains Eurocentered, thus simply replacing bad stereotypes with new ones. She adds:

What capitalist white America now needs from its dead, its vanished indigenous people is drawn from the Indians of positive stereotype. It is their lack of materialism, their spirituality, their ability to live with the earth that have once again made Indians popular in America’s fin-de-siècle distress.

(Penn 2000:30)
Dias (2007) has also examined how during the 1950s ethnographical artifacts started to be read from the perspective of art history, thus excluding the context surrounding the objects in order to subject them to universalistic aesthetic claims, in tune with the Western canon. The accumulation of exotic artifacts in ethnographic and comprehensive museums produces differences but disguises them as cultural diversity. Can museums interrogate their established museological discourses and narratives? We have to ask the question of whether we can tell stories about the other without cramming that other into our previously-existing categories.

**Cultural cannibalism**
This emphasis on culture fits well with the discussion of the cannibalism of Black culture described by De Carvahlo (2005). He maintains that Afro culture is still considered exotic but not as a menace, rather as a “complement” to western ethnocentrism. It already has an intimate and safe place; it has been incorporated into western culture as its own (cannibalised). Whites can have the African experience through consumption:

> In this context, symbolic afroamerican expressions play, in fantasy, the role or restating human values lost in the present day West: la fiesta, laughter, eroticism, corporal liberty, vital rhythm, spontaneity, the relaxing of tensions, sacredness of nature and the quotidian act against reason as a sensualist utopia.

(2005: 19)

In that same line of thought, we value our Afrodescendent communities because they are considered ancestral safe keepers of culture and remain festive even under great
distress. This situation creates a tension between attributing symbolic and aesthetic richness to Afroamerican culture but not being able to see the state of exclusion and necessities of the members of such communities. I might add to this argument that when necessary discussions take place, they are kept simple by not looking at the causes, almost as if these groups had been predetermined to live in such ways, as if this were their “natural state” of affairs.

Despite the fact that there might be persisting stereotypes, in an interview with anthropologist and production team member Jaime Arocha, he claimed that at least they allow people to enter a debate, because an acknowledgement exists:

> In natural history museums, as detestable as dioramas might be, well it turns out that they are teaching us something, they are very didactic, even if they are horrible and dusty…. To form ideas, even if they are essentialist, static, they might have many defects, but at least they are ideas that are there to be corrected or discussed.

(interview December 10, 2008)

For Arocha, silence is much worse than stereotypes:

> My concern with Africans and Afrodescendents is the void, there’s nothing. When school kids were telling us that the Afro don’t suffer, they even enjoy death, the stereotype can be corrected, modeled. We all acquired essences, some might even be problematised. Regarding the void, I’d rather have the
academic or the empiric representation, even if it might be static, because they can be corrected and filled with new contents and we can enter a debate.

(Ibid)

We also have to be aware that stereotypes can be of use to certain communities. As an example of new accounts, a study shows how the Yolngu people from Australia use the display of their culture and contact with Europeans as a way to negotiate and demonstrate their value and worth to outsiders, “what can be seen from one perspective as the production of stereotypes can be seen from another as a process of restatement” (Morphy 2006: 495). Cultures on display, once seen as a product of colonialism or subjugation, can now be read from a point of view of self-determination. Not all groups and communities will choose to represent themselves in a national museum under a critical light.

What this analysis shows is that much advancement has to be accomplished before a just memory is staged. This exhibition was based on the performance of social memory of groups whose own history prior to enslavement was violently erased. When history is not present in schools or in the institutions of memory then it is considered less important, ineffective, shameful. “Why? Because they are so obviously powerless” (Jordan and Weedon 1995: 300). Hence the warning that Eric Wolf shares: “uncovering and foregrounding THE HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE WITHOUT HISTORY –that is, those groups, societies and cultures whose history has been marginalized, trivialized and ignored –is no small job” (Ibid: 298).
In this chapter we discussed the impact of the exhibition for non-Afrocolombian visitors in terms of generating a connection with an unknown *other*. But what was the meaning of the exhibition for Afrodescendent audiences? In the next chapter I will look at how the Black people that we worked with, as well as visitors and youth that collaborated in the exhibition, interpreted their experience and how they discussed the exhibit that aimed at foregrounding an ethnographical, aesthetic and historical account of these communities in the national narrative.
4 AFROCOLOMBIAN IDENTITIES AND THE EXHIBITION

In the introduction to this thesis, I stated that national museums reproduce the space of the nation. I acknowledged that nationalism operates by creating an “us and them” mentality, positioning identities at either side, and legitimating hierarchies (Özkirimli 2005). Museums also recreate these dichotomies by including and excluding forms of heritage, but they can also be spaces for bridging differences. In the last chapter, I examined how visitors interpret dissimilarity amongst nation members, but also how exhibitions can create an arena for communication between communities and stage similarities that allow visitors to construct representations of a shared community.

Despite the advancements in transforming representation, the long-term impact of policies of exclusion that have been in place for centuries cannot be properly fixed with a single effort. Neither can these efforts be aimed solely at majority cultural groups. One of the objectives of the exhibition was to take the first step towards inclusion of Afrocolombians and their contributions to nation-making processes. Under these circumstances, how did the groups represented in the exhibition read this effort? What was the impact of this initiative on the Afrodescendent communities?

The possible answers to these questions are of central importance because they are directly related to how people connect (or not) their experience to an ethnic and a national identity. In the introduction to this thesis, I stated that citizenship has a historic dimension that is intrinsically tied to the way citizens see themselves
included or excluded from their nation’s past and present. Issues of citizenship are related to debates around who represents a community because new forms of citizenship entail not only the right to participate in democracy but also in the definition of that in which we want to be included (García Canclini 1995). For Delanty, citizenship is about:

common experiences, cognitive processes, forms of cultural translation and discourses of empowerment. The power to name, create meaning, construct personal biographies and narratives by gaining control over the flow of information, goods and cultural processes is an important dimension of citizenship as an active process.

(2003: 602)

For Hall, power is exercised when we represent others because it marks them but also confirms and reiterates that power is physical, economic, political and cultural. Power is not only about force, it “seduces, solicits, induces, wins consent” (Hall 1997c: 261). Both the powerful and the powerless are concerned in the circulation of power, in different terms. In this context, the ability to insert or support representations of the community one belongs to constitutes a source of power and exercise of rights.

In this chapter, I want to examine how Afrodescendents responded to the exhibition, both in production and as audiences. My intent will be to address two research questions: What are the challenges for national museums in working with communities marginalized both in the museum and broadly in society? And in what
ways do members of the communities represented engage with an exhibition
designed to change narratives of the national? In order to approach these themes, I
will use the data collected in informal interviews with production team members,
focus group results and other interviews held with Afrocolombians, as well as
personal experience.

The main points of discussion will be centred on the relationship between
Afrocolombians and heritage and how this hinders or supports a sense of belonging
to political communities, both ethnic and national. The chapter has three main parts:
self-representation, the exhibit as a mirror and, the exhibit as a lens. First, I will look
at issues of creating representations: who is responsible, what is represented and how
do these occur? What were some of the main debates around the production of the
exhibition as well as the spaces available for self-representation? This is a central
discussion because, as we saw in the first chapter, one of the aims of the exhibition
was to give visibility to the legacies of Afrocolombians in the nation’s narrative with
the participation of Black leaders. Despite the fact that policies of inclusion have
changed working methodologies for museums, I will examine further difficulties
faced by opening up processes to communities that are heterogeneous. It is of
importance to recognize that representation is not neutral; hence, it becomes a zone
of conflict, not only of negotiation, between museums and their communities and
also within the communities.

In the first part I discuss the negative reactions caused by the exhibition. Objection to
several elements, including our choice to work with particular Afrodescendant
people, the theme that was displayed and the fact that white or mestizo staff members
were working on this issue for the first time in a National Museum led to a series of reactions and critiques that sometimes scared and other times disappointed the production team. Nevertheless, the backing of those Afrocolombians who stood by us was key in overcoming attacks, many of them quite personal, as well as reinforcing the commitment to the mission we had accepted in 2006.

The second and third parts of this chapter look at the themes that Black participants in focus groups highlighted in terms of the impact of the exhibition. The themes have been divided into two major categories: a mirror in which to “find oneself” and confirm an identity with others and a “lens” used by particular groups to be seen by others. The metaphor of the mirror is used to look at themes that were of importance to communities that have been displaced or that suffer discrimination. What is the role of the past under these circumstances? A reality we did not account for is of relevance: few Afrodescendents attended the exhibition. What significance does this have? When examining the concept of the exhibition as a “lens”, a main theme for this thesis reappears: stereotypes and essential notions of culture which can be thought of as a “necessary malady”, that is, categories and limited representations are both dangerous because they encapsulate people and groups but are also used as tools for recognition and marketing devices by the same groups that bear them.

The chapter will close with a discussion on the challenges faced by communities that still fight inequality, racism and discrimination in utilizing patrimony to promote advancements in political, social and economic spheres. The role of the State is key here because it utilizes cultural assets, such as diversity, to its benefit, while at the
same time negating political rights or discriminating against certain communities, as we examined in the introduction under the theme “Becoming multicultural”.

**Self-representation**

As was described in the first chapter, the exhibition team incorporated at an early stage a group of Afrocolombian professionals from different regions who had been living in Bogotá for a while and whom professor Arocha knew through different projects. Leocadia Mosquera from Quibdó (Chocó), Carmen Paz from Puerto Tejada (Cauca), Ruby Quiñónez from Tumaco (Nariño), Luis Gerardo Martínez from Palenque de San Basilio (Bolívar) and Dilia Robinson from San Andrés (Saint Andrews, Providence and Saint Catherine Islands) accompanied the project through to the end of the exhibition.

These participants were invited on the basis of their knowledge and cultural competence. Since Professor Arocha has been involved in the work with Black communities for over 30 years, he suggested names of participants who could contribute to the project. In the case of Leocadia Mosquera and Carmen Paz, both teachers, they were acquainted with Arocha through a research project on racism in public schools. This was also the case with Dilia Robinson, who worked for the Ministry of Education. Arocha was an examiner for Luis Gerardo’s history thesis and knew Ruby Quiñónez (also a teacher) from conferences and seminars. Whether they were part of political organizations was not a main factor for their participation; hence one could argue that their capacity to represent groups *politically* could be contested. For the production team, it was of vital importance to involve people with
knowledge as well as time and interest. In this sense, their expertise turned them into ideal representatives of their communities.

It was rare that the whole team could meet at the same time because of scheduling conflicts or out-of-town travel; there were also periods of absences of team members that caused minor disagreements, but, fortunately, as the exhibition came together, each participant had a say in the content and we felt the project was being supported by people whose knowledge could not be questioned.

It was in two of the meetings (June 19th and July 3rd, 2008) that we asked the Black team members why they had chosen to voluntarily participate in the project. Dilia Robinson said:

I have been moved by the fact that this is the first time that the contribution to history of the Black communities will appear in the National Museum of Colombia. I have a need to give what little I know, because when my people are spoken about, things should be told as they are. Written things irritate me when I say, ‘who did they ask about this?’ One doesn’t know everything, but knows about quotidian aspects.

Miss Dilia –as Raizal adult women are called regardless of their marital status– wanted for people in her community to feel identified and represented by the exhibition knowing that what was included was correct. The issue of “the truth” and of making correct statements was important for her.
In the case of Carmen Paz, she confessed feeling apprehensive about the subject at first:

“At first, I rejected the name ‘Funerary rituals of Afrocolombians and Raizales’ because they always see us as Blacks who practice ‘witchcraft’ and strange things…. But when I was told that [the research included] going to our communities to speak to our people, I said, ‘great’, because this is a direct way of knowing us. Here in Bogotá, they speak about us, but they don’t know us. They see us as savages, but you go to our community and see that people are humble but they share, they treat you well, and they are interested in people knowing the truth about them.

Ms Paz pointed to the difficulties she faced when she came to Bogotá and how she had learned to stand strong and mature, to reaffirm her identity in order not to be torn down. Knowing this, she thought it was important to contribute: “What can I do, what do I want to change, what do I want to be shown?” She also asked an important question: “When this ends, what comes next?”

Ms. Leocadia Mosquera said: “For me, it’s an honour to be able to give what I know and to be able to share it with the people around me and at this table for this event. I am willing to give what I know”. In her view, the exhibition was important not only to show other people “all of what we are” but also to activate a collective memory and prevent certain knowledge to be lost. She also said that the idea was for Black people to see themselves in the exhibition and represented in the Museum “and if they have something to say, they should say it with a positive and critical sense, not
of destruction, to see what else can be done, because knowledge is multiple”. Ms. Mosquera said that people had accused her of giving away secrets, but she insisted that she had not revealed them. To this accusation, she responded: “What have you contributed?” She is teaching her children things that she had been keeping to herself, but that she then thought it was better to transmit to others.

This particular issue of not giving away valuable information was important to members of the group. Miss Dilia said that she thought that it was possible to show certain information without being disrespectful of the need to keep some private. She expressed that there are things that cannot be represented in the Museum: an object can be placed but its significance is only partially revealed. “If we really want the contributions of the Black communities to the nation, to culture, to be visible, then we have to show it, otherwise how will we make this visible?” Luis Gerardo Martínez seconded this statement: secrets will remain secret. Mr Martínez also acknowledged the limits of the exhibition:

What we are doing here is only a sample, a representation, because all of what we have to show would not even fit in the space of the Museum. Nevertheless, there will always be people who will ask: why was this not included?

Miss Dilia was also aware that this exhibit did not exhaust the theme, but that the effort made by everyone had to be acknowledged.
On the issue of the expectations raised by the exhibition, there was a common agreement that Afrocolombian people wanted to be known, to be valued, to be acknowledged, not only with the contributions in the present but also in the past. Though these participants wanted their communities to be recognized for what was particular about them, Ms. Mosquera also said that she wanted non-Afrocolombian people to think: “We are not so different”.

Another common element that was shared by the Afrocolombian team members was the opportunity to know more about their own culture and shared elements as well as differences with other Afro-communities. In the case of Miss Dilia, she expressed that before participating in the project she had not been aware of the significance of a plant that is found in cemeteries, which she had always seen. The altars that other communities create also amazed her because in Saint Andrews they do not make altars, due to the a vast influence of Protestantism there.

Representing others

Despite the fact that the production team and the field work team in the regions included knowledgeable people, when I presented the exhibition project at a meeting of the Committee of Culture of Black, Afrocolombian, Palenquero and Raizal Communities created in 2006, I felt awkwardly out of place speaking about rites foreign to me to a group of Afrocolombians¹. I was hoping that they would see the Museum –and myself– as a medium for communication with wider audiences rather than as an “owner” of the research process. Some members of the Committee were

¹ This Committee had been created in order for Ministry staff to consult their projects with Black leaders.
not very enthusiastic about the project. Although we had started developing the exhibition before the Committee was created, there was a non-explicit charge for not having consulted with them earlier.

These problems of who to work with and whom to listen to are discussed by Dubin (2007) and others such as Dean (2009) who have pointed to these issues of who represents a community, a theme that will be discussed further on. Dubin quotes professor O’Donnell from Hunter College who had been part of a curatorial team that came across resistance from Irish Americans who did not feel represented in the exhibit *Gaelic Gotham: A History of the Irish in New York City* (1996). O’Donnell points to the fact that community participation is many times directed by availability and interest, not necessarily by representativeness:

> There’s a segment that has a strong sense of itself, and begins to speak for the group. Those subgroups tend to be more motivated and more organized, while most [other] people are out there trying to put food on the table, and go through everyday life. [This privileging of identity] is not their burning passion.

(2007: 220)

Working with groups and individuals that are outside the sphere of the museum is both rewarding and extremely difficult. In Dubin’s text one can hear the curatorial voices that argue for the supremacy of museum expertise over group affiliation because community involvement can sometimes hinder the process of the “best and smartest show” (Ibid.: 221). I disagree with this argument because many Black
people who have much to contribute, have been excluded from the realm of this expertise.

In this project sometimes the importance of content (knowledge owned by Black people) took over form and communication (in the domain of whites and mestizos).

The members of the Ministry Committee, for instance, expressed their concern over whether there would be enough contextual information for audiences to understand their rich symbolic universes in order to be treated with respect and highlighted that they did not want “others” to speak for them. We did address some of their criticism, such as changing the name of the exhibition in order to include broader categories with which Black people identify as well as keeping in mind cities that should have been part of the research process and which were later included in the traveling exhibition itinerary. Additionally, concerns expressed over the initial theme chosen for the exhibition –funeral rites– were met by later changing the exhibition to include a wider notion of ancestry. Nevertheless, we consulted again with the communities involved –after the initial approval of fieldwork– to make sure that there was consensus regarding the public staging of funerary altars, which remained a key element of the exhibition. As we will explore further on, the issue of the subject matter of the exhibition caused fractures and disagreements.

Early on, the production team thought about the ways in which Afro Colombians could participate in the exhibition process, besides their contributions to research.

Two main instances were introduced. The first was the inclusion of a group of young Afro Colombian students trained as Museum tour guides. Under normal circumstances, people who work in the Education Division of the Museum have to
complete a course and pass certain tests before giving guided tours of exhibitions.

For this particular case, we had to break our own rules in order to incorporate Afrocolombian students who had not taken the course but who attended the study sessions. Initially, the group was composed of around 12 people, six of whom worked in the exhibition alongside other white or mestizo guides.

Despite the Afrocolombian tour guides’ presence, it was considered insufficient by Afrocolombian people in all the focus groups. One participant said: “I thought that many Afros would want to be here as guides; when [the mestizos] spoke, I complemented a lot of things”. For another participant, this presence has to be guaranteed:

because I don’t separate the visual from the political…. The museum is a site of power, and in this power we have to see ourselves reflected, and in these spaces of power we have to be represented and it’s stronger when people find a guide who is Afro.

Other people said that the Museum should have brought people from the regions so that the same people who possess the knowledge on the altars would have narrated the exhibit. For one of the Black guides it was important to participate because he believed that visitors in tours took away another image and idea of the Afrocolombian people. He thought that those who did not interact with a Black person left the exhibit with a superficial image of them.
The second instance of self-representation was the program of nine presentations that were held in the auditorium every Saturday throughout the exhibition. These were integral parts of the exhibition, not merely complementary activities. The groups were chosen according to the regions represented; the people working on the exhibition team as well as the communities we worked with in the different sites were given priority. During the exhibition, these groups told audiences that ranged from 150 to 300 people their own interpretation of the funerary rituals and rituals to the saints through music, dance and short explanations of what was being presented. Some of the groups also spoke about ethnoeducation processes as well as patrimony and history. These presentations were of significance because the mestizos (visitors, staff or production team members) were at a disadvantage, since we were the “others” who were foreign to a particular language. What was particularly interesting about the presentations was their diversity and how they combined tradition and modernity (and postmodernity): from very traditional music, through combinations of contemporary dance in dialogue with tradition, and hip-hop as well as Baptist hymns. These presentations were also a sign of inter-generational processes and recuperation of traditions by local communities.

Working with Afrocolombians on the production team, in the activities and in the educational component of the exhibition was part of the democratization of the Museum that ranged from decision-making to interpretation. Nevertheless, many times these instances were utilized in order to gain support for ideas the non-Afrodescendent team members put forth. So, we looked for consensus with the people who were already in agreement with us. Sometimes we looked to validate decisions, not to question them deeply. Even in the museum as a forum, there were
situations where staff members were ultimately able to get their way by persuading all other participants who disagreed with them. It would have much more been harder for a non-academic team member to convince us of something that we were not thinking of including. This does not mean that the theme or the exhibition was of less importance. We were convinced that it was appropriate precisely because of the factors that threaten the rituals and were backed up by a series of communities and people who thought that dealing with sacred themes in the Museum was important too.

Participation mechanisms are praised in the literature but difficult to properly put into practice. Museums are responsible for giving voice to groups that have been shut off from official discourse and to attend to their needs (Sandahl 2005). In this context, community’s self-representation has been referred to as a ‘right.’ But is it not a duty, as well? If it had not been for the mobilization of communities in the latter part of the 20th century, their rights might have not been granted or gained. Authors signal to the importance of community action in challenging the museum: “Given the fact that museums are often supported by dominant cultural policies and are considered important in themselves, they can very well remain unthreatened, unless challenged by strong community demands, political initiative or informed debates in the media” (Lagerkvist 2006: 55). Despite opening up to communities, is participation enough to create consensus, and can it serve as a guarantee that these communities are correctly represented in the museum?
Who can represent?

Does everyone have a right to represent a community? For Clifford:

[n]either community ‘experience’ nor curatorial ‘authority’ has an automatic right to the contextualization of collections or to the narration of contact histories. The solution is inevitably contingent and political: a matter of mobilized power, of negotiation, of representation constrained by specific audiences. To evade this reality –resisting ‘outside’ pressures in the name of aesthetic quality or scientific neutrality, raiding the specter of ‘censorship’– is self-serving as well as historically uniformed. Community pressures have always been part of institutional, public life.

(1999: 449)

Who, then, represents a community? There is no easy answer to this query. For instance, though we intended to appeal to Afrocolombian, Black, Raizal and Palenquero people, not all Black people think of themselves as belonging to an ethnic group: many of them think of themselves as “integrated” to the nation or think of themselves first as Colombians.² In the 2005 Census only 10.6% percent of people in Colombia identified themselves as Afrocolombian, negros-mulatos, raizales and palenqueros, though the population is estimated to be around 20%. This means that in the context of Bogotá, where the exhibit was staged, there are urban people who do not necessarily feel connected with traditions they might feel are no longer theirs, and might have had a different outlook on the exhibition.

² For a criticism of this line of thought see Mosquera 2007
The main question that checkmates inclusion and participation in museums is whether being of the community is in itself enough to instill authority. On this issue, we are reminded that “[s]imply being an Indian is not enough to suggest that he would represent an insider’s view of Native culture” (Hill Sr. 2005: 109) or that one would be able to act outside of the current paradigm. This issue of who speaks for whom is deeply embedded in the struggles of democracy and is also highly political. If people do not participate in processes that give them a voice, someone else might take that space left and pretend to represent a community’s interests. Communities are not homogeneous, which therefore makes the question of representation more difficult to answer. There is also the issue that was discussed in the second chapter of whether the scholars or the people in charge of the project have to be part of the culture being studied. For Gilroy, this is not relevant:

> The idea that only those who possess a particular identity have the necessary qualifications for engaging in this kind of work [of the history of violence and terror] is trivial. Histories of suffering should not be allocated exclusively to their victims. If they were, the memory of the trauma would disappear and the living memory of it died away.

(1997: 340)

The issue of experts who are not from the community was also discussed in the focus groups. For one participant, there were concerns on how much the communities were able to control research and on the fact that Arocha (the anthropologist) was mestizo. For her, these discussions were also part of the internal tensions in the Afrocolombian social movement. She expressed that the correct order of things
would have been to invite the anthropologist and not the other way around. One focus group member thought that the exhibition spaced lacked more of “us”. Others were more ambivalent in their interpretation, such as a social worker very knowledgeable on issues of legislation and rights. She thought that it was important for outside anthropologists to instigate research but also deemed it important for communities to have access to knowledge production schemes. She said it was a political discussion:

because this initiative comes from someone who is not one of us. It’s about how the others are concerned about recuperating what is ours, from their point of view. I think Jaime Arocha’s work is admirable, and there’s a sector, and I’m a part of it that thinks that these alliances are important, but will not necessarily represent what we are. There is also a resistance to make our [culture] visible.

She analysed different examples where the communities have cultural assets that cannot be explored by them because they lack the tools or the access to institutional power, commenting:

If Jaime Arocha would not have done this, then who would have? We don’t have the means or the logistics to do this. When we want to do it [research and have access to institutions] we can’t because we are not in a position to do it.
One of the young guides also questioned the fact that the production team did not include more Afrocolombians, such as Black anthropologists: “Why are Black people isolated from talking about their own history? It was an interesting process, but I would have liked to see other Afro professionals. Looking at this experience from our point of view would have been different.” What these discussions show is that representation is about responsibility, power and authority exercised by authoring. For Kratz, “Like power, authority is (and should be) essentially contested, inevitably caught up in disputes about proper use and appropriate perspectives” (2002: 235).

Chavez Lamar questions reducing issues of power and authority to the Native vs. non-Native dichotomy because having a diverse production team will not necessarily derive in ownership:

In Our Lives [exhibit at the National Museum of the American Indian], community curators did not feel complete ownership of the final exhibition. They felt empowered during the process of determining the exhibition content; however, as the exhibit underwent the design process, their involvement was curtailed and they understood it was the NMAI’s turn to take over…. Agency and commitment must begin with the communities and its representatives for the projects to be considered as a true partnership.

(2008: 159)

As a response to the claim of being included in any research processes, the 2009 document for working with Black communities elaborated by the Ministry of the
Interior with collaboration from the Ministry of Culture emphasizes collaboration and one of the basic criteria of the plan is to make it possible for history to be written by the communities themselves without excluding specialists (Ministerio del Interior y de Justicia 2009).

This tension between communities and museums over content and display is not easily resolved and, as museums continue to open up to the subject of representation, further tensions will arise. In a dispute over an exhibition that included Canada’s Bomber Command in WWII at the Canada War Museum, Dean concludes that “consultation with the wider community and those whose experiences are represented and constructed is no longer enough; museums must conduct themselves in a way that will minimize and eliminate offence” (2009: 10). It is true that when working with source communities, museums have focused on celebratory exhibitions and put aside internal conflicts (Chavez Lamar 2008). In this particular Canadian case, those who felt the exhibit did not accurately represent them and saw that the museum was somehow questioning their heroism, triumphed over how the subject matter of the deaths caused by bombing and their true impact in winning the war had to be represented. Dean highlights that:

> in theory the public both trusts and expects its museums to deal with controversial topics – in practice there are serious limits to this, especially if the museum can be shown to be challenging even a small part of a powerful and highly-charged national narrative.

(2009: 10)
This case shows that there still exists a tension between the museum as a forum where all groups meet on an equal basis versus a space where conflict is inevitable because it exists as such in the relationship between different communities.

*The museum as a zone of conflict*

Participation of Afrocolombian professionals and consultation was no guarantee for the *Velorios* exhibition to be exempted from criticism and expressions of disagreement. This statement is especially true for the case of a very heterogeneous Black community, or communities to be more precise. Resistance to the exhibition was partially a result of the tensions and political interests of different groups but also a response to the sensitive subject matter that the Museum was dealing with.

One participant mentioned that some of the people in the Committee of Culture of Black, Afrocolombian, Palenquero and Raizal Communities did not think that religious rituals could be brought into the public sphere because it was something intimate, and because it made the history of the communities more painful. We were aware of this resistance and this was the reason why the space was consecrated during the inauguration, as was explained in the second chapter. Attempting to make the museum a sacred space runs against the principle of museums as secular spaces (Dias 2007). The exhibition of sacred objects in museums is not without contestation (Ibid) but that participant’s response to this critique was as follows: “I think our push is only one, these are our own [people] and they have to be in the Museum”.
This conflict brings us to a question that intersects this study in its entirety. Who are we representing marginalized communities for? And, can we respond to the needs of the different constituents? A professor and activist said:

… ¿velorios? (wakes) I’m not going to that. I asked myself, why are they doing an exhibition at the museum of something from the heart, something so private and ceremonious? In any case, this must have significance for our people in Bogotá and people who don’t know [the importance of life and death and its meaning for us]. To go and see this in a museum? I better not go.

She later visited the exhibition when giving a talk at the Museum. She still thought that the exhibition evoked pain and memories that one does not necessarily want to come to terms with. This issue of representing what might be painful for communities will be discussed more fully in the next chapter when we touch on the subject of the memories of enslavement and representation of the painful past as reparation for these groups.

This criticism was done in an atmosphere of dialogue. There was also the case of a young Afrocolombian who respectfully called me to tell me that the altars could not be kept up for so long. When I asked him what other solution we could come to, that did not imply tearing down the exhibition, his response was vague. He said we should give out more information. My question about what to do if the altars were blessed and consecrated to those who die everyday and have no altar did not elicit a response from him. This conversation moved me to consult with Father Emigdio
Cuesta, an Afrocolombian Catholic priest, who did not see a problem in the representation of the altars because he felt that the exhibition recognized the spiritual values of communities that have been historically excluded or made invisible.

Not all criticism was made in the “museum as forum”. Other comments were not made in this constructive environment and were what we can call strategies of opposition without dialogue. A woman who has been very active in the recuperation and diffusion of Afrocolombian heritage led them. She had expressed her disagreement early on and thus we invited her twice to meet with us; however, neither meeting was ever carried out. On the day of the inauguration, she stated “Huele a muerto” (“It smells of a dead body”). On the second weekend of the exhibition, one of the two when I was not present, after the performance of Nelly Mina (a woman from Cauca who has a group of dancers and musicians) had ended in the auditorium, a woman who has a dance group called the Sons of Obatalá and who was not invited to perform, started screaming in the hall. I was not present and therefore cannot quote her directly, but I was told that she was expressing her disapproval of the fact that sacred altars and themes had been placed in the Museum. Standing next to her was the other woman who was at the inauguration. “No saben qué puertas se están abriendo” (You don’t know the doors that are being opened), they both said at different times, meaning that something bad could happen because of the exhibition.

Along the same lines, and perhaps instigated by the same people, an anonymous letter was sent to the Museum one week later. The letter was directed to the anthropologist Jaime Arocha and said that the Orichas (African deities of the Yoruba
Afrocolombian identities and the exhibition religion) condemn him directly. Strangely enough, the museum never received this kind of direct threat. A week after that, a young Rastafarian Afrodesendant apparently went into a trance at the Museum. He had done this before when the sessions of study and preparation were on their way, but this young man was not selected to be one of the people who guided visitors through the exhibition. On September 11, the teacher of the young man who had gone into a trance approached the anthropologist and also criticized him. We also found out that one of the main voices in the choir from Saint Andrews that sang on September 6th did not want to come to the Museum because she had heard that the exhibition was a mockery. For other Afrocolombian people who supported the exhibition, the real sacrilege taking place were the violent deaths occurring in the country, not the exhibit.

There are several explanations regarding these events. One indicates that there are internal rivalries that are related to who is conceded legitimacy and who is invited to participate. And along these lines, these problems also have to do with access to public funding in order to develop projects and of internal criticism because, for some people, certain leaders that are getting the funding do not represent their interests. In the second focus group, there was a disagreement between people who thought that a wider set of organizations had to be called on to participate, and one person who said that the majority of the organizations are only interested in financing “their own pockets”.

Three different people who participated in events or the exhibition mentioned that if people who were in disagreement had organized the exhibition, there would have been no problem. What was not cohesive about the criticism was that in 2008 and
2009, the woman who attacked the exhibition most vehemently received sponsorship from the local government for representing a lumbalú (funerary chanting from Palenque de San Basilio) in the Central Cemetery of Bogotá – where this particular ceremony would not be seen; hence, she was also representing a ritual of mourning and death out of its “proper” context.

The issue of temple versus forum where different voices, narratives, and communities can meet and be heard is best understood through the concept of “contact zone” developed by James Clifford. Clifford uses the notion to explain how people traditionally separated by conditions of conflict, inequality, coercion, and asymmetrical relations of power come into contact in a “safe,” democratic space. In contact zones there is a continuous negotiation of borders and centers where interaction takes place. Clifford explains:

…the multiplication of contexts becomes less about discovery and more about negotiation, less a matter of creative curators having good ideas, doing research, consulting indigenous experts, and more a matter of responding to actual pressures and calls for representation in a culturally complex civil society.

(1999: 450)

If museums are able to become such spaces, the notion of education changes and, instead, museums will be grappling with issues such as dialogue, alliances, inequality, and translation (Ibid).
This notion feeds the perspective of creating a forum out of a national museum where exchange occurs. In this scenario, the museum works to undermine fragmentation, though it is not interested in creating unity but rather something such as a market for ideas. Though the “contact zone” has been widely embraced, Dibley (2005) has questioned Clifford’s arguments. His critique is centered on the notion of redeeming the museum from its exclusionary practices. For Dibley, dialogue and participation of communities “is insufficiently acute to the ways in which prior techniques subjectivized those that are now the loci of resistance to, and reform by, museological operations” (2005: 7). His argument is that the museum does not have a natural democratic ethos, especially as it pertains to the legacies of colonialism. It is clear that not all subjects have access to the egalitarian ideal that the museum-as-democracy theory suggests.

There are additional queries. Stevens’s argument is centered on museums as “zones of conflict” that may actually cause or exacerbate rivalry rather than dialogue. According to her study, there is little research on how working with one group might deprive another to equal access to the museum. In the particular case she explores, different cultural groups made demands about inclusion, which resulted in exhibitions at the Musée Dauphinois, in Grenoble, France, but also involved aggression in acts of racism against the members of groups included. Working with minority groups was not only about narration but also about recognition and self-empowerment. Therefore, processes involve a wide scope of emotions and participants that might not be prepared to come into contact with each other. She proposes that the museum space be looked at as a kaleidoscope “in which a play of perspectives generates complex responses that perhaps begin to break the cycle of
recognition’s restrictive binaries” (2007: 37) as the model of one community and the museum is further complicated by other communities and visitors.

Realistically, the action of embracing and inclusion can never be all-encompassing. The museum-as-democracy, in the words of Dibley:

> creates a space of representation that, at least in principle, has been democratized in that the occupancy of the position of Man –based on ‘his’ universality– is openly and freely available to all. But it also creates an insatiable politics in which any museum display can always be held accountable for representational inadequacies on the grounds of any particular social exclusion –be it gendered, classed, racial or some other pattern of marginalization– and thus in need of supplementation.

(2005: 11)

Indeed, national museums have to deal with their own limitations. In this sense, though the institution may strive to be more democratic and representative, an ideal state of affairs is utopian. But perhaps, this is the strength of such institutions. The museum is a field in which to play out the soundness and the inadequacies of the public sphere. In this sense, Littler recognizes that “consensus will always be provisional and conflictual” (2005: 18) in a space where disagreeing experiences are brought together. In this bringing together, do we silence antagonism and domesticate differences? Can we only accept differences that are like our own? Do we homogenize differences? Is this the museum as a forum or do we create the image of the museum as a forum that embraces democracy as the safe place where all can
express themselves, but in reality looks to invalidate the arguments of the opposition to make sure that one’s own are still correct?

**THE EXHIBIT AS A MIRROR**

I will now turn to issues of reception. Toño, the husband of Leocadia Mosquera, one of the Afrocolombian teachers who had been working with us in the exhibition project as part of the production team, mentioned several positive aspects of the exhibition at the luncheon we had a couple of days before the exhibition closed. For him, the exhibition was “alive” and thus had acted as a mirror in which Black people could see themselves and that was why it produced so much emotion: laughter; crying; even rage. He said, had it been a failure, the exhibit then would not have elicited feelings or moved people. It was important to have had the opportunity to share the experience with other Black communities and regarded the space as a bridge that had integrated visitors of different backgrounds.

In this first part of the analysis, I will use Toño’s notion of the exhibition as mirror in order to explore the ways in which an exhibit asserts identities and how these are used to put forth collective rights. Such assertion of previously marginalized identities is not uncommon to post-colonial Europe (Woodward 1997) and is tightly related to identity politics around the world, where “new kinds of social mobilization [appear] based upon various collective identities that were previously hidden, suppressed or neglected –both by the dominant culture of liberal society and by the agenda of the political left” (Kenny 2004: 3). These claims are not solely “cultural” but include “particular battles against injustice, and issues forth in the common
ambition to challenge the boundaries and conventional content of politics” (Ibid.: 4). For Pearce, heritage “becomes a representation of beliefs about self and community which nest in with other related belief systems to create a holistic structure that ramifies through all the areas –politics, economics, use of resources– where social life touches us as individuals” (2000: 59).

It is in this reaffirmation of identity that a connection with citizenship might take place, because experiences of suffering and domination as well as of emancipation make up identities. In this sense, feelings and emotions are also an integral part of citizenship. It is not only the known body but also the felt body that experiences subordination. Groups such as the Afrocolombians who have been submitted to particular injustices, such as kidnapping, torture, subordination, abuse, exclusion, will look to this particular past in order to craft their identities, relate to the nation and define their citizenship. This collective identity is not solely based on “positive” feelings of belonging but also of victimhood or injustice (Delanty 2003).

In this next section, the exhibit as mirror is discussed in relation to three themes: individual and social memory; the space of legitimation and self-exclusion from the exhibition.

**Individual memories**

Many adults in the focus groups described the impact of the exhibition in terms of the revitalisation they experienced of their own life stories: they remembered their place of origin or their childhood. It was also an opportunity for them to bring
family, especially their children, and show them Black culture to foster pride
“because many people have whitened themselves, and they don’t feel Black, and we have to feel Black in order to be proud of our colour, we are human, we are people”.
The same woman who I quoted completed her opinion by highlighting why she had liked the exhibit: “because it makes me remember who I am really, remember my customs”. Along the same lines, a university docent, added:

I left here, the museum, singing my chants, and wondering how this has impacted my projects as a teacher…. [I]t was a chance for me to bring my students and tell them that academia is possible from an indigenous and Afrocolombian’s [perspective].

Most of the adults in the focus groups were not originally from Bogotá, but had been living in the city for many years. Their children were either born or had grown up in Bogotá and hence were not familiar with such rituals, seldom practiced in this context.

The exhibition was a chance to remember the rituals of their hometowns but also specific people who had passed away and their legacies, an opportunity to understand the behaviour of their mothers or grandmothers when they spoke of traditions, or even to learn about things they did not know, though they felt a certain familiarity with the traditions in the exhibition. A teacher of biology in the first group said:

I felt nostalgia and incertitude, I felt the people, very real, I felt they were there… the sounds transported me to the place where the ritual takes place, a
ritual that is alive… even the smells, the smells of the Black people, us the Black people, the noises we make when we are together, the laughter.

In these instances, coming in contact with heritage that has been lost or forgotten was an opportunity for producing an identity in the re-telling of a past and a present (Hall in Woodward 1997). This action is important in the case of communities that have suffered alterations of their physical settings, such as displacement, which “erases their history, it reduces the role of the past and place in a community’s identity, condemning a way of life” (Hewison 1999: 159). Such a sense of recuperation of an identity is also present in the case of the Okiek portraits exhibition which showed in the National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian) described by Kratz (2002), where visitors were able to assimilate the quotidian to their own family experiences, even if these were from the past.

Despite the positive effect of recuperating the past, we should be aware that this idealization creates nostalgia, which “always involves looking back, idealizing certain aspects of the past that crystallize an ambivalence toward the present” (Ibid.:183). Such ambivalence is related to the difficulties of the present: fragmentation of communities; violence; displacement; as well as the result of racism and domination on memory. For Jordan and Weedon, “Colonialism and racism, as physical and cultural domination, force their victims to –literally– lose their memory” (1995: 299). Though the people participating in the focus groups might not be living in difficult circumstances, they were all involved in political or grass-roots organizations or in education, hence not disengaged from the reality of their peers, and well aware of the difficulties of Black communities.
These interpretations by Black people remind us that identity is marked by symbols embodied in the objects and the altars. These were not merely things, but managed to evoke experiences, knowledge, cultural legacies and emotions. Newman and McLean bring this issue forth in their investigation on identity and museums in the United Kingdom. They found that visitors actively make and remake their identities, and manipulate what they find in an exhibition according to their needs:

Such a view is supported by Lee, who states that ‘people invest a certain amount of their self in material objects as a way of managing their sense of place, social position and identity’, and by Fiske, who suggests that ‘commodities can be used by the consumer to construct meanings of self’.

(Newman and McLean 2006: 62)

This finding leads us to think that communities that heavily base their patrimony on oral and intangible structures also depend on objects and tangible heritage.

We can also get a sense that the relationship to material objects is emotional and affective; they are inextricably social and need to be shared. Thus, the exhibition was not only about the self finding markers of a recognized identity in cultural heritage but also about sharing this experience with others, such as family or other Black people. For one of the young guides working in the exhibition, one of the positive aspects of the exhibition was that it enabled him to talk to people and gain insight from Black people directly: “Julian’s grandmother [from Guapi, one of the regions represented] told me many things that I was not able to learn in the study course.
People from Nariño and Tumaco gave me information that I had not found in the bibliography”. Hence the identity-reaffirming experience was extended to incorporate other Black or Afrocolombian communities because it was an opportunity to see the great diversity within the communities and a possibility to exchange knowledge.

For the younger generation in the last focus group, the experience of the exhibition was a mixture of affirmation of knowledge, related to previous experience, and completely new information due to the fact that they had grown up distanced from these rituals. Other young people, such as an Afrocolombian dancer interviewed during the exhibition, remarked that she could remember these rituals from her childhood but had never stopped to think about different phases to the rituals. The museum, then, is a site of dissemination, categorization and recreation of knowledge. When I asked the participants in a diagnostic meeting in 2007 what the word *museum* evoked for them, one of the younger leaders said:

*Identity*. In the sense that we know what there is in a place and we identify with that…. In present times, there are many things that distract us and our parents are not attending their historic role…. our parents are not fulfilling their role of accompaniment.

In her view, younger people are not necessarily disinterested but rather the older generations are not passing along their knowledge and for her the museum would be that place where young people could recognize ancestral and historic knowledge.
Social memory

Afrodescendents in the focus groups not only touched on the issues that were relevant to them as individuals but also as a community that shares experiences and meaning, “and to see how beliefs generate a point of encounter, in a positive way”, as one of the participants remarked. Individual memory then becomes social by speaking about it, by sharing remembrances with other people (Fentress and Wickham 2003). Social memory is described by Fentress and Wickham as the process of recognition and remembrance as well as the communication of that which is remembered.

There were several layers in which the exhibition permitted an elaboration of social memory. The first was constructed in the production process with the group of Afrodescendents in Bogotá and the people in the regions who remembered their past and their present day rituals and communicated this knowledge, thus creating a shared experience. The second layer was the assembly of the exhibition at the National Museum where each person or group who came from the seven regions represented an altar. For some of the people who assembled the altars, what was being constructed was a representation in the museum, and for others the altars were real. This layer is particularly significant because social memory is transmitted via the enactment of rituals (Fentress and Wickham 2003: 70). Visitors constructed the third level of social memory as they shared their remembrances and experiences with other visitors and with family and friends (Afrodescendents and non-Afro). And a fourth level was elaborated in the focus group discussions when Afrodescendents shared their individual experiences with each other and myself in a more formal
environment. In the group dynamic, new meanings about the exhibition were constructed.

A well-respected man from Guapi touched on the issue of social memory:

all of this leads me to think that peoples without memory will have to disappear, the significance [of the exhibition] that I find is that a space for this memory has been opened in this city that is so aggressive towards us; it has its symbols and heroes that have spoken poorly about us. This is a space to find each other again.

His view coincides with a therapeutic understanding of social memory that creates a sense of community, based on a shared identity (Newman and McLean 2006). Bringing this discussion to present day Colombia, social memory can be seen as a remedy to solve the lack of social networks or those that might have been torn upon arrival in Bogotá or due to discrimination or racism, as well as the present day harsh living conditions of these communities. In that respect, the loss of traditions constitutes a real threat to these communities, as the exhibition itself pointed out. Adults were concerned that knowledgeable men and women were passing away. Hence, some of the participants thought that in smaller towns they should replicate the exhibit so as to contribute to avoiding the loss of traditions and memory.

Newman and McLean have investigated the impact of exhibitions on creating an arena for social exclusion. In their findings, they highlight:
the ability of the exhibitions and community development projects to make the participants and visitors feel more positive about themselves. It was possible to identify that respondents were, in some cases, constructing or appropriating a particular identity in response to the context that they found themselves in…. A socially constructed identity emphasized the positive aspects of the local area and ignored the difficulties it suffered from. This could be seen as defensive identity activity enabling them, to a certain degree, to deal with their experience of exclusion.

(2004: 493)

Similarly, Black visitors to the exhibition remembered the positive aspects of rituals and their communities as an element of resistance to historic violence and discrimination. In this context, identity here is about survival. Histories of violence, suffering and oppression remind us that many times “people do make their own identities but not in circumstances of their own choosing and from resources they inherit that will always be incomplete” (Gilroy 1997: 341).

**Legitimating groups and heritage**

For Afrocolombian visitors and non-visitors in the focus groups, inclusion and identification with contents of the exhibition at the individual and group level had further significance because of the space where these processes were taking place: “I liked finding elements of my little universe that I had not considered were going to be elevated to the category of museum [content]”, said one focus group participant. The museum is a public space that sanctions practices and includes an “inventory” of national heritage by extracting history “from denigrated everyday life and its
restaging or display in certain sanctioned sites, events, images and conceptions” (Wright 1999: 134).

This view of the museum as a space of legitimation was reinforced by Toño during our luncheon, as he explained how practices could change from being penalized to “legalized” as was the case of Alabaos, the sacred chants that are part of funerary rituals. These chants, which were included in the exhibition, are not only a marker of a particular Afro-identity but of resistance, since they were, for the most part, prohibited, “and now they are in the Museum.” Toño’s argument is seconded by a young student of communication in the second focus group, who said:

I liked that this part of Black Colombian culture was made visible…[T]he fact that the National Museum gave an ample space to this theme in a way validates and legitimises the vision of life and death that Black communities have.

What he was pointing to was the idea that a museum not only constructs heritage as valuable but also ascribes validity to different cosmologies and practices. These comments are in tune with Kratz’s view on museum exhibitions that rely on “[I]nstitutional approval and investment of space, personnel, and other resources [that] lend certain kinds of legitimacy, expertise, and associations to the values and perspectives formulated” (2002: 92).

Following Wright’s idea that “what survives is usually what it is intended to survive” (1999: 140), collecting or exhibiting in the museum representations of groups that
have been silenced in historical narratives is undermined by a lack of equivalence in types of heritage, where what is ephemeral or quotidian is competing against more traditional notions of tangible heritage. The altars, for instance, are ephemeral; thus, the challenge becomes how to make permanent what is temporary.

One of the teachers who participated in the production process mentioned the importance of “using” the exhibition to start looking behind at that which has been westernized and have a “second reading on origins”. The connection with the African past has become of utmost importance to many Afroamerican groups.

A case of interest is the legitimating of Candomblé objects in Brazil because, as happens in Colombia, for some Black communities, the Catholic saints are hiding African Yoruba deities. Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religious practice that was born out of syncretism. In Salvador de Bahía, objects related to Candomblé were included in the collection of the Historic and Geographic Institute of Brazil at the end of the 19th century as part of police raids, which in theory persecuted “false medicine” and were intended to finish off the traces of “Black fetishism” in order to have a modern society (Sansi-Roca 2007: 98). These objects were also collected as proof of African resistance but not as a positive identity, but rather as markers of the inferiority of the “Black race”. In the 1990s, the Society for the Protection and Defence of Afro-Brazilian Cults demanded that these objects were not shown as part of a criminal nor pathological and racist discourse. Instead of demanding that the pieces be returned to the houses of ritual, they were included as art pieces and as artefacts of cultural worth. Though these objects were incorporated in the Afro-Brazilian Museum, they lack the context of enslavement, the system that gives life to
Candomblé. A particular discourse is also constructed by the elites of Candomblé practice where private museums are used to legitimate an element of purity of Africanness in the AfroBrazilian cultural context.

This example points to how museums can validate heritage but also how it can be used by communities to change the “illegitimate” status of certain objects that had been considered inferior. Though in Colombia there is no parallel with the Brazilian case, the Velorios exhibition acted in similar ways by including in the museum objects that were banned at some point such as drums or practices that were outlawed such as the spiritual chants called Alabaos.

The case of the objects in the Brazilian context is also interesting because it shows several players –the State being only one of them– involved in the process of legitimating heritage. Nevertheless, the role of the State in Colombia is given great weight and though not everything can be reduced to “official heritage”, there has been a trend to institutionalize heritage as a way to protect it and find funding for tourism development. Communities are aiming to present their local intangible heritages to be sanctioned as “national” and, in a second instance, to be considered and included in UNESCO’s World Heritage List. There are contradictory views on the profits of this process. Colombian anthropologist Jaime Arocha (2006) is very critical of what he calls an “ethnoboom” which is carried out by the government and private enterprises to exalt (and cannibalize) the intangible heritage of ethnic peoples, while the expropriation of their territorial patrimony is taking place. Hall, Mason and Baveystock argue that heritage is a discourse by which the state induces citizenship in evoking attitudes and forms of conduct (Anico and Peralta 2009) but
this citizenship remains partial, precisely because it does not necessarily embrace other political or economic spheres and it can create further exclusions within the communities.

Other uses of heritage include identity politics, as Woodward (1997) and others argue. Though different actors exploit discourses about Colombia’s multiculturalism, narratives of difference have not necessarily overtaken hegemonic ones but “simply means that these narratives have become increasingly negotiated and multivocal, challenging the unilinearity and universality of the modern self” (Anico and Peralta 2009: 2). In this context, I would like to briefly mention the case of Palenque de San Basilio, a Black community that is recognized as a bastion of resistance due to the fact that it has managed to preserve a unique Creole language as well as other cultural assets, and a highly elaborate discourse as a free territory since colonial times. A group of academics and palenqueros elaborated the documentation to support the project submission to be considered patrimony of humanity and Palenque de San Basilio was included in UNESCO’s list in 2005. In the last few years, this recognition resulted in positive projects for the community, tourism as well as profits for outsiders such as chefs or music producers. We can argue that a series of institutions and people contributed to the legitimating of their heritage.

The impact of this cultural boom has not been measured. Since the time of the exhibition, we were aware that there were different factions in San Basilio with perspectives on heritage that differed. A competition for recognition and visibility also occurs within the larger Afrodescendent community. These fractures can be explained because heritage legitimises and excludes other Afrocolombian
expressions that have not been labeled as “official” or “true” heritage. Returning to the example of Palenque de San Basilio, a newspaper article (“Palenqueras falsas aprovechan ahora la fama de las originales, in El Tiempo, September 22, 2008) described the disturbances amongst Black women in Cartagena because women from Palenque de San Basilio were claiming that others who did not share their place of origin could not call themselves *palenqueras*, women who make a living from selling artisan candy. What this discussion means is that a small group is entitled to particular cultural benefits. The image of a palenquera is well entrenched and constitutes a way of making a living. It is also exploited by commercial use, as in the programs of the country’s official brand *Colombia is passion*.

The exhibition also created inclusions and exclusions since it could only fit seven different communities, and this was also a matter of discussion. For a university docent, part of the (negative) impact was not seeing the practices of her own hometown. Such criticism was also made in the presentation of the project to the Committee of Culture of Black, Afrocolombian, Palenquero and Raizal Communities because Cali, one of the main cities with a high percentage of Afrodescendants was not included. The problem arises when exclusions are read as some cultures being more “authentic” than others, or more “Afro” than others, though our intention was not to create such parameters but rather to include a wide array of different communities that were chosen because of the availability of sources, of previous research conducted and also the limitations of the gallery space.

In fieldwork conducted by Samuel Thomas, at the time a Masters student at Oxford University, he narrates the experience of sharing the exhibition’s catalogue with a
leader of an Afrocolombian community in Patía Norte (Cauca). One of the leaders is quoted as saying: “The morenos in Chocó and Nariño have preserved their African culture much better than we have.” Thomas discusses how not being able to recognize similar African traces in the community’s own traditions creates a sort of scale of “Afroness”, and he asks: “Should the San Bernardeños really consider themselves less Afro on the basis of an exhibition that seized on a particular, and seemingly dominant, theme of research mobilised by a particular research body? Less Afro than any other Negro in Colombia for that matter?” (Thomas 2008). Such a reading and experience of the exhibition was something we did not account for and is, of course, problematic for future projects that try to create an encompassing narrative. I wanted to highlight, by means of these examples, that heritage can create a competition by political factions that “lobby to have their memories and messages sanctioned by government policy” (De la Torre and Avrami 2000: 9).

Self-exclusion?

The exhibition included, by incorporating Black and Afrocolombian heritage, but also excluded subgroups inside a very heterogeneous community. In this scenario, we can ask: Do we come to the museum to see ourselves, those who are like us, or do we come to see the unknown, “others”? Identity encompasses action: “the action of making and being part of” (Anico and Peralta 2009: 1) but is also crafted in difference, finding others that are not like us. A short interview during the exhibition with an Afrodescendent woman from Tumaco who had been living in Bogotá for

---

3 Thomas (2008) discusses the use of the “Afro” terminology and puts forth an interesting debate: “It might seem that only through acceptance of the fashionable racial order of the moment is recognition of rights acquired”. He also questions whether that terminology is a sign of white dominance since he did not register events related to the slave trade in the tales and memories of the Black people themselves.
more than 11 years was of interest because she had come to the museum to look for “strange things” and instead found her culture (interview 7). She thought that it was rather redundant to see her own customs, though expressed that it was nice for people to know the culture of the Afrocolombians. She had come with her child to do homework, and the little girl was in awe of one of the altars and the different dances. By “accident” the little girl might have found something of her own ancestry.

When working on the project, we had assumed that Afrocolombians living in Bogotá would come to the museum to see their practices—though Black people in Bogotá do not have a museum-visiting culture—and to find a place where they could meet, since in studies it was been highlighted that Afrocolombians in Bogotá lack such communal spaces (Secretaría de Gobierno de Bogotá 2002). We also knew that the vast majority of the visitors would be mestizos not only because they represent a larger percentage of the population but also because they are the majority of museum visitors. We certainly did not predict that there would be so few visitors who identified themselves as Afrodescendent, Black, Afrocolombian as we examined in chapter two. What does self-exclusion entail for the future of the museum, in terms of citizenship?

Though we advanced in securing those rights in elaborating representations, this question opens up a reflexive process to think about the exercise of rights of visitors as well as their perceived need to see museum visiting as part of their culture and an important element in strengthening of identity. Apart from the fact that introducing museum culture to a population as a new activity and habit is much harder than we anticipated, there are other elements to consider. For people like the woman from
Tumaco described above, the exhibition was good for others to see; in that sense, some Black people might have heard about the exhibition, but avoided visiting because they were not interested in seeing “themselves”. One of the focus group participants questioned the attendance of Black people at the events: “I looked for Black faces, I go to the concerts, and I was the only Black, where are the Black people?… I think it’s also us, it’s not only a matter of saying that the spaces are not available; we have to look for them”.

I speculated that the subject and the sensitive feelings it raised could have been a factor for the poor numbers of Afrocolombian attendees. A focus group participant expressed that the title, though it tried to include both elements of life and death, could have put people off. The resulting title did not please many of the members of the production team but it was decided that non-Afro audiences would be more attracted by it. Focus group participants also pointed out that a major reason for low attendance was a lack of information, and a poor job of inviting Black communities in Bogotá. Though there was information sent to organizations and pamphlets distributed, they were insufficient. One of the guides noted that on the day of the inauguration she found “the same Black people” and, thus, if people were not aware of the exhibition, how could they have participated?

García Canclini (1995) discusses the lack of interest of lower income sectors of the population in exhibitions, theater, or experimental cinema, as something not only related to education and a weak symbolic capital to appreciate these messages (citing Bourdieu), but also the fidelity of these groups to the cultural offers they have where these people are inserted. Family, neighborhood and work shape and control
consumption tastes and expenses. To the lack of habit of visiting museums, we have to add the historic exclusion that these communities have faced in all instances of national culture. It is clear these processes cannot be altered with one exhibition. And it is equally difficult to change the perception excluded communities have of a national museum. For Bond, “members of minority groups may choose to exclude themselves from the identity associated with the majority” (2006: 611).

Another reason that came up in the focus groups regarding the poor attendance of Afrocolombian visitors is the living conditions of these communities in Bogotá. According to the study led by Arocha Mi gente en Bogotá (Secretaría de Gobierno de Bogotá 2002), a vast percentage of the Black population has a low income. For a prominent man from Guapi this is a big impediment: “It’s very difficult to go to the museum when people have not been able to meet their basic needs, they are looking for survival…. Until society guarantees these basic needs, museums will continue to be spaces for the elites”. A further discussion in the first focus group led to the conclusion that the museum had to go to the communities, it had to come closer to the people and involve schools more actively: “Here we don’t have a culture of museums, and this has to be mobilized inside the communities”.

THE EXHIBITION AS A LENS

Although heritage is a marker of identity through which we can reaffirm our sense of belonging, it also constitutes a vehicle of communication with other identities. In this sense, exhibitions are not exclusively an arena to reaffirm an individual or collective
identity but also to be seen by others who are outsiders. Citizenship is closely related to this notion of “reciprocal recognition” (Martín Barbero 2007), “that is, the right to inform and be informed, to talk and to be listened to”, actions which are necessary in order to participate in the decisions that concern a collective (Ibid: 29). For Martín Barbero, one of the forms of exclusion from citizenship is precisely the dispossession of these rights, to be seen and heard, which constitute the equivalent of existing or counting socially. For this scholar, what minorities demand is not so much representation but recognition, being visible socially through images, and being recognized in their difference (Ibid.). Exhibitions and museums are sites for such visibility. How, then, did Afrodescendents discuss recognition? Did they believe that the exhibition was a space in which to be heard?

In this part of the analysis of how Afrocolombians interpreted the exhibition, I seek to highlight how cultural heritage is caught between two main poles. On one hand is the need to reassert difference, based on ethnicity, and on the other is the need to be included as part of a larger community; in this case, the nation. There is a third transnational reference, constituted by a supra-identity that is present in people who recognize themselves as Black or Afrocolombian, labelled by Gilroy (1997) as the Diaspora identity. This last tension is seen in the relevance that international figures –especially North American ones, such as Barack Obama during this period– have for local communities. The tension exists also in the notion that African roots are the same, regardless of where people come from, which was made apparent in the comments of one focus group participant when he said “we are the same, universal”, referring to Black people.
The exhibition as a lens is discussed in three parts: stereotypes and knowledge; representation of culture; and fear of patrimony being turned into merchandise.

**Perception of ignorance and stereotypes**

The young Black students were keen to critique ignorance and stereotypes more than other participants. One young man said that he was impacted by the fact that there was an “exhibition to show something different from what is seen in the media and in textbooks used for the education of all Colombians”. He went on to comment that schoolbooks reproduce stereotypes of indigenous and Black people. He was a guide to the exhibition and therefore considered it important to create a dialogue with visitors. His work with the political collective is to identify forms of racism in universities: “Fortunately, the exhibition aims to make visible, and in a first stance, change the images…. At the end [of the guided visit] the [visitors] looked at me in a different way”.

The young man in the third focus group who opposed the exhibition because he considered that altars could not be kept up for more than nine nights expressed concern about people’s ability to understand practices that are different from their own, though they are localized in the context of Catholicism. For him, before representing such images, people have to be informed: “First, it is important to know and understand what certain things contain”. In his worries, he is expressing the fear of being misunderstood by audiences.

These young people were very much aware that there are images that circulate widely and repeatedly which do not represent them. In the words of Hall, these
images reduce black culture to a few essentials, fixed by nature, and simplified, as well as integrating into mainstream that which is considered proper and rejecting what does not fit in. Stereotypes are about power: “One aspect of this power, according to Dyer, is ethnocentrism – the application of the norms of one’s own culture to that of others” (Hall 1997c: 258). Kratz brings up the question of “How do we know and show who we are and who others are? How do others know us and how might such impressions be changed?” For her, questions of identity and difference are deeply related to existing cultural values: “If exhibitions are occasions and means through which such issues are explored, they might also become opportunities both to recreate and reformulate identities, values, and social or political priorities and allegiances” (2002: 3).

Predominantly young, highly political Blacks think that cultural stereotypes are a strong barrier for recognition and overcoming discrimination. They hear people speak of Indians, for instance, in pejorative terms. One young woman considered that this was due to ignorance, “but it’s the fault of this society”. She also spoke of a recent student meeting where a girl was called mestiza and was offended: “I explained that using terms such as negritos (diminutive word for Blacks) was the same. She understood this [how language carries discriminatory practice] thanks to this discussion”. The young woman also commented on the inauguration of the exhibition. On that evening, entrance to the Museum was not restricted. We received about 700 people simultaneously, both Afro and not. One of the visitors wanted to see and hear music and dance: “She was desperate [to see] the negritos dancing and playing…. in the guided visits I told people it was not only music and the exotic…. People in the guided visits, who came to the exhibit during regular hours left with
another vision.” She also mentioned that it was difficult for non-Black people to understand the ceremonies for children who die, “People were shocked by this because it’s so different”.

On the issues of whether we can create an arena for cross-cultural understanding, and whether we can truly grasp cultural systems that are so foreign to us without imposing our own standards, a university docent asked during the focus group: “Why didn’t I invite my night school students? I wondered whether they had the capacity to respect us. It has to do with what I experience in the institution. When they speak poorly on what’s Black, I question them”. Kratz argues that inaccurate representations are not only a matter of information available: “Stereotypes are vexingly resilient and unresponsive to empirical disproof and experience” (2002: 105). Nevertheless, she adds, for those being represented, exhibitions can challenge stereotypes not only of that which is represented but also of what is “worthy” of being in a museum or even a museum’s function.

Such discussions have also been at the centre of museums that represent other groups that have been marginalized, such as American Indians. On the subject, Lonetree argues that postmodernist, postcolonial and Indigenous museology has to be clear to visitors on what images it wants to portray: “Given that the public carries with them so many stereotypes about who we are as Native people, isn’t it critical that the museum staff engage those issues right away?”(2008: 313) When the message is left open for interpretation, there is a threat that audiences will read them according to the knowledge they bring, and not necessarily question their schemes or transform them, as we explored in the last chapter.
Despite the criticism towards stereotyping, we must be aware that sometimes Black people use them to their advantage. An example of how representations that are critical coexist with those that play with ideas that white people have is the inauguration of the exhibition. The ceremony consisted of speeches by a representative of the National University and the Museum’s director, followed by the religious component led consecutively by a Baptist Pastor, Catholic priests and a “Babalao” (father of the secret in Yoruba). The program, put together by Father Cuesta, Arocha and myself, was designed to consecrate the exhibition space. Officiates were chosen in order to reflect the diversity of spiritual beliefs and cultures within the Afrodescendent communities. Invitations were sent out, as with any other inauguration, but the information also started circulating on the Internet, which could account for a larger turnout than expected. Anyone who wished or who could fit into the entrance hall was welcomed.

This last part of the ceremony was meant to honour the African past, but on that evening, the “Babalao” – a Cuban doctor knowledgeable on matters of African deities – performed a “cleansing ritual” inside the exhibition playing on stereotypes related to “magic” or “witchcraft”, thus attracting white and mestizo visitors who were fascinated. The apparent purpose of this procedure was not to point to voids in representation, or to critique the current state of affairs, but rather to create a more marketable notion of spirituality that can be easily accessed by all.

In sharp contrast to this performance that confirmed people’s expectations, Father Emigdio Cuesta, an Afrocolombian Catholic priest, led us to the most powerful part
of the ceremony when he asked all the people in the room (around 700) to put up our fists and respond “We are present” to lines such as: “Against the deaths of the innocent”, “Against the false policies of the State for our people”, “Against war and violence”, “Against discrimination and corruption”, “Against forced displacement”, “Against historic exclusion”, “Against the presence of armed forces in our territories”, “Against indifference”. The sight of this was quite amazing because saying such phrases out loud forced participants to question their own representations of Black people as well as their role in changing discriminatory practices. It also had an astounding symbolic meaning due to the fact that we were standing on the site of exclusion, in an institution that is part of the State, crying against the status quo.

**Essentialism as a defence mechanism**

When groups discuss stereotypes, always negatively, they also have in mind what the “correct” ways of representation should be. As we discussed earlier, communities that have been subjected to difficult conditions may tend to idealize their traditions. How we choose to portray our identities and the historical depth of these “is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (Hall in Woodward 1997: 53). In the case of Kratz’s exhibition of the Okiek portraits, the group emphasized more traditional themes, “recognized such photographs as prime means of exoticizing, providing ways to emphasize strangeness, difference, and distance from themselves” (2002: 154). Other analyses on identity and exhibitions confirm that:

It is possible to identify a commonality between the imagined communities constructed by respondents and essentialist forms of identity that do not
reflect the complexities of modern life but present a simpler, more straightforward identity with which to make links.


In the case of *Velorios*, the first focus group discussions revealed a tension that was not seen in the groups in which younger people participated. Two people highlighted as a negative component of the exhibition the inclusion of “rancheras”, popular music originally from Mexico that is not a product of Afrocolombian culture but, as happens with other music, has been integrated into non-traditional repertoires. For one of the schoolteachers, “If they sing the Dario Gómez [ranchera song], they are not Black like me”. Other female participants compared the traditional music, games and displays with this music and said: “I wondered whether I was out of date?”

For these women, including such music in the exhibition was considered a destabilising factor. In the process of reaffirming a certain identity against another one, internal differences can be problematic. And what people do is “restore the place to order, bring back the normal state of affairs. The retreat of many cultures towards ‘‘closure’ against foreigners, intruders, aliens and ‘others’ is part of the same processes of purification” (Hall 1997c: 236). Recovering a “pure” identity is important for the present and is more easily homogenised in the face of possible conflict. The teacher who brought up the issue at the meeting reaffirmed this observation:

I saw it as dissonant because I wanted to see that which creates difference from the other. I think rancheras are disastrous, and one cannot link them to
what is essential….Rancheras are not spiritual, for me this has no sense, because I don’t see them as part of my culture.

Her view was also that rancheras could be related to mafia groups and thus were not appropriate in the setting of the exhibition.

Not all people were in agreement. A historian who is known for examining representations of Black people in schoolbooks said that she did not think the rancheras were there as a negative element, and remembered that her father listened to diverse music at burials:

I think that contemporaneous times make this phenomenon arrive, and it’s going to cross our territories. When I was in the plains I was listening to joropo, and saying this is not Afro. And then I asked myself: Which Afros? What are the essentialisms, what Afros are we talking about? The Afro with his drum?

One of the guides said that what he liked was finding similarities between different religious practices and syncretism behind Catholic images. These two views contrast with a need to erase internal differences, and the notion that “unpolluted” characteristics have to be shared by all members of a group (Woodward 1997).

For Gilroy, placing identity as “natural” and predating history and culture has the consequence that it becomes:
part of our fixed essential being, persisting from time immemorial without significant change or alteration. Appeals to identity of this kind, which conceive it as so fundamental and immutable, represent a turning way, a retreat inwards, from the difficult political and moral questions which the issue of identity poses.

(1997: 310)

At the same time that some groups might be retreating into “safe” and “uncontaminated” notions of culture, a growing body of research is looking to understand identity formation across gender, race and sexuality. For Stevenson, “multiculturalism needs to move beyond simplistic assumptions in respect of the ways that individual and group identity become constructed” (2002: 4.1) in order to avoid essentialising differences with simple categories.

The question of how cultural institutions prioritize representations as the exercise of collective rights remains open and entails dangers of closing up identities. Gros outlines this issue for indigenous communities, which ultimately applies to other ethnic groups. Essentialism brings dangers such as internal fractures “between those that appeal to tradition as an unquestionable order and those who want to take their place as individuals in a wider society” (2000: 361). How can the more traditional markers of identity converse with change and modernity without fixing identities or disposing of ancient ways? And does ethnicity have to close itself, or can it be conceived in other terms that include gender, age, sexuality, etc.?
Resistance and commercialisation of culture

Despite the fact that many of the participants in the focus groups considered the placing of traditional symbols of their communities in a public space like the museum as a positive action, it was also considered dangerous. For one of the elders: this theme that was placed in the museum has a problem, it’s a delicate theme; it’s related to resistance but also to the fight against modernization….I deducted that there are things that are there but cannot be transmitted. I’m afraid of this society that commercialises everything; how do we manage so that this is not marketable?

This concern is not without evidence. The act of placing the rituals in the museum already modified them (De la Torre and Avrami 2000: 9). Brazilian researcher Jose Jorge de Carvahlo examines the appropriation and cannibalisation (consumption) of Afroamerican culture by White and Black entrepreneurs both in the countries where cultural symbols are produced and where they are consumed. For De Carvahlo (2005), the greatest problem concerning the exposition and commercial appropriation of Afroamerican culture is related to ritualised or sacred traditions. Both White and Black artists cannibalise these traditions by recording and selling music taken out of its ritualised context.

Syncretism and the ability of communities to negotiate their religious beliefs with the Catholic religion imposed on them is a sign of resistance. Nevertheless, De Carvahlo thinks that the expropriation of symbolic forms that used to be closed to and protected from outsiders can be detrimental to religious traditions. These traditions have to be protected against commercialisation. There is, though, a way in which
these institutions of African origin can reach others who are not acquainted with these traditions: to preserve such traditions, there is a need to preserve them as institutions – with their protagonists – and not build a museum with “dead masks” that were once used in these rituals.

This phenomenon was, according to participants, a fear that some of the Black people had mentioned. The young musician who had disagreed with the exhibition claimed:

All the expressions of African descent are the purest. When I went to Brazil, I could identify that there are rituals that have been completely commercialised. Their significance and religiosity are being lost. When I saw the exhibition, I had a horrible shock. I thought that in Colombia there was still respect because these things have a when, a where and a why. When I arrived, I thought ‘this should not be here’.

For him, what was in the exhibition was precious. There was a need, in his mind, to preserve it as it was. “If we want to show what we have, we have to show this ourselves… and for our benefit”. Hence, there is a need to protect the knowledge that is transmitted. He was very critical of African-Americans and Afrobrazilians precisely because he saw that they had “sold” their culture. His concerns also mirror De Carvahlo’s critique. For this researcher, Afroamerican culture that is brought into the mainstream has a danger of being depoliticised in favour of becoming a brand for consumption by tourists or the world market. It also creates a situation of inequality within the communities where the elites become the beneficiaries of these projects.
Cultural industries select individuals and groups, thus creating divisions and disputes within the community in relation to access to capital (De Carvahlo 2005).

Though there is an imminent danger of appropriation and cannibalism, there is also a need to disseminate a deep understanding of Afrodescendent cultures. For one young man, the exhibition was an obvious case of this, and he supported cultural negotiations:

Recognition is also a part of the Black movement in Brazil that has earned it…. If they would have been closed off then it might have continued to be demonised or disappeared. Candomblé has survived because many people have participated and this has given it legitimacy.

Father Cuesta had already defended the importance of the exhibition as it emphasized how the Afrodescendent communities conceive life and death, the importance of ancestors that live among us. His perspective was that the exhibition was a way to include the Afrocolombian people in the nation-construction processes and to recognize the diversity of its communities.

Presentations of sacred heritage are not only a preoccupation of Black cultures. The case of Indigenous patrimony in the United States is also an example. Message (2009) describes a Powwow event held at the Verizon Center arena in Washington, D.C., and at the National Museum of the American Indian. The second space allowed much more control and safekeeping of the internal rules of the ritual, but the first
permitted a constant exchange between participants and non-Indigenous audiences and the press.

Gilroy also provides a positive account of the idea that marginalised communities can own the channels which are used to disseminate their culture:

The black musicians, dancers and performers of the New World have disseminated these insights [of a distinctive African-derived identity], styles and pleasures through the institutional resources of the cultural industries that they have colonized, captured and adapted. These media, particularly recorded sound, have been annexed for sometimes subversive purposes of protest and affirmation.


He does not think that these forms are solely entertainment or cultural commodities. Something of its character remains even though it has been depoliticised for mass consumption, as in the case of the music of Bob Marley, a spectacle and marketing device in a global business, but nevertheless some of its political message remains.

Despite some of the possible benefits of the market or more commercialised forms of circulating culture, for De Carvahlo (2005), the State cannot leave its cultural policies in the hands of the marketplace because it will make vulnerable traditions and new experimental cultural forms. Neither can the State solely appropriate Afroamerican culture to purify itself while at the same time making such culture neutral and unpolicised. If the State has cashed in the earnings of Black people’s
work in the past, should it not take in account their retribution when it plans to take advantage of their cultural heritage? For Wakeham, the State can bypass “any performance of apology for colonial injustices and [move] straight to a joyous, depoliticized celebration of reconciliation” (2008: 354).

Both the market and the nation can homogenize culture (Stevenson 2002). We can picture a sharp contrast between understanding diverse citizenships through identity politics versus a public world dominated by functional and economic criteria, which results in the sole identity of the citizen as consumer (Serna 2007). For García Canclini (1995), identities are now largely dependant on appropriation of goods, and these in turn depend on material inequalities. Hence the importance of access to public media – such as the museum, even though it is at a disadvantage to compete with private media – in order to open spaces closed by the privatization of the distribution and creation of cultural goods (Rowe 2004).

**Heritage and rights**

We have explored how individuals and communities that have been marginalized from the nation and its narratives – and continue to face discrimination – use heritage and patrimony as elements of cohesion. Identities linked to material and intangible heritage are both strengthened and contested, producing effects of internal discrepancies and, simultaneously, a call to unity. We saw that conflict is inherent in the process of opening up museums and thus continues to be a challenge for these institutions. Given this context, where do national museums and communities meet and come together with their own needs? In the case of the Afrodescendents, their plight is for a full recognition of their rights. What can the museum contribute?
Scholars such as Arocha (2006) and Mosquera (2007) point to the broad space given to cultural heritage in music, gastronomy and sports while other rights are relegated to the background. For Arocha, “The State concentrates its efforts on salvaging, promoting and manipulating intangible heritage with the objective of creating commodities or incorporating this diversity into its cultural capital while still excluding communities from political, aesthetical, social and labour spheres” (2006). While the image of the “exotic” Black is exploited by national and international trade and marketing campaigns such as Colombia is passion, Black populations are the most affected by the country’s internal conflict and by economic liberalization and poverty as well as low political representation (Arocha 2006, Mosquera 2007, The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice 2007, Rodríguez et al. 2008). What scholars are demanding is that incorporating Black heritage into mainstream Colombian patrimony, or recognizing cultural distinctiveness in national narratives, is not done at the expense of dealing with other inequalities, nor can it be the sole step taken by the State.

This demand can be extended to other countries and excluded groups. As I write this text, the Roma people are being deported from France with wide media coverage (September 2010). Ironically, we treasure otherness in museums (the Musée du Quai Branly example), talk of diversity and intercultural dialogue; yet, those others who do not fit in a particular societal canon are distrusted or expelled. These same contradictions are found in Colombia. Language of inclusion and diversity finds no correspondence in quality of life of Black communities. There is an inherent opposition between a sound group of laws and decrees that have followed Law 70
and which have fostered a strengthening of Afrocolombian organizations versus the reluctance of the State to see these compromises lived out in practice. There is also a perverse result of recent legislation; for instance, the right to hold land collectively was legalized in the 1990s but has had a sinister result, as legal and illegal armed groups entered the scene to dispute the control of their territories (Arocha and Moreno 2007).

Conditions of exclusion, displacement, and a denial of basic rights are not only a product of disenfranchisement but also of discrimination. Law 70 of 1993 states that the government will condemn all forms of racism, though experts point to the systematic denial of the existence of racism. In reality, “Afro-Colombians have unequal access to education, employment, housing, health care and other services (literacy rates for Afro-Colombians are much lower than for the general population). These shared experiences indicate structural discrimination within the Colombian system” (The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice 2007: 20). Diagnostic reports published on the application of Law 70 find that its impact is highly irregular in all its respects: “land rights, ethno-education, government inaction such that the very relevance of Law 70’s rights and guarantees are put in question, along with the state’s commitment to more fundamental human rights” (Ibid.: 22).

The unveiling of structural discrimination and racism as well as a changing international panorama caused by the Durban Declaration have recently introduced the concept of reparations in order to attend to the particular historical circumstances that touch the Black communities, as we discussed in the first chapter. Discussions
by local intellectuals and leaders in Colombia have taken on this discourse that draws on the injuries of the past to explain the present (Mosquera 2007). This is perhaps the point where museums step in and have a major responsibility towards the past and the present. For Almario (2007), there is a need to revisit the past in order to see how the damages to the communities in the present are a result of the repression of former events. He agrees with the idea that a lack of acknowledgment and hiding the memories of slavery cause continuities of inequality, exploitation and discrimination generated by the politics of imperialism (Ibid).

In this context, historical narratives are a crucial element of identity and are seen to have an immediate weight on the present. A group of activist-scholars demands that public institutions rewrite the history of a Black presence (Mosquera, Barcelos and Arévalo 2007: 16), and Velorios was a direct first result of these demands. Their invitation is meant for those Blacks who perceive themselves as integrated into the nation, to remember the pain of the past, and to see how slavery has had repercussions on the inequalities of the present as a constitutive determinant of a social identity.

This movement is not isolated. Around the globe, there are other groups that claim reparations and actions that are visible in the public sphere. “Colonialism, slavery, and racial injustice have been prominent in these attempts to bring the past into the present” (Schwarz 2005: 225). Schwarz argues that history and heritage institutions have to explore the continuation of past mentalities into the present. To recognize the wrongs done in the past has consequences that are judicial, therapeutic and historical, but he states that history can be in conflict with the way these events are
remembered. There is no formula and there are no predictable positive results, but recognition of the past is a way to make visible the undesirable forms of the former times that continue to exist in the present. For McCarthy (2004), reparation measures cannot be isolated, but most come from an all-encompassing policy, which means that change cannot be cosmetic but rather transform all spheres of social life.

Is inclusion of new narratives in museums sufficient, then? In terms of issues of representation, we can ask whether museums have done enough to recognize their own exclusionary practices. Jones’s (2005) critique is centered on how inclusion does not necessarily disrupt existing narratives and the discourse of celebration but, instead, unveils relationships of power. Creating a contact zone has to challenge institutions deeply, not only in the way they construct narratives but also in the way they function. Littler (2005), for instance, finds fault in being over-reliant on inclusion policy because it does not necessarily tackle the way institutions function internally. It can also be the case that “strategies of cultural inclusion are being used as a sop or plaster in cases of deprivation without the broader reasons for such deprivation being taken into account” (Ibid.: 12).

What becomes evident from the literature is that there is a concern with failing to question the basic underlying structures that give way to (negative) differences. In the case of the National Museum of Colombia, the staff is clear that the museum can no longer close its doors to the communities it aims to represent. The Deputy Director pointed to the work done with Afrocolombian communities and added: “Once that door is open, it’s difficult to think that this is not the natural process that the museum is going to follow.” Going back to the threat the Museum received on
the inauguration of *Velorios*, it is true that we did not fully know that the doors that a diverse group of producers had opened could not be closed again. The next step would be, then, to try to answer the question of what kind of museum do we want to construct together? How do we come to terms with a fairer representation of the nation? How do we repair communities with the work in museums? These are the underlying questions we will address in the next chapter.
In the two previous chapters, I set out to explore the impact on audiences, museum staff and Afrodescendent communities of an exhibition conceived in response to claims of historical reparation and transformation of national narratives and collections. So far, I have analyzed possible answers to questions regarding how general museum visitors interpret these exhibitions that aim to counter racism and discrimination, the challenges of museums in working with marginalized communities, and how groups represented engage with representation in the museum. I have also looked at the limitations of such transformations and how visitors use stereotypes in order to categorize meanings, as well as introducing problems of what type, who is affected and when representation of marginalized communities occurs.

In this chapter, I will look at the broader repercussions of the exhibition by addressing two research questions: How do national museums appropriate and communicate conceptions of multiculturalism? And, how do audiences engage with the concept of a multicultural nation in a national museum? My aim is to analyze the ways in which people interpret discourses of the nation but also to look at the role that the nation’s museum might play in society.

First, I will compare and contrast the ways in which different constituents talk about an ideal National Museum of Colombia and how they envision their communities and other groups forming part of that wider “imagined community.” When looking at
how people feel and imagine their ideal museum, I have drawn up major categories of discussion, encompassing narrative as a restatement of grand narratives as well as the tension between representing groups together or apart.

I will then examine the possibility of contributing to historical reparation in the museum as well as staging memories of the painful past. Reparation is understood primarily as a strategy to mend or at least an attempt to rectify the consequences of a past action that cannot be undone. In the case of the Afrodescendants, scholars such as Mosquera and Arocha argue that the transatlantic slave trade has had a lasting impact on Black communities that require the implementation of differentiated rights or affirmative actions in order to make up for the wrongs of the past and the inequalities of the present with the intention of creating settings of justice and equity for disenfranchised communities (Mosquera 2007). We saw in the introduction that this philosophy as applied to the symbolic realm and to historical narratives was the main force behind the demands made on the National Museum. It was also a key factor in the development of the exhibition as a major step towards the just representation of Afrodescendants in the Museum’s collections and exhibitions.

This issue of implementation of special rights for the Afrocolombian population, due to their tragic past, is closely related to staging narratives according to the principles of unity and difference; hence I will reflect on the democratic possibilities of space in the museum. Can the museum represent that which brings together the Colombian people while, at the same time, acknowledging its distinct and varied populations?
Finally, before moving on to the conclusions of this thesis, I would also like to explore issues related to the political impact of representations in the museum in order to get a sense of how the museum contributes—or not—to processes of fulfillment of rights and whether it can be a major player in the process of disseminating narratives that aim at historical reparation of Black communities. Can the museum engage with understandings of culture that involve other spheres that are not only aesthetical? Can we stage the conflicts that are inherent to the relationship between groups and the inequalities that exist in societies?

At this point of the discussion, I now face an inevitable question: if the nation and national narratives have excluded certain groups or have represented them poorly, how can national museums expand notions of citizenship? Museums, especially in Europe, have been called to promote intercultural understanding (European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research 2008, Bodo, Gibbs, Sani 2009, clmg 2006). These institutions are expected to play a critical role in the exploration of “the similarities and differences of identity in modern society, and nurture the roots of citizenship and cohesion” (clmg 2006: 4). Since issues of cultural identity are central to a “museum’s business”, their contributions are very significant (Ibid 10). Message also recognizes that museums are expected to “contribute to the meta-narratives of civic unity and a common notion of public good by adopting advocacy roles and supporting or developing strategic partnerships with local areas and community groups” (2009: 50).

Although we have addressed the importance of fostering dialogue, intercultural exchange and citizenship in the museum, we have also examined the difficulties of
doing so and the dangers in thinking that this is enough or simple, as museums have responsibilities and audiences have needs that are not necessarily equivalent. In order to tackle this inquiry we will look at how audiences (Black and not) and staff speak about an ideal national museum. My starting point follows Stuart Hall in that members of the same culture have to share in concepts, images and ideas (1997a: 4). How to represent the nation? Regardless of differences between ethnic groups, there are multiple elements that citizens share about the ways in which they imagine the nation and its museum; but there are other areas of conflict where tensions and disagreements cannot be resolved between groups, and inside the very heterogeneous Black community – for example – where there are political, ideological, generational, historical and identity disparities. The problem that we grapple with is: how do we represent the nation without reducing groups to essentialisms? Museums can activate individual and social memories, thereby supporting processes of identity formation and/or they can also legitimise certain unitary characteristics of cultures, thereby excluding subcultures. In the case of Afrodescendent communities, I have explored – and will deepen the discussion in this chapter – the issue of “Afroness” and the dangers of closing up such identity.

**IMAGINING THE NATION’S MUSEUM**

Trying to approach the problem of how multiculturalism in the museum can allow for both broad notions of heritage to be staged as well as taking in differences implies that one must revise the ways in which multiculturalism is played out. It can take on several forms, as analysed by Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge (2007).
Policies can range from “assimilation”, where the use of historical narratives is used to spread an ideal of a collective society; “melting pots”, wherein immigrants are expected to shed their own heritage in exchange for the one offered by the place of arrival; “core plus”, in which minority groups are added but do not threaten the centre; “pillar models”, where each group is self-contained; and “salad bowl” models that “share in the basic idea that the diverse ingredients are brought together and collectively create a whole without losing their distinctive characteristics” (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge 2007: 84). These different ways of understanding multiculturalism have an impact on the role that the past embodies in the patrimony or heritage of a community and whether it is included or excluded from national museums.

Though it is true that “Policy will not, on its own, bring about a pluralistic society” (Witcomb 2007: 148), in the case of Colombia, the discourse of plurality brought about with the new Constitution of 1991 does seem to have propelled discourses of diversity. As we have noted previously, it is obvious that pluralistic policies do not make societies, because they exist as such beforehand, but the impact of these at a local level cannot be undermined. The relevance of diversity was seen in the responses of 28 out of the 45 people interviewed, when they were asked how they would construct a national museum if it were up to them (see question 10 appendix 2B). These respondents talked about the importance of highlighting this particular asset of the Colombian nation in the Museum; additionally, when discussing the exhibition in general terms, 16 interviewees brought up the term in their responses. Diversity is linked to a notion of what is positive about our country. It is a source of “joy” (interviews 27, 41) and is proof that groups with different rituals can coexist in
one country (interviews 17, 33). As a young anthropology student and her friend noted, “It’s important to see that Colombia is culturally heterogeneous…. We have so many things in common but at the end the structure of things is the same” (interview 4).

Regarding official discourse, recent policies tend to combine “core plus”, “pillar” and “salad bowl” models and have the same conceptions described earlier by visitors. A 2007 Ministry of Culture document stresses Colombia’s diversity in what is envisioned as its cultural assets: regions; ethnicities; languages and cultural manifestations. These are all fundamental components of a collective identity, which is the basis for social cohesion (Ministerio de Cultura 2007), replicating the tensions highlighted in the introduction between unity and diversity. Additionally, the document includes a promotional video that shows images of diversity, such as people from different regions, landscapes and protagonists such as Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez, among other male writers, and victorious athletes at sporting events. It also emphasizes the “purity” of indigenous cultures in the Amazon or the authenticity of Afrocolombian music or the strength of cowboys from the plains. When it describes the country’s different regions, the video essentialises diverse communities and creates an unequal narrative in which names are reserved for talented white men while communities remain anonymous but responsible for keeping traditions alive.

Many questions arise from this representation of diversity. First, is multiculturalism a rainbow made up of different colours that have little to do with each other? Second, why must culture be portrayed as apolitical? Following that line of thought, where
are the realities of the communities: displacement; violence; and war, which affect the video’s showcased regions the most but seem to be absent from the way cultural policy is conceived at the centre? The triumph of diversity may lead to a denial of asymmetries of power and a rejection of differentiated identities based on race, class and gender (Mesa-Bains 2004). This sort of policy is imbedded in large dynamics where “governments have a vested interest in promoting a heritage that reassures and reconciles rather than disturbs and divides. Heritage is being used to soothe away our individual and collective stresses, leaving only contented well-balanced people in an all-inclusive harmonious society” (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge 2007: 53). In the second part of this chapter, we will return to the relationship between culture and conflict. In the meantime, we will examine how interviewees, staff and focus group participants discussed their ideas about a museum that would truly represent the nation.

**Encompassing narrative**

In order to be able to move towards multicultural representation, the Assistant to the Ethnography and Archaeology Curator stated:

I think that a starting point would be common elements. Though we are a multicultural nation, there are things we do without it really mattering what group or community we belong to. So, for instance, if we are going to have an exhibit on family in Colombia, what is the family experience in the different communities in the country?…What are the themes that cover this nation or permeate us all but in very different ways?
The notion of creating a cohesive account by developing a common theme is in tune with “salad bowl” models of policy on heritage where each group contributes to the whole with an emphasis on shared elements (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge 2007). Cutting across cultures would also have the potential to create an intercultural dialogue but could run the risk of promoting more conservative models of simply putting multiple cultures together side by side.

Following these debates on change, the Museum’s Designer described the multicultural narrative as inclusion in a widened narration so that a whole set of new actors has more prominent roles. Along similar lines, for the Director, the representation of multiculturalism is seen in the way that agents are inserted in a narration of history:

We would have to take away much from the hegemonic history and bring into this other story people who are unknown. We are conscientious that the nation is not composed of the gentlemen who are hung on the wall…. There is no correspondence between the country as it is told in the Museum and how I conceive the nation with all the inhabitants of a territory.

Inserting what is missing in an already existent narrative is more in tune with “assimilation” models or “core plus” models where a strong center is left unchanged (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge 2007). On this second option, we can ask: “Is multiculturalism simply the coexistence (peaceful or otherwise) of different cultures within a larger culture that may or may not try to subsume them?” (Edelstein 2005:
16). Do we expect multiculturalism to make the other more like us, rather than being able to see them in their otherness? We must be critical of what Littler refers to as:

the language of inclusion [that] can also imply assimilation to a pre-existing set of national norms rather than a genuine diversity…. It can imply that there is only one already sealed and written national story, with room at the most for a little non-threatening difference, and to which ‘newcomers’ need to conform to gain acceptance.

(2005: 12)

In either case, the search for an integral space where all are welcome is in tune with liberalism, but as was mentioned earlier, the philosophy of equal rights for all does not deal so well with different value systems and does not guarantee that all groups will have their rights observed, therefore, the question of not reducing differences remains open.

Weaving together an encompassing narrative appears as the main characteristic of multicultural representations. For 28 interviewees, the ideal national museum is representative of the entire nation. For non-Afrodescendants such as the family accompanying a boy with school requirements, everyone must be treated equally (interview 29). Some of the answers regarding what a museum should hold include:

If it’s national then everything has to be included, not just a part, and all the regions (interview 1);
This is a great step, to bring together the different ethnic groups and really all the Colombian people to be represented in the Museum (interview 12);

I´m thinking of a cultural diversity museum that is more alive. Everyone talks about cultural diversity but it’s an abstraction and no one really knows what it’s about (interview 3);

I´ve always felt great admiration for these groups, for Afrocolombians, for indigenous people and ethnic minorities…. It would be great to find out about other rituals that other communities have (interview 21);

It’s complicated [to privilege something] because this is such a diverse country and of so many things, if one says this, there are others that would remain outside (interview 28); and

It should show what is beautiful about Colombia (interview 29).

A visitor from Medellín (Colombia’s second most populous city) who described himself as half indigenous said that we should be able to see things we do not know: “More of what Colombia is, because it has something very interesting. It can have 10 or 20 different dances; when you look at the Germans, they only have one” (interview 11). Cultures in this sense are looked at as groups we can learn from and that “enrich” us.
Visitors interviewed also highlighted the importance of having the opportunity to know other cultures, or what we might interpret as an interest in interculturalism. For instance, a Xerox machine technician who was visiting with his two boys alluded to the need to have the Ministry of Culture promote an interchange of Afrocolombian culture “with our culture just as it happens in other countries, like in New Orleans” (interview 10).

*New versions of the old grand-narrative*

Afrocolombian focus group participants suggested new forms of a grand-narrative. For instance, when discussing the name of an ideal museum, a political science student said: “it has to be a truly national museum because I think right now it’s a museum of a few for the many.” The conclusion reached was that it should be named “Museum of Colombia”, “so that it represents everything,” as another respondent summarized. There was clarity about the presence of indigenous peoples, Afrocolombians, and mestizos, but also about groups of immigrants and, therefore, diversity was not confined to the presence of ethnic groups.

When asked what stories they imagined they could find, they answered in very broad terms. People in the second focus group suggested “elements of all the cultures in the nation” or “everything that has to do with the cultural aspect of the country and the regions.” Territory and origin were relevant for Afrocolombians as well as for non-Afros. Focus group members used place of birth or ancestry to identify themselves. A young Afrocolombian communications student said the museum should include:
everything that is Colombia, and in that sense it should not exclude anyone. There are regions that one doesn’t see in the Museum [and referred to his own], we are being relegated and therefore we are not protagonists of history, and that doesn’t mean that in reality we are not.

The permanent exhibition galleries were not considered representative of the diversity of the nation, “because here we only see one type of person, and the rest are excluded, as though they don’t exist,” as one of the Afrocolombian guides who worked on the exhibit commented. As a consequence, she stated that ideally the museum “will show all of the people who belong in the Colombian territory and it will develop political, social, cultural, and economic points of view to include the most salient exponents of each ethnic group.”

Overall, non-afro and Afro respondents are closer to “salad bowl” models in which there is no “dogmatic affirmation of a unique and legitimate identity of a city or nation, but the coexistence of multiple ways of being” (García Canclini 1995: 89-90) based on recognition of local identities.

Can this model of representing all citizens equally really work? The staff pointed to the difficulties of being a place that is truly representative of the nation’s diversity. The Museum´s Designer acknowledged:

we have included small things in the galleries but it’s too ambitious to think that we can represent them all. I imagine something like [this]: we [think] we finally represent them all and then comes a Jehova´s witness [or a member of
another group] and says, ‘I’m not represented in this museum.’ So I think it’s very difficult [to represent every single possible group], but [it’s good] if the seeds are planted….We have a responsibility towards this representation.

This notion of “representation for all”, where no groups should be privileged, makes the issue of differentiated rights, reparation and difference in the museum more complicated. A Mexican photographer in his fifties even questioned the necessity to highlight different groups: “Under the blanket of the national we need to justify why the others who live inside our own [territory] have a right not only to live, but to survive and keep their funerary rituals” (interview 39). Sandell points to this tension when he asks: “How might museums negotiate conflicts that will inevitably arise between universalist claims to equality for all groups and the particularities of locally contingent manifestations of prejudice?” (2007: 32). This question brings us back to the issue that in reality we are not all equal, and thus museums should act accordingly, as Jordan and Weedon point out:

Some versions of postmodernism imply that we are confronted by a plurality of competing narratives, none of which can be privileged…. [D]ifferent versions are not all the same, neither in their explanatory power nor in the power that they exercise in the wider society where they work on behalf of particular interest.

(1995: 548)

In the introduction I highlighted that we have a challenge to promote equality for all, promoting respect for our differences, but at the same time, we need to acknowledge
that those differences are not all the same, because the structures of discrimination operate differently.

Keeping it separate

Museum staff members were asked:

A strong sector of the Afrocolombian communities is claiming reparation via the reconstruction of the narratives of the nation and a separate space in the museum as a means to come to grips with the legacies of enslavement and racism. What is your view on this matter?

There was an immediate consensus against a separate space, because it was described as discriminatory in an already-fragmented society. An additional problem discussed was that it would create expectations for other groups to have a space of their own. One participant even used the word *ghetto* to describe what would happen in the museum if this was implemented, thus rejecting any notion of the “pillar model”, where communities are set apart without communication (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge 2007).

On the other hand, it was also recognized that having a space in the museum is part of a political process of recognition. The Deputy Director thought the claim was valid and hence supported it, but stopped short of creating a separate space:
When you only hear their voice, as though they had been independent, it generates these discourses that are racist against others. So it’s the greatness of the Black people versus the cruelty of the Whites. And it’s again these tensions of Black and White, wonderful indigenous person versus Bad conquistador…. I do accept that because of the exclusion to which they have been subjected, they should have more relevance but it should not be something exclusive.

The Director’s statements are along these same lines: “We want to make diversity visible but when we put it in boxes we are not being true to the reality, which is integrated”. These statements show that highlighting a specific group can be read as a strategy of discrimination or as a means to give prevalence to that which has been silenced.

The Museum’s Designer defended the idea of a separate space as something that would create great impact:

A great gallery to show things that people haven’t seen…. [Visitors should recognize that] it’s [their] people [that they are seeing]. We have to be suggestive, we have to create something that they can’t relate to anything they have experienced. We should leave the script up to them so that they choose what to do. Music, altars, life, death: we do workshops. [Minority visitors] are going to say: ‘I feel discriminated against, but in a gallery by myself, I can handle it’.
Some non-Afro visitors did directly refer to the issue of privilege when asked if any group should have prevalence over others. A woman from another city running errands with her husband in Bogotá said, “Why privilege something? If we have so many things we should know them all, I can’t think of anything specific. Why give something more importance if all our culture is important?” (interview 19). These notions of diversity and multiculturalism have in common the equivalency of the groups, which could hide the inequalities that exist between them (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge 2007:8). What these discussions show is that interviewees are comfortable with differences only if communities are treated equally. Some people in the focus groups also supported this idea. A Black man in the first focus group who had lived what he called “the apartheid regime” in the Colombian Pacific created by the North American mining companies clearly stated that he thought that Black people should have access to politics or institutions on their merits; otherwise, he considered the quota system discriminatory. “We are all equal, first we identify ourselves as people, but if we want to leap forward we need education”.

Integration versus differentiation

Focus group participants were asked how they saw the relationship between the different groups in the museum. I used the example of the funerary rituals exhibition, which represented seven Afrocolombian communities, and asked whether they thought it would be relevant to see the rituals of another culture as well. All were in agreement. One of the women who did not visit the exhibition made an emphasis on “why not show these things where we converge …. [I]n what moment are we different but then in what moment do we converge in social and cultural aspects that are part of a culture that composes everything that makes us Colombian?” The point
she was making was that mestizos, indigenous and Afro Colombians have been part of a historic process and, therefore, why should the museum separate identities by saying “indigenous here, Afro over there.”

Across groups, among Black young people there was a defense of a system that could allow space for both difference and cohesion. For young Afro Colombians it became a necessity to have a space where different groups could be seen together but also a space for each one. In implying this they did not suggest that only Afro Colombians cultures deserved their own space. One young man studying communications envisioned “A space to see how different we are.” A young woman studying arts education who participated as a guide in the exhibition questioned the strategy of only setting Blacks apart and not being able to see “this side” where they have contributed to the whole of Colombian society. A young sociologist and also a guide in the exhibition drew attention to the need to have histories where different groups meet but also some that are particular to each community, because “it is just that there is a space for them.” The other young people were in agreement.

Other differences inside the Black community are created by how different sectors perceive their relationship to the nation and its narratives. One of the participants mentioned above considered himself Black and said that the word Afro Colombians bothered him: “Black people are one in the world. In Colombia there is one race that is called Colombian”. His views on the need to be integrated into Colombian society are further supported by other Black people who think, “national identity of the overwhelming majority of the Colombian people is not mediated by ethnicity” (Mera Villamizar 2008). Daniel Mera works with the Fundación Color de Colombia, a
foundation that focuses on rescuing prominent Black figures in literature, politics and history in order to promote their integration into the national narrative. He does not think that the universal values and ideals that unite the Colombian nation should be undervalued. In a personal conversation, he reiterated his criticism of the work the museum had been doing because the exhibition privileged difference over integration. Understandably, for urban Black people an exhibition on funerary rituals, tied to notions of African ancestry, might not be something with which they can identify because they have different identity markers. An altar to a particular saint might have more significance for a white or mestizo person who is religious than for a Black urban, middle class person who is not.

Mera has written that there is a difference between the ethnic representation of ancestral communities (according to him approximately 10% of the Black population) and the democratic representation of the Black people who are integrated into national culture (90%). Mera sees two currents of thought: one that privileges resistance, emphasizing difference, popular culture and oral patrimony; and another that looks for integration privileging equality, “refinement” and written patrimony, but both can coincide in that poverty is a major problem –for him not related to issues of race. Cultural difference should not take away Colombian identity in the first place (Mera Villamizar 2008).

Others, like Claudia Mosquera, who defend the issue of difference and reparation, oppose Mera´s stance. For her and other like-minded scholars, (Mosquera, Barcelos and Arévalo 2007) Blacks who perceive themselves as integrated to the nation have to remember the pain of the past and acknowledge how slavery is a crime against
humanity that has shaped the present. For them, the principal fight is against racism and discrimination, looked through the lens of history to find its original causes. Slavery is an integral part of the past of Afrodescendent people and thus is not to be equated to the differences that mark other groups, such as homosexuals or women.

These two opposing views (integration versus differentiation) also represent different ideas about how Afrocolombian or Black people have to be represented in a national narrative. In an interview with Juan de Dios Mosquera (November 24, 2008), a prominent Black leader, he criticized the exhibition because he considered that in trying to show the cultural diversity of the “others”, the effort undervalued and represented that culture as inferior. He said the anthropological gaze continued to show the other as “wild”. In his view, the exhibition should have incorporated other cultures in equal conditions to show rituality in its differences but also as part of the life of other communities. In separating a culture from the national reality, it highlights the idea of the anthropological subject available to be observed by society; in this sense, he explained that Black people were first denied their humanity, which created the sense of “otherness” that is pervasive today. For him, exhibitions that are based on folkloric aspects do not rescue Black people as social subjects. His critique is of interest precisely because one of the main concerns of the production team was to oppose stereotypical representations, even anthropological ones. His views show that readings and interpretations can never be closed off and singular.

Mosquera considers the National Museum indebted to the African dimension of Colombia because it does not give an appropriate idea of what happened to these African peoples: enslavement; resistance; that which occurred after slavery was
abolished and how Blacks have contributed to the Colombian nation. He was also critical of the Gold Museum in Bogotá because he considers that the indigenous ancestors represented there are treated as objects. In general, he feels that museums kill the relationship between memory, history and culture with their silence and the denial of memory. He considered it a great fault that there is not a museum dedicated to Afrocolombians, and compared the situation to that of the United States, where there has been great efforts to preserve Black heritage. He pointed to a series of portraits in his office of American Black leaders: Frederick Douglas, Dr. Martin Luther King, amongst others, and said that these referents were everywhere in North America. For him, the Afrocolombian communities have to rise –like the indigenous communities have– because just as they do not exist in the museum, they are invisible in universities, in the courts, in the Church. The museum, for him, still symbolizes the vision of culture and national memory of an elite.

Other questions raised on the option of representing Afrocolombians separately are whether privileging difference might also result in reproducing racism because it tends to leave the mainstream intact, confining productions to differentiated spaces (Jordan and Weedon 1995). For some theorists, multiculturalism produces a disguised racism by superficially changing what was known as primitive arts to ethnic art, for instance (Jordan and Weedon 1995 discussing Araeen). The Musée du Quai Branly has been criticised precisely for this matter. Dias discusses the apparent equality of cultures being exhibited in this controversial French museum. She asks, “To what extent does this recent interest in equivalence of cultures –equality of human creations as well as equality of works– reflect a decreasing concern for cultural difference?” (2008: 128). This researcher goes on to point out that the Musée
aims to promote republican values and a model of “assimilation” where citizenship means being part of a common whole and sharing universal values as a national culture, equivalence in artistic production and equivalence in cultures. But as Dias points out, equal worth also has a homogenising effect. Is it really possible to erase hierarchies in societies? This claim “obsures the inequality of the relationship between France and non-European peoples. This is the role ascribed to museums: to exonerate society for its failure to deal with peoples and cultures whose objects are in museums devoted to cultural diversity” (Ibid.: 149). Sally Price has also written critically about the Musée du quai Branly and its “general tendency to privilege harmony and nation-to-nation diplomacy over social criticism and attention to the interests of particular ethnic groups” (2007: 138). Under this model, the celebration of differences makes power, as well as inequality and oppression, invisible. While societies fail to face to social crises, museums are being called on to disseminate civic values or redeem the nation for its past discriminations.

**REPAIRING THE MUSEUM**

So far, we have pointed to both consensus and discrepancies regarding the representations of difference in the construction of a national narrative. We also highlighted diverse opinions inside the Black communities. Internal disparities hinder a cohesive process of what Macdonald describes as “politics of recognition, crafting self-narratives and claiming legitimacy through memory inscribed as heritage” (2009: 93). Other difficulties arise because minority memories may oppose or create discord over mainstream narratives and what gets to be considered as heritage.
A lack of consensus regarding being represented as part of the nation or a part of the nation should not divert us from the analysis of whether the exhibition managed to bring forth a process of historic reparation (a notion that highlights that a group of people is different and should be treated accordingly due to historic reasons), since this was an important reason to do the exhibit in the first place. Regarding the role of museums, people in the focus groups and over the course of the diagnostic meetings that we held in 2007 did not necessarily use the word “reparation”, but it was very clear that the voids and misrepresentations had to be corrected because, as a member of the production team stated, “one, as an Afrocolombian, is not found in the galleries”. This was considered important, not only in terms of the Museum’s content, but because of what this invisibility reiterates: “that we are invisible to this country, even though we have given the nation multiple contributions”. For another participant, “if we are not here, how can we expect to find the things that we do?” One of the women participating in the 2007 research for Velorios described very profound and negative feelings about her visit to the museum:

I felt hate, rage, I wanted to cry. Why have the assassins, the guilty, those who murdered us? Why not have the history of the Black people and the contributions that Blacks have made to the country? [Our] history is being kept away because there’s no desire for it to be known.

“I don’t know what is worse, to be made invisible or misrepresented”, someone else in the meeting claimed.
Despite the negative encounter with the contents of the permanent exhibitions and the voids, people who participated in the 2007 diagnostic meetings were very positive about what the role of museums should be. Generally, they highlighted the importance of bridging the past and the present: “things of the past that reinforce the present and are alive. Museum is memory and knowledge and the responsibility of [acknowledging] that when our elders teach us this memory [it] has to be preserved”, said a young Black woman from Tumaco. According to Fentress and Wickham (2003), oral societies give more value to memory that is alive, which would account for comments such as: “I didn’t know that what we had in our heads could also be saved”. This task of safekeeping traditions was made apparent in these descriptions of the museum as the place that “feeds the seeds so that they do not die”. A repeated sense of “treasure” for future generations was highlighted in affirmations such as “So that the young people can recognize historical and ancestral knowledge”. Though societies cannot freeze the memory of the past because social memory keeps what is most significant (Fentress and Wickham 2003: 82), in the case of the descendents of the enslaved African memory is about resistance, and there is a fear of losing the traces of that collective memory: “Maybe museums can make us remember the things of our quotidian lives that we are losing”, said one focus group participant.

For participants in the 2007 diagnostic meetings, the museum reflected what Colombia is, “but the fact of enslavement has to be shown, not minimized”. And the violence of the past was brought to the context of the present day communities: “the heroes that riddle, this is the consequence of what the country is today. The war is being fought practically in the Afro villages”. The relationship between past violence and the present was also made apparent in the last focus group. The young musician
who opposed the exhibition, for instance, said that people have to understand the reasons why displacement exists and the conditions of people who experience it: “there are many millenary traditions and these have to be benefited. There has to be reparation of the discriminated peoples, and when something of us is [reproduced], there has to be reparation”. One young man, who is knowledgeable of other social and cultural processes in Brazil, commented that the museum could contribute in similar ways to the symbolic reparation as it is being carried away in that country, “in symbolic terms because it’s the work of telling a history that has not been told, and in ways in which it has not been told”. People like this young man or others who are involved in political processes see that education is a way to claim and to stage such reparations. One of the participants spoke about the need to continue the debates because the exhibition could not be only about nostalgia but rather articulated to reparation, justice and violence.

Anthropologist Jaime Arocha confirmed that exhibitions and representations of national narratives are crucial to processes of reparation:

Yes; [these exhibitions can be a part of a process of reparation], but only if they are part of a larger effort. What we did is important in this sense, but we need more. To have a group of people [at the inauguration] with a fist up in protest for the situation of the Black communities is a landmark…. an important symbolic act. Even the video with the contexts, the fact that the museum had a video that confronted official policies regarding palm harvest, monoculture, mining, which are an integral part of this government, and to
have left that implicit inquiry regarding the environment and the people, that’s very important…. 

The problem that one highlights is that the museum is not the nation, and this museum cannot respond for national policies; it can make great efforts to support reparation but what if the national scope is against it? Even inside the Ministry of Culture, if the Minister goes to the exhibit for just a few minutes it’s because she does not care for such reparations. In the interviews she has given, it’s obvious that she is only interested in a cosmetic multiculturalism…. 

(interview December 10, 2008) 

Memories of enslavement 

The question of what to remember and what past to represent is not an innocent matter. One of the main themes that Black people mentioned in meetings and focus groups was the relationship between America and Africa. Enslavement is a crucial part of their history, as well as a focal point when debating acknowledgement that leads to reparation. In the case of the memories of the descendents of the enslaved Africans, their history and its portrayal in museums have been controversial. There is a danger in exalting heritage “laden with sorrow and guilt”, in the words of Lowenthal (2000: 18). He states:

More and more, heritage has become distressing in character, shaming rather than laudatory, lamentable rather than lovable –what ancient Romans termed
heritas damnosa, a damnable, crippling legacy heirs were stuck with, like it or not…. The past still awakens pride in origins and precursors, but victimhood occupies center stage. It is often said that history belongs to the victors; heritage is now the special province of the victims.

(Ibid.)

These words can also be used to discuss the representation of enslavement, a necessary but painful feat that risks reinstating victimhood upon today’s generations. Samuel Thomas in his report on fieldwork also discusses the dangers entailed in recuperation of the past:

Moreover, as has been discussed within the remit of Afro-Brazilian scholarship, an over-focus on Africa, and by implication the slave trade, and by implication the subordinate status of blacks in the nation, risks explanation of the contemporary black predicament with an over-emphasis on the past, leaving more contemporary dynamics and their contribution to the plight of blacks under-addressed and left ‘by the wayside’, as the force of History recuperated dominates the construction of miraculously homogeneous ‘Afro-identity’.

(2008: 2)

Despite the need to tell unsettling stories, we should be wary of opening wounds, as Peralta argues for the case of Portugal: “…the silencing of the past may be a productive process, enabling people and communities to move on, discarding those memories that just do not fit present practical purposes” (2009: 115). Idealized
representations are also reparation and rehabilitation of a community, as well as a form of survival.

Representations of enslavement, colonialisit practices and other forms of subordination have many risks. A much-discussed exhibition for establishing a parameter of what should be avoided is *Into the heart of Africa* at the Royal Ontario Museum (1989-1990). Instead of disputing white colonialism and the ways it “othered” and represented the colonized, the exhibition incorporated only the side of the story told by missionaries and soldiers, ignoring the voices of Africans themselves. The museum was accused of perpetuating racism and of “inadequate consultation with the black community” (Dean 2009: 2). A decade later, the same museum put on display *Underground Railroad, Next Stop Freedom* (2002-2005) developed between the National Historic Sites –a governmental agency– and a group of African-Canadians in an effort to include voices not previously heard (Ashley 2005).

Currently, museums and “living history” in the United States continue to be cases of discussion, which make them particularly interesting examples to ask how the National Museum of African American History and Culture (Smithsonian, the site is to be open in 2015, though they have started exhibitions) will deal with this difficult past. The positive efforts that this institution makes in the future will have to compete with other representations of enslavement made popular in plantations (open today as “historic” sites) and other themed locations.
Gable has written critically about these representations in places such as the house of
president and slave owner Thomas Jefferson –Monticello– and Colonial
Williamsburg. He argues that visitors to these places “recognize (or refuse to
recognize) themselves in the historical personages the site portrays” (2009: 145).
Thus, they are made to choose:

Crudely put it is, ‘I’, white person, expect that ‘you’, black person, will
identify with the slaves. They are your ancestors. Thomas Jefferson –he is my
ancestor. To put it more crudely still, antebellum heritage museums promote,
if inadvertently, this kind of segregating identification.

(Ibid.; 147)

When I visited Monticello in August of 2009, it surprised me that the tour that tells
the story of Black people at Monticello on Mulberry Row (it was decided not to
rebuild the slave quarters) was “optional” while the guided walk through the main
house (where Jefferson and his objects remain protagonists) is the tour people
receive when they purchase a ticket. Other optional tours include the garden, the
cemetery, the kitchen, even the visitor’s center and gift shop. The story of how
Monticello and Jefferson developed economically due to the work of the enslaved
people seemed to me to be more than complementary information.

In their analysis of Colonial Williamsburg, Gable, Handle and Lawson (1992) make
the case that adding new stories of enslavement does not necessarily challenge the
core of hegemonic discourse. In Colonial Williamsburg, as in Monticello, there
exists a divisory notion of history versus memory, the first for Whites, and the
second for Blacks. Improving narratives can lead museums in the direction of creating equity in representation, but there can never be a truly balanced representation in any museum if it focuses solely on objects, because there is a different starting point for each different group that makes up a community. The fact that scarce objects survive, in Colombia, to tell the story of enslaved people or other 19th century leaders can never be undone. In a 2007 visit by the representatives of Colombian Afrocommunities, they were displeased to see that a mulatto leader in the country’s independence was represented by including his biography inside a picture frame, rather than by his (non-existent) portrait. Lowenthal points to this difficulty when he describes representation of elites of whom objects and inventories survive while no material testimonials of slaves in Colonial Williamsburg were available and replicas had to be constructed. He explains that “The elite appear in actual, contextual, explicit detail; the faceless, unprovenanced slaves are generalized and undifferentiated. The former come across to visitors as memorably authentic individuals, the latter as depersonalized simulacra in counterfeit (because reconstructed rather than ‘genuine’) milieus” (2001: 166). For Gable, Handle and Lawson, visitors may end up enhancing the image of slave owners and their economic power because “the elite’s story is told in terms of specific individuals – white Anglo-Saxon male landowners– and, occasionally, their female dependents, while the story of everyone else is generally devised from statistics” (1992: 797).

The banalisation of slavery one detects at some “historic” sites is caused by the narcissistic pleasure invoked by “identification” or by making it a commercial enterprise (Macdonald 2009) and it can also occur when the context in which objects
are shown is poor and thus the terror of enslavement is neutralized. Sepúlveda describes the case of Brazil and she asks:

How to show the pain of those who were forced to labour, were whipped, were separated from their families, treated like animals and submitted to all sorts of vileness? …It is very difficult to explain terror without justifying it and, as we do this, rather than bringing past memories to the present, we provoke the more complete forgetfulness of what has happened (Bataille, 1995). These narratives of slavery hide a wound, and as such they represent an impediment to those who might try to give a better account of what has happened.

(2005: 59)

She is critical of national museums because they present negative images of Black people and hence a continuous humiliation. As in the case of Monticello or Colonial Williamsburg, White visitors will find themselves represented by the political elite of the nation and Black visitors will find themselves represented by slaves (Ibid.: 60).

While national museums might remain oblivious to these problems, Brazil has recently implemented transformations in museums that are a direct consequence of implementing affirmative actions in response to the Durban Conference (2001). In 2005, the University of Sao Paulo held a discussion on this topic in the conference Acoes Afirmativas em Museus: Educar e Preservar (Affirmative Actions in Museums: Education and Preservation). One of the products of these debates was the development of “affirmative action of museological character… to recognize cultural
afro-Brazilian patrimony in the construction of a new project for an exhibition” at the Museu Afro-Brasileiro inaugurated in 1982 at the Federal University of Bahia in a close working relationship with African institutions (Freitas, Baeta, Gomes 2006). These actions are a response to inequality and they aim to diminish or neutralise it, creating access opportunities. They are a result of working with the Black movement which aims to construct a positive concept of these communities in a society based on an African ancestry (Ibid.: 116). In 2002, the museum started a database with information on the organizations of resistance and affirmation of Afro-Brazilian identity. Another visible outcome is the inauguration of a National Museum of Afro-Brazilian Culture in January of 2010 in the historic centre of Salvador de Bahia.¹

Representing enslavement as part of the national narrative

In the case of the National Museum of Colombia, one of the main points of critique during the 2007 diagnostic meetings was centered on the exhibition of two lists of “things” in the gallery that comprehends the process of Conquest: one from the “Old world” and the other form the “New”. Close to “yellow fever”, between “peaches” and “spinach”, was the word “Black slaves”. This caused an uproar because even if the banners tried to make a reference to how enslavement turned people into property, it did not contextualized or explain this crime (see Arocha 2008).

The National Museum is not the only cultural institution that has not been able to come to terms with the difficulty of representing enslavement. Another notable institution, the Gold Museum, has kept silent on the criticism regarding:

¹ [www.amafro.org.br/content/view/91/1/](http://www.amafro.org.br/content/view/91/1/) Accessed November 28 2009.
the official approach to the role played by ancient gold in the construction of the Colombian nation [that has] failed to recognize the link existing between African slavery and the socioeconomic relevance that gold mining had from early colonial times to mid-nineteenth-century Colombia. According to [Michael Taussig], thus a museum of Prehispanic gold artificially truncates a historical sequence traced along the uses and abuses of gold as a prime material and its contribution to explaining the social structure of power and exclusion that pervades Colombian society today.

(Gaitán 2006: 245)

In spite of the silences, redemptive history has begun to be discussed at various sites. Many events organized by Black individuals with support from universities or the District’s Secretariat of Education have pushed for a better representation of enslavement in school texts and national history, but I also wonder how being represented in a situation such as slavery affects the descendents of those who were enslaved. I ask myself, if the inclusion of rituals of mourning in the museum was painful for some, as we examined in the last chapter, how would the communities react to the representation of slavery as a marker of identity? Of course, representing slavery cannot be done without representing resistance as well, and yet being “marked” as “children” of a crime remains controversial.

When we held the focus groups, I directly asked participants what they thought about the history of enslavement and resistance: “Would you see this in the Museum?” Most in the groups were supportive of the idea, making it clear that we had to include instances of resistance “because we survive today…. [W]e are a product of that
resistance” as one participant mentioned. Another participant, who is a musician and part of a Black family that has been crucial in rescuing heritage also supported this view and remarked “how they could live independently in the palenques [maroon communities] in the midst of a repressive society”. If the heroes of Independence are represented, then the heroes of Black resistance should also be emphasized. Also, it was necessary to give more relevance to the hands that built towns and roads, even the museum, as one female participant claimed. Another woman said that it was important for present and future generations to see this past, “so that they will also resist” and one man also linked this history to the present: “many of the regional elites are the same ones that enslaved a lot of people…in the worst economic conditions”. There was also agreement that present-day conditions called for other forms of resistance, such as education.

In the focus group with the young students, the theme came up without my intervention. For the sociologist, “Though many people will not like it and say that it’s overcome, that it’s ugly, there have to be artifacts that tell a lot of people that there was enslavement”. For him, enslavement is part of the foundational process of the nation, but it is poorly acknowledged. He connected this with narrations of history, specifically school books “that speak of the Blacks but only as slaves, people without history, they simply appeared, disappeared in the period of Independence and reappeared in 1851 [with the Law that ended slavery] and disappeared until 1991 [with the new constitution]”. For him, “it’s not only of the incumbency of the Black people but all Colombians…. With forced labor you also construct nation”. The young man who opposed the exhibition spoke of including musical instruments to represent the process of liberation, even the safeguard of many of the family names,
as well as hairstyles as traces of Africanness and of resistance. The young men in the
group emphasized the need to include oral accounts and bridge academic and
traditional knowledge.

Jaime Arocha was also in agreement with the necessity to tell the story of
enslavement:

of how these people were turned into and treated as merchandise during a
period that exceeds 250 years. What is complicated about learning is
unlearning…[W]hen you have such a long period during which you have
repeatedly told Black people they are smelly, or indolent, libidinal, those
types of things, there is a moment when people repeat this mechanically.
Then it’s worse because people will deny this, they show patterns of racism
but will deny they do.

(interview, December 10, 2008)

**The nation in the museum**

Are we able to resolve the tensions between unity and difference and between
equality or rights and reparation in the museum? For Bonilla (2003):

We want a country that gives political autonomy to its minorities but at the
same time we want a country where all citizens feel part of the same project.
We want a state that respects the legal systems of its cultural minorities and at
the same time we want to guarantee the judicial unity of the state. We want to
recognize the different traditions of the cultures that live in Colombia and simultaneously we want to protect equality and individual liberties of all citizens.

Martín Barbero also makes his case for having to choose between integration or isolation and defends:

a politics that extends universal rights and values to all those sectors of the population which have previously lived outside the application of those rights, be they women or ethnic minorities, evangelists or homosexuals. Michel Wiewiorka (1997) thus refuses to have to choose between the universalism inherited from the Enlightenment, which excludes whole sectors of the population, and the tribal differentiation affirmed in racist, xenophobic segregation—a choice that is fatal for democracy.

(2002: 629)

The task, then, is to avoid essentialist readings of culture (Hall 1999) and to be able to live with difference. But Pieterse (1997) warns that a multiculturalist museum that recognizes many communities takes the risk of becoming a series of cohabiting ghettos of static and essentialist views on culture. How to integrate differences? Pieterse lists several possibilities that range from pluralism (multiple views), dialogues between center and periphery, self-representation (with an eminent danger of centering representation in one group because no community is homogeneous), hybridity concerned with the emergence of crossover cultural forms and, finally, reflexive, which incorporates a criticism to the process and logics of othering.
Space as democratic engagement

How might the museum as a democratic and including space play out physically? And what might be the value of place in “promot[ing] equality through the combating of prejudices, the reversal process of othering and the engendering of pluralist, democratic values”? (Sandell 2005: 185).

The use of space to create exclusion is not an overcome strategy. Sandell describes three ways by which space can be used to promote inequality. First, “differentiated spaces (dioramas, exhibition cases or entire galleries) that separate, demarcate and distinguish between different groups” (2005: 188). These spaces described by Sandell are characterized by the exaggeration of difference and may lead to the opposition of an apparent superiority of a group over another. The second strategy he explains is “displaying cultural difference within physically shared spaces but within an interpretative framework that reproduces and reinforces (rather than challenges) social inequalities” (Ibid). The third strategy is marked by the absence of representation of certain groups from museum space and narratives.

As counter-strategies, or new strategies that are more in tune with the transformation of museums, Sandell describes three possibilities: compensatory; celebratory; and pluralist. The first is characterized by temporary, small, peripheral displays that are “attached” to the permanent exhibitions without causing much to change. The second, though still temporary, has a place in the main exhibition galleries and focuses on a particular group. The temporal nature of both of these strategies, Sandell points out, might undermine their impact and might be interpreted as less important. The last category integrates “cultural difference within a unifying interpretative
framework, designed to suggest both similarities and also (positive) differences between groups and in ways that aim to challenge rather than reproduce the inequalities of power” (Ibid: 191).

Different necessities might require a combination of integration and differentiation, as is the case described by Sandell in the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, in Glasgow, Scotland, where each of the six most practiced religions in the city has a space, but they are also compared to emphasize shared themes. The intention defines the spatial tactic utilized. What we might describe as a “second version” of the pluralist display that has been demanded by a sector of the Afrocolombian community is a place within the national narrative but also a differentiated space, separate from others, where what they perceive as a distinct identity can be on display. The “possession” of their own space has been defined in terms of historical reparation, as was described earlier. Recent national museums have opted for different strategies for creating not only inclusion, but also exalting difference. For instance, the National Museum of Australia integrated Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories, while the Canadian Museum of Civilization opted to keep them separate (Dean and Rider 2005).

Despite the fact that theorists like Pieterse (1997) call for an abandonment of the discourse about the other and the principle of separation, the fact remains that pluralism in museums runs the risk of making certain groups invisible or particular stories that are important to highlight might be lost in an all-encompassing narrative. As is the case for the much-contested policy of affirmative action, it seems then that national museums will continue to struggle with creating a balance between unity
and difference, while keeping in mind specific necessities of groups that have made claims due to their particular history. In regards to the communities that are pressing for the acknowledgement of past injustices or crimes against humanity, the responsibility of the museum, then, is to take these on.

The conscious need of a transformation of the museum should not stem from “self-generated altruistic interest for ‘others’ as well as for ‘White people’s’ own moral well being” (Bonnett 1997) but rather from a perception of what is fair and just, as well as from respecting the rights of the communities. The issue here is whether the museum has ideals of justice in mind. Sandell questions the traditional role of museums and signals that:

> Rather than aiming for objectivity or neutrality, museums might more usefully aim to adopt a position of fairness – in relation to the objects’ various meanings, to the many possible points of view that audiences will bring to the exhibition encounter and, most importantly, fairness to those human rights are at issue.

(2007: 196)

**MULTICULTURALISM AND POLITICS**

Until now, we have discussed representation of the nation in the museum seen through the eyes of different constituents. As we determined in the introduction and in chapters three and four, representation is a political act. What then, are the political consequences of representation in the national museum? If, in fact, we agree
with other Black representatives and academics that representations have a role to play in advancing respect for human rights and, for instance, are crucial in processes of reparation, to what extent does the impact of the exhibition contribute to such ideals? What part does an organization like a museum play in extending those rights outside of its walls? And to what extent should culture be used in an instrumental way, for example to advance in a policy of reparation?

In the United Kingdom, cultural policy was steered towards countering problems of social exclusion, and this affected museums and galleries (Newman and McLean 2006). The result was that cultural organizations had to justify their monies according to tangible benefits. But as researchers have pointed out, larger questions of equality of rights, holding of land, and access to education will not be resolved inside the museum. Message quotes Phillips in pointing out the limits of representations: “All a museum can do is to disrupt tired stereotypes and ways of thinking that lead only to dead ends and to stimulate its visitors to think critically about contemporary issues” (2009: 59). Our responsibility is to not reproduce inequalities and avoid representing a harmonious set of conflicts not resolved (Ibid.) as well as presenting the public with updated and collaborative efforts to transform negative stereotypes, in the ways that we discussed earlier. We also have to be aware of the obstacles faced. In the case of the National Museum of the American Indian, Message quotes Jacki Thompson drawing attention to how cultural recognition and representation in the arts will not generate change, as these do not create a platform of dialogue with the government of the United States. Culture, then, can also become “a distraction from the core project of achieving social justice, political power, and economic change for Native Americans” (Message 2008: 34).
At this point, we need to examine whether culture is compatible at all with political issues in the museum. Jordan and Weedon (1995) discuss different definitions of culture, a contested and open term. It can be thought of as something that one cultivates (related to aesthetic and intellectual experiences) or as a way of life, that is the property of groups rather than individuals. The third and most widespread use is related to the fine arts: music; literature; painting; film; etc. These researchers point to how this latter definition has worked to exclude and marginalize cultural production of certain groups. This conception has long been contested to include other cultural productions of popular and mass media, such as television and popular music. A fourth definition highlights that culture is not a separate sphere but rather a system by which a social world is communicated and hence a set of material practices that are related to social, economic and political spheres. All these notions are related to power, to represent and to define, but the fourth definition is directly related to the impact of exhibitions upon society at large.

Regardless of the limitations that museums have in pressuring larger transformations, we have to also acknowledge that social inequality is legitimated through culture because it is imbued with power (Jordan and Weedon 1995), hence the opposite can be true as well. When we discussed stereotypes and preconceptions in chapter three, we saw that they render Black people as powerless, either “naturally” born into poverty and violence or poorly capable of acting in politics. In this sense, culture is both a validation tool of the superiority of one group over another, as it is usually portrayed in the media, schoolbooks, etc. or it can be used as a tool against this oppression (Ibid.) and in the defense of identities that we explored in chapter four.
Public memory, the changing representations of the past, is shaped through the unequal competition of national narratives that influence politics. McCarthy points to the work of Black activists and scholars in the United States against the “master narrative” that highlights the “steady growth in the American Republic of ‘liberty and justice for all’” (2004: 766). In Colombia, Black people and scholars who participated in meetings, the exhibitions process, and focus groups deemed that cultural change and representation is inextricably tied to acknowledgement in wider spheres. Such is also the case of Canada and the United States, where indigenous representation in museums has been recognized “as a visible and immediately obtainable goal useful to broader, long-term political agendas” (Phillips 2008: 408).

The fact that struggles over recognition involve places like national museums make it clear that there is a wider battle to transform, “decentre, displace or deconstruct dominant cultural constructions, meanings and values” (Jordan and Weedon 1995: 5).

The question that arises from acknowledging the political power of culture is: what are its limits? Is culture enough? For scholars, academics and leaders there is an asymmetry apparent in the proliferation, support and visibility of cultural forms such as music and gastronomy, which may end up masking and rendering invisible genocide, lack of policies to effectively reduce poverty and encourage education access. Multiculturalism and respect for diversity create new challenges, since they are “aimed at nourishing and perpetuating the kind of difference which do not [threaten]”. Yuval-Davis further develops this idea quoting Andrew Jakubowicz: “Multiculturalism gives the ethnic communities the task to retain and cultivate with government help their different cultures, but does not concern itself with struggles
against discriminatory policies as they affect individuals or classes of people”
(Yuval-Davis 1997: 197).

**Revisiting the painful past**

Multiculturalism does not necessarily deal with past oppression either. A cruel past of injustice of the people of African descent is also present in the case of Native Americans and Aboriginals in Australia and New Zealand. A right gained and exercised by these groups has been participation and self-representation, but members of these communities might not necessarily be interested in questioning or representing a violent past. The case of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI, Smithsonian) is relevant here. Former director W. Rick West is quoted as saying:

> Here’s what I want everyone to understand. As much and as important as that period of history is [referring to conquest], it is at best only about 5 percent of the period we have been in this hemisphere. We do not want to make the National Museum of the American Indian into an Indian Holocaust Museum…. You have to go beyond the story of the tragedy and the travesty of the past 500 years. What we are talking about in the end is cultural survivance. We are still here.

(in Atalay 2008: 280)

This aspiration, which is represented in the museum’s exhibitions, is criticized because it does not include:
horror, injustice, and multifaceted aspects of Native people’s struggle while simultaneously highlighting their active engagement in and resistance to such onslaughts…. One cannot appreciate and experience the power of Native survivance if the stories and memories of our histories are not placed in the context of struggle.

(Ibid)

On this issue of the museum as a site for the discussion of politics and oppression, there does not seem to be an easy solution. Lonetree has also debated the “missed opportunities” at the NMAI. While she acknowledges the positive aspects of the new museology, she criticises a lack of “truth telling – a site where the difficult stories could finally be told to a nation with a willed ignorance of the past five hundred years of ongoing colonization” (2008: 310). She points to the “silences around the subject of genocide and the hard truths of colonization and the lasting impact in Indigenous communities” (Ibid). In order to understand resistance and survival, one has to acknowledge that oppression is a result of the work of humans upon other human beings. The similarities of pressing issues between Aboriginals, Native Americans and Afrodescendants are apparent when Lonetree writes that “Truth telling” on:

genocidal warfare, land theft, ethnic cleansing, disease, the attempted destruction of our religious and ceremonial life at the hands of the government and Christian churches – is for us to speak the truth about what has happened, document the suffering and name perpetrators of the violence in our history…. By naming and speaking these truths, we are mobbing out of victimry and seeking justice for the past and the present.
Wakeham has also been critical of this “depoliticized celebration of reconciliation” (2008: 354) that hides asymmetries in museological institutions, as well as larger dynamics of redemption of the state, which appropriates (cannibalizes) the discourse of diversity and “richness” of cultures.

**Citizenship and conflict**

The ability to promote wide change from within the museum is inextricably related to what the public perceives is the main role of the institution. Conditions for this may vary from country to country (see Cameron 2006, Dean 2009). In the interviews conducted for this research, 18 interviewees mentioned issues related to the social and political realities of the country and Black communities such as the paramilitary, palm enterprises (which usurp land), construction of roads that threaten ecosystems, mining, poverty, work conditions of semi-enslavement, armed conflict, food scarcity, displacement. But when asked directly about the national museum they would like to construct, only five responded with direct allusions to the country’s history of violence. A young lawyer who was visiting the exhibition because he had gone to the Pacific coast recently replied:

This issue of the disappeared, the massacres, I don’t know if a national museum should hold what is bad about its country but undeniably, as a Colombian, [I think] we should have a gallery of the massacres because at
some point we should be conscientious of what has happened and what is happening, just as the Germans have their Holocaust Museum.

(interview 27)

What this extract points to is the challenge of representing a nation where groups have confronted their differences (economical, political, ideological and criminal) by means of annihilating the other. Clearly, this reality contrasts with the notions of a national museum showing what is “good” about a country.

We could ask whether representations of the painful past create a dichotomy in representing the nation. In the particular case of the exhibition being discussed, for the production team, Velorios was not solely about notions of ancestry. It had a political intention as well, which was made explicit in the videos shown in the first space. The first showed the routes of the transatlantic slave trade. The second summarized the contexts of economic, social and violent processes that are altering the rituals seen in the exhibition and that deeply affect the communities. Hence, we tried to create a space within the exhibit to balance the “cultural” (as in aesthetic production) outlook on the communities, combining it with a political criticism to other social agents, including the State. In retrospect, this particular element was insufficient and timid, as the Deputy Director critiqued. One focus group participant who was also a guide to the exhibit also mentioned that the video held very important material but was not properly included in the exhibition. We thought that by including it in the first space it would be seen by most visitors, but the contrary was true because people walked directly to the altars in the second space. It did lead to some comments from people who questioned multicultural policies. A man who
works with a foundation that has projects with Afrocolombian communities in the Pacific said:

The video makes us think that Colombia is a multiethnic and multicultural nation but that in a few years this will only be true on paper because it’s been disappearing and colonizers go into their territories with goods that supplant local ones and are putting an end to their nourishment security. And this makes one think, what is the State doing so that this doesn’t happen?

(interview 13)

A young woman from mixed ancestry visiting with her mother was also highly critical of the reality of our multiculturalism:

Though the Constitution says that Colombia is plurietnic, apparently it stays on paper… because up until now ethnic communities have not been given the recognition they deserve…. And I think that in the cultural realm it might be a credit they deserve, but it’s always been about recognizing indigenous and Afrocolombian communities in the cultural sphere, but the political part, the social participation, in those spheres, it has not been granted.

(interview 41)

This last statement points to an apparent perceived excision between a cultural realm and the social and political realms. This interviewee had come to some of the other events related to the exhibition where communities had their space for self-
representation (some placed more emphasis on history and politics than others) and she stated that one should be able to recognize the political in what is “cultural”.

Staff supported being able to discuss and include polemical and political contexts that include conflict between groups or between groups and the State. Most did not think the museum’s role was to denounce but rather to leave visitors to make up their own conclusions. The Director also acknowledged that the museum could not avoid these topics, but that representing present-day conflicts was problematic because of the lack of historical distance and because the museum financially depends directly upon the executive branch of government, hence lacks independence.

For Black participants in the 2007 diagnostic meetings as well as for the first and third focus group, there was an immediate relationship between representing Afro Colombians in the museum and tackling issues related to politics and armed conflict, especially because of the role it has had in the process of displacement and the destruction of the memory of these groups. For a physical education teacher, the museum should hide nothing and should show what the country is. Another respondent considered the effort to include politics important because there has been an attempt to homogenise and make invisible what is politically different. Many of the participants in the focus groups were impacted by the images of displacement and violence because they know that this causes the impossibility of carrying out the rituals that are so important in the cosmology and functioning of these communities, as was mentioned by one activist:
The fact that one of the things that is being lost by force due to armed conflict is that our people cannot send off their dead ones as they should, and this is grave because the elders have to pick up the memory of the person, their spirit; it’s worrying and painful to see how war impedes the rituals.

They were in agreement that by killing the rituals, they are destroying a culture and, hence, it would be important to highlight these aspects because genocide is being committed. For a Black university teacher, the exhibition “gave me strength to keep working” and facing problems not directly related to culture such as a lack of a road and a decent hospital in her hometown.

There is also the question of when and how politics and conflict enter the museum. On October 4, 2008, before the presentation of Junpro 35, a group of singers and musicians from Guapi, the father of one of the students helping with the surveys asked me if a sugarcane-cutter could talk about the strike that had been going on for several weeks because Black workers were demanding better working conditions. Sugar enterprises also make, sell and receive subsidies for producing ethanol, but better economic returns do not reach the workers. I asked the group performing and they agreed to the announcement. People had not come to the museum to face the dire conditions of Black workers, but they listened to the story of the man on strike. He was looking for some economic help or the donation of food. He criticized the sugar estates and said their working conditions were worse than slavery. He then asked for support for the strike, which had already lasted 23 days, and added that the 15,000 men (most of them Black) were not guerrilla members but looking for economic stability. When he finished speaking, I told the audience that if they
wanted to bring anything for the cane cutters to the Museum they could do so (but over the course of the week nothing came in). Later, this small gesture of recognition was brought up by a focus group participant, despite the lack of response from the auditorium.

This incident recalls the situation described by Wakeham (2008) at the NMAI where a vigil in protest for the lack of defense of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, in Alaska, was being held close to the museum (policy prohibits protesting on Smithsonian property). At the same time, a one-year anniversary celebration of the museum was taking place and crowds flocked to see indigenous performances inside the venue while very few people noticed the protesters. In this task of widening the memories that are narrated in the museum, we are against a field of recognition that surpasses the walls of the institution, though it may start right at its doors. For Zambrano:

The historical defense of cultures is not the object of a program for the execution of a museographical script… because such defense goes through the actions of recognition in matters such as jurisdictional autonomy, political participation, cultural respect and social inclusion.

(2006: 96)

To this argument we add the question that Roldán poses: “Do we dispute recognizing diversity or is the problem a profound inequality of rights?” (2000: 115).
There does not seem to be a definite answer. The Constitution challenges the script of the Museo by promoting diversity, political participation, inclusion, but it does not make explicit how to make these objectives possible. The Museo’s task involves not only these changes but confronting the maladies that taking on this task entails because the national script is well embedded in society. For Macdonald, transformation is complex:

New memories do not necessarily just jostle alongside existing ones, like new products on a supermarket shelf, but may expose previous silences, raising questions about their motives or the power dynamics of which they were a part. Or they may threaten to eclipse other memories, edging them out of public space or undermining their own achieved settlement as accepted heritage.

(2009: 93)

The main problem is whether, as we discussed in chapter three, we diversify the national story leaving, the core unchallenged or whether we can also publicly question hierarchies and silences. Can we incorporate narratives that are unsettling and conflictive?

These and other questions that this research has raised do not have definite answers. In the upcoming and last part of this thesis, I intend to revisit some of the more polemic issues and draw some conclusions in order to highlight main areas of debate for national museums. In these conclusions I wish to explore possibilities that the results of this analysis have opened up, but also look at the limits of change set by
institutions. In order to do so, the next chapter will be centered on what the wider repercussions of this case study might be for the museum field, in practice as well as in theory.
6 CONCLUSIONS: WHAT THE PAST HOLDS FOR NATIONAL MUSEUMS

I started this research facing big political questions surrounding the problems inherent in representing the multicultural nation and the conflict between unity and difference, as well as role of national museums in advancing issues of citizenship and historic reparation for marginalized groups. In order to see how issues such as national narratives, stereotypes, representations of multiculturalism, reparation, citizenship and heritage played out in reality, I looked at the processes of production and reception around a single exhibition: *Velorios y santos vivos. Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palenqueras*. This exhibition constituted a conscious attempt by the National Museum of Colombia to redeem itself following centuries of making Afrocolombian communities invisible and staging discriminatory representations.

My intention throughout this thesis has been to analyze this concrete exhibition as it impacted different constituents as well as the museum where it was held. I looked at the meanings of the exhibition recreated by different parties as crucial elements to foster cultural rights, because through representations groups choose to “speak” and the national community chooses to “listen”. Hence, the recomposition of a public sphere where dialogue and debate are promoted is an important consequence of policies of multiculturalism. Although the results from this study reinforce the idea that national museums are arenas where these processes can take place, there is also a need to examine the limits these museums face in the ways they respond to multiculturalism and diverse societies. Therefore, in this last chapter I set out to look
at both possibilities and restrictions in the ways in which national museums can represent the nation to contemporary audiences and how they can contribute to societies at large.

I will look at the problem of identity narration in national museums that continue to represent the nation in a unitary sense; this occurs because politics moulds the ways in which that narrative is constructed. But resistance to new approaches to display can also come from visitors as well as staff; hence the issue of participation is another area that remains to be examined closely in the scope of national museums. This unitary model of national identity has consequences for the exercise of rights where different groups might not be able to appropriate such discourses. But there are also possibilities that are opened up in representing a more critical multiculturalism and taking on the issue of representations of the painful past and reparation as serious matters.

**National museums and identity narrative(s)**

If national museums represent our idea of nation and are places where we can generate narratives of the nation, what kind of nations are museums “producing”? A recent publication of case studies of national museums around the world with a focus on Europe and Asia, confirms that many of these institutions are reinforcing ideas of a sole identity that is meant to encourage cohesiveness against internal or external threats (Knell et al. 2010).

In the European context, national museums have not been exempt from a detected backlash against more open models of multiculturalism and calls for a return to
policies of assimilation; “tensions created by asylum, labour needs and multicultural citizenship, which have become dominant since the 1990s, have led to a redrawing of multicultural political and policy approaches” (Ashworth et al. 2007: 25; see Littler 2005, Message 2008) giving way to revived notions of integration, cohesion and unitary national identity. This phenomenon can be seen in countries that keep a strong hold on other cultures expected to adapt to mainstream society, such as Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia and Romania (European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research 2008). The case of the Netherlands new national museum is very telling in this respect. In that country, there is a perceived need to strengthen a national identity as a response to the changing internal cultural climate caused by migration. Van Hasselt describes how “[t]he idea of a national historical museum developed an increasingly firm foothold in the national conscience and several parties argued that immigrants should learn about Dutch history as part of the process of integration” (2010: 316).

The example from the Netherlands shows that particular political and economical contexts determine different stances and discourses on diversity as well as policies implemented by governments which inevitably influence national museums since these are not independent institutions. The recent surge of fear of the other in Europe has resulted in a resurgence of official policies of exclusion such as the deportation of the Roma people from France and Germany in 2010. How will these policies affect cultural institutions?

In nations that are growing economically and are overcoming their colonialist past, museums are playing a central part in the definition of a strong national identity in
response to perceived outside threats. Such is the case, for instance, of the South Korea National Museum which legitimizes local identity in contrast to Chinese and Japanese cultures (Choi 2010, Lee 2010), and the Shanghai Museum which appeals to aesthetic engagement to create a linear history of civilization and national pride (Varutti 2010). Recently, museums have emerged in places like Qatar and United Arab Emirates with the intention of creating a new narrative that will show a civilization in splendor and counter stereotypes of Arabs.

If, traditionally, national museums “exist precisely in order to foster and perpetuate the belief in the truth of abstractions such as national identity, character, mentality, or ethnicity” (Preziosi 2010: 63), does this mean that they are immutable? Can they stand firm while the museum landscape embraces principles closer to the New Museology or practices of what Hooper-Greenhill (2000) termed the postmuseum?1

If the museum acts as a sort of mirror and lens for different communities—as I explored in chapter four—and legitimises heritage that is outside the museum as Preziosi (2010) reminds us, when does the transformation of external conditions permeate the institution? The relationship with context creates a paradox for these institutions: on the one hand, there is the tendency and expectation from different constituents to preserve a strong national identity rooted in a distant past; on the other, exist the possibilities to engage audiences in serious debates around how nations change, the kinds of conflicts that arise and the politics of citizenship.

1 Some of these practices include bringing multiple voices and perspectives, multiple uses of the collections and alliances with different communities.
Problems of exclusion are not only relevant in the European context. As the Roma people were being expelled from France and Germany, the Mapuche people in Chile were on a hunger strike against the government and what they deemed as the stigmatisation of their people as “terrorists” due to a law that dates to the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). The difference between these cases is that policies in Latin America are geared towards grappling with issues of inclusion and not –what can be perceived as– the other way around. Hence, the context of regions and countries remains determinant in limiting the scope of my generalizations. But, at the same time, in order to build on the lessons we have learnt, we also need to find channels of communication between experiences in the so-called developing countries and institutions in other parts of the world.

Overall, I can ask whether national museums are destined to “construct a singular public performance, a singular manifestation of the nation rather than the nation found through democratic negotiation”? (Knell 2010: 7). Are they meant to follow whatever governmental policies are en vogue? For Paul Gilroy, who responded to attacks in 2004 on Britain’s diversity as threatening national cohesion, the matter is not centred on being able to construct a common narrative, but rather having a polity that is free of racism: “Why not try to identify the results of ordinary multiculture’s [sic] demands for recognition in various areas of policy: health, education, social reform, arts, criminal justice? Wouldn’t less racism make their institutions work better across the board?” (Gilroy 2008:4). We can interpret his position as calling on policies to tackle problems instead of glossing over them with tales of singular and

---

successful narratives, a strategy that does not acknowledge the realities different groups uphold.

This discussion and the case study of the Velorios exhibition showed that culture is political and can be staged as such in the museum. It also enabled us to understand that visitors both Afrocolombian and not are open to see content related to conflict, even if this does not necessarily fit into their ideal image of the narratives of the nation. They were also keen to see others, even through stereotypes, and see how their own cultural markers were both similar and dissimilar to cultures that were staged as “different.” Thus, it appears possible to think of national museums as the places where we ask questions on why we need stories of national identity and what the use is for myths of nationality as well as asking, following Rhiannon Mason (2010): ‘How many Colombias are there?’ or ‘How many ways are there of being Colombian?’

The role of audiences and staff

Limits on what national museums can stage are not only the result of politics, but are also imposed by visitors. Audiences might expect the museum to reinforce a certain identity and not necessarily question it. As we examined in the last chapter, overall, staff, focus group participants, and visitors regarded multiculturalism as something positive and inclusive, emphasizing the richness of cultures but saying very little on how these interact or how the conflicts between them should be staged. Visitors, both Afrocolombian and non-Afro, were determined to have a museum where everyone is included, without exception, hence suggesting a new grand-narrative. Diversity is seen as the major asset of the Colombian nation and thus a main component of what
the Museum should represent. This sort of “Feel-good multiculturalism” (Lau 2000) tends to oversimplify cultures; the triumph of diversity may lead to a denial of asymmetries of power and a rejection of differentiated identities based on race, class and gender (Mesa-Bains 2004). A multicultural narrative also runs the risk of simply putting stories side-by-side therefore simply changing protagonists but keeping the canon intact.

Despite these agreements between the different groups, there are also some disagreements surrounding what the narrative would look like. Museum staff was conscious of the dangers of attempting to totalize accounts and suggested building a narrative around themes, where participation is limited not only by the story told but also by resources available. Other unresolved issues include the relationship between multiculturalism and politics, as the latter concept does not necessarily resonate with people’s understanding of culture and how they imagine interaction between different groups that make up the nation. This too can be seen in cultural discourse disseminated by the Ministry of Culture, in which an emphasis is placed on culture as separate from the harsh realities of the groups it wishes to promote. But a need for political and social context does appear in the demands of a number of Black scholars and activists as well as a few visitors, as I discussed in chapters three and four.

There is also the question of reparation. Visitors in general did not see a need to privilege any specific group or culture in the museum. Under this idea, a specific space for Afrodescendent communities runs counter-wise to how audiences imagine the museum. Similarly, there was disagreement amongst the staff of the National
Museum of Colombia about developing a specific space for Afrodescendants; although a segregationist approach did not appeal as a solution for representing these groups, most did acknowledge that, because of historical reasons, these communities deserved special attention from the museum.

Can the museum and its constituents reach a consensus? This question is related to issues of who the museum can work with, who represents whom, as well as the museum’s capacity to swim against the tide and put on thoughtful displays that are less related to confirming a certain version of the past and more with critically examining representations. Burch mindfully asks: “Who is the audience and what exactly is it participating in? Is everything open to negotiation?” (2010: 229)

Dean has pointed out how audiences or specific communities reject changes in national narratives (2009). What kind of national museum would be the result of leaving all decisions up to audiences? Perhaps it would be a place that remains a crowd pleaser that confirms expectations and myths of the nation? Would different groups manage to find consensus or would the museum turn into a series of “ghettos” with no connection? On the other hand, closing off participation is dangerous as well, because it leaves all decision-making to guesswork and preferences, such as in the case of the Estonian National Museum where the involvement of audiences was not deemed relevant in the development of the project (Runnel, Tatsi and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2010). It seems then that neither extreme is desirable.

In this study, I found the relationship between participation and the museum very complex. Opening up museological processes had a deep impact on both
Afrocolombians as well as the museum and the production group because the experience of working with marginalized communities created greater awareness amongst us of the importance of the project as well as the need to continue such work. Hence, “participation” is not only a question of who we work with from the outside but also who our partners are inside the museum. Knell (2010) makes a distinction between those who make museums and those who go to museums, but in this particular case study these groups were actually very close, due to the impact of the exhibition. For future museum practice as well as advancement on theory, there would need to be more research done on interpretations of audiences of the discourses of nation in museums in order to compare and contrast with what professionals perceive as the role of the museum.

**Citizenship and transformation**

Under the model of a unitary national identity that is still going strong in many institutions, what happens to citizenship in the museum? As I have stated, citizenship is a key element of nationalism because it is a political identity that allows a transit from the self to the collective and has a historic dimension. Will everyone have the elements needed to make such a transit? Based on the analysis of this case study, I can argue that a traditional unitary narrative is not conducive to creating an arena of appropriation of this discourse. If there is but one way of being Colombian, for instance, or a sole historical narrative, how can different groups find their own contributions in such accounts? Afrocolombian people reassured us of this: if the nation and its narratives are exclusive, why should they feel any alliance to these?
A way in which people look to participate in the public arena is via the politics of difference. Message (2008) and other researchers (Lara 2002; Van Oenen 2002; Stevenson 2002 and 2003; Delanty 2003; Hooker 2005) focus on how citizenship today relies on cultural markers such as identity, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race to advance in putting forth rights. But, as was noted earlier, there are also growing reactions to the multicultural model which embraces differentiated policies. In the case of European national museums, Message (2008) detects that they are developing their tales of uniqueness as a defence mechanism due to the pressure of integration into the European Union. This evidence shows us that the tension between unity and difference that I explained for the case of Colombia is not unique and that the tension between universalist rights and differentiated rights is also present in other contexts.

In this particular case study, I looked at the difficulties still faced by Afrodescendents in Colombia regarding respect for their individual and collective rights. This group’s situation could be similar to what groups of immigrants are facing in other parts of the world. In this scenario, access to cultural rights is not resolved merely by staging exhibitions of cultural difference. Throughout this thesis, I have explored how there is no simple answer to how museums foster cultural rights and their impact on political, social and economic spheres; it is now clear that it is a complex process that should be looked at over a span of time.

As I noted in chapter three, overvaluing cultures in itself does not necessarily result in challenging existing paradigms, but new content can eventually lead to more radical transformations. If the kind of democratic conversations that led to the exhibition and during the months that it was open are possible in the museum, then
these institutions could also be part of a greater effort to foster these ways of talking outside of their walls so that otherness is not only embraced inside museums.

On the other hand, one should be wary of placing too much emphasis on what museums can accomplish. Message warns about:

overstating the extent of governmental reach, so as to avoid challenging the potential that particular circumstance, seized discourse, contestation and compromise have to develop into new processes and forms of government and even altered relationships between individuals and the state, which may even result in the creation of new definitions of citizenship and new sites of sovereignty.

(2008: 37)

How this plays out in this particular context is seen through the results of the travelling version of Velorios which has completed its second year of being exhibited in different communities, inviting them to construct their own altars (if they decide to) using panels of text and photographs from the exhibition and instigating conversations and discussions on heritage, rituals and Afrocolombian identity. It has visited different parts of the country (first those regions that participated in the exhibit, then others with high percentages of Afrocolombians as well as other smaller communities that are in the process of crafting their Black identities). The travelling exhibition has also been staged in 12 public schools in Bogotá, with workshops and

---

3 For information on the travelling exhibition see: http://www.museonacional.gov.co/sites/Velorios_site/Index.html
enriching exchanges between docents, students and museum representatives. Many of these Black communities have used the exhibition as a starting point for their own agendas and plan to continue researching and developing projects on aspects of the spirituality of Black people. In other words, the exhibition has produced processes that are outside of the museum realm. Many times the impact of a multicultural-represented exhibit is unpredictable. As I finish this text, a museum in Cali, one of the regions not included in the exhibition, held its own exhibit (August 2010) on the funerary rituals of the Black communities. The structure was obviously inspired by Velorios, though its producers did not publicly mention it. This museum has now asked us to cooperate in their next exhibition regarding festivities to the saints.

**Multiculturalism and representation**

Change in national museums is possible because myths of identity are a construction (Preziosi 2010: 63); therefore, we are able to interrogate the objects that have been used to represent that story of identity as well as propose new ways in which museums can elaborate more nuanced and critical narratives. In order to engage with society at large, national museums should think about how “[m]ulticulturalism has evolved and social justice issues (human rights issues, antiracist pedagogy, programs that address systemic discrimination, equity, inclusion etc.) need to be firmly entrenched” (Chalmers 2002: 300). This sort of working policy of multiculturalism would differ substantially from the ways some national museums deal with difference, such as programming “special events” on specific days without making it a continuous thought process.
For Jordan and Weedon (1995), genuine multiculturalism includes other key elements such as avoiding a monopoly on the values of cultures, having genuine dialogue, creating anti-racist policies and addressing wide notions of culture and participation throughout institutions. Regarding the role of the State and its institutions, though they should not restrict the public sphere because that space belongs to citizens, the State cannot wait with crossed arms. De Carvahlo, for instance, defends that the State privilege marginalized communities and sponsor young creators that cultivate traditional and experimental forms (2005). He contends that citizens also need social movements involved in vindicating their rights through participation in the political realm.

In an exercise of reconfiguration of narratives of the nation, we have to be wary of creating a narrative of an ideal collective society without dissenting voices to the core discourse. There is also a call to move towards relational models that allow us to see distinct identities that cross over single culture models. Another possible danger is essentialism. We also have to be careful of simplifying cultures. Hence, we cannot expect that Black people should be taught only about Black culture (Jordan and Weedon 1995) and we would have to move towards the recognition of the heterogeneous character of communities. For instance, De Carvahlo highlights that Afrodescendant music can—at the same time—both vindicate rights but create other exclusions and perpetrate certain stereotypes against women. Instead of trying to smooth over uncomfortable differences, national museums should attempt to grapple with a more critical rather than a celebratory multiculturalism. Such an invitation requires that visitors think about their own standpoint and culture without homogenising, trivialising or essensialising it, finding common ground as well as
difference with other cultures, challenging hegemonic discourse, and encouraging “dangerous [critical] discourses” (Chalmers 2002: 295).

These objectives of more critical ways of engaging with multiculturalism might stand in contrast to how people described their own preferred representation. Not all groups and communities will choose to represent themselves in a national museum under a critical light. In the case of Afrodescendants participating in this study, as I discussed in chapter four, an idealization of the past is inevitable and difficult to question under the circumstances of violence that they still face today. A unified sense of social memory is both necessary and problematic: in the former sense because it creates a sense of community, in the latter because it tends to homogenize ways of being Black. While theory signals that museums should be moving to stage hybrid identities (Pieterse 1997), we saw that many times people do not want to acknowledge non-traditional identity markers.

If national museums are less experimental than other institutions how can they be reimagined? For the philosopher Andreas Huyssen (2002), one way of judging museums will be by their ability to stage the problems of representation, narration and memory in programmes and exhibitions. Will these institutions be able to triumph over the ideology of the superiority of one culture over others? Can it be a stage for other representations and a space for contestation and cultural negotiation? Can national museums favor recognition of others in their alterity, with their histories, aspirations and worlds? (Huyssen 2002: 74).
The answers should be yes, though any attempt to grapple with such polemic issues can only be thought of as a process, not as a goal. For the National Museum of Colombia, the conversations initiated before, during and after the Velorios exhibition have resulted in closer working relationships with different Afrodescendent communities and the possibility to construct a new research project. Many of the staff think it is possible to recognize the other with respect and embrace new practices. Still the process has not been without conflict. As a result of the commitment the Museum undertook, we have begun working to establish the Observatory of the memories and resistance of Afrodescendants, with the objective of staging the first permanent exhibition on Afrodescendants in the National Museum of Colombia on the theme of spirituality in a few years.

**Historic reparation and responsibility**

Are national museums places that include difficult political contexts and histories of the painful past because communities are demanding these changes? What happens when national museums try taking on these views? Future research is much needed in this area, analysing the impact of staging such exhibitions and how processes of production affect communities and institutions. Longitudinal or comparative research across exhibitions, scenarios and countries that can look at broader and longer processes is much needed as well.

In the case of the Afrodescendent communities, looking at the past will be painful and conflictive, but also urgent and necessary. Their participation in future projects will continue to cause disputes and frustrations due to internal fractures and the complexity of the task before us. But it is also true, as Arocha told me in a recent
meeting, that the situation of the Black communities has not improved. Rodríguez (2010) highlights the fact that the probability of an Afrocolombian being displaced is 84% higher than the rest of the population. He also points to the Auto 005 of 2009 of the Constitutional Court which demands that the State act immediately to protect the rights of the Afrodescendent population that has been forcefully displaced. There are pressing issues concerning the impact of violence and the holding of land, amongst other dire conditions. What becomes of central importance is how and what to represent. We saw in the last chapter that there is an imminent risk of highlighting the victims’ stories, even those stories of resistance, and not presenting audiences with other ways of understanding the legacies of enslavement, but, following Hein, “…if museums are sites for objects to speak, then, when eloquently displayed, they will speak of past and present wrongs as well as rights” (2000: 105).

These issues are relevant not only for the Colombian case but also universally because all nations are a product of conflict. German philosopher Hans Magnus Enzensberg makes a drastic assertion on the exclusive character of the nation: “a coherent national narrative presupposes an ability to forget everything that is contradictory” (1992: 19). Enzensberg draws attention to how a part of the world’s population has always been moving, much of the time in violent contexts: conquest, expulsion, exile, enslavement, deportation and colonization, situations that ultimately challenge the “coherence” he criticizes.

If reconciliation starts with the acknowledgement of violent history, then museums can be part of a larger effort. In chapter five, I discussed the issue of exhibitions as reparation. Perhaps the effort of Velorios was a single step but it did not go
unacknowledged. The test remains to make culture more political so that it can encompass the realms that communities have to deal with:

histories and current practices of racism, oppression, disempowerment, and without ignoring histories and practices of resistance, affirmation, creativity, and agency, and without removing all possibility… of the very hope that is required for agency, activism, and change.

(Edelstein 2005: 15)

Lastly, as a national museum practitioner as well as researcher, my experiences have taught me that it is difficult to combine both the realities of working for a traditional institution and the knowledge that transformation is indeed possible and desirable. Participating in the Velorios experience was a thoughtful lesson in negotiation, opening up processes and constant learning but also in taking both personal and institutional criticism, as well as acknowledging mistakes done along the way. Even knowing the difficulties we faced, I am still convinced that the National Museum of Colombia –and by extension other national museums– can continue (or start) to be the public spaces where the multiple identities of individuals and communities are staged and where the nation is questioned as well as thought of as heterogeneous, conflictive and asymmetrical.
### Appendix 1A  Survey questionnaire (Spanish)

**VISITA A LA EXPOSICIÓN**

1. ¿Cómo se enteró de la exposición?

2. ¿Quién lo acompaña hoy en su visita?
   - Amigos
   - Familia
   - Compañeros de estudio
   - Compañeros de trabajo
   - Estudiantes
   - Solo

3. ¿Qué puntuaje le da a la exposición en una escala de 0 a 10?
   - Mejores puntuajes: 8, 9 y 10
   - Intermedios: 3 a 7
   - Bajos: 0, 1 y 2

4. ¿Recomendará a familiares o amigos visitar esta exposición?
   - a. Seguro que sí
   - b. Es probable que sí
   - c. Es poco probable
   - d. No lo hará

### EL MUSEO

5. ¿Había visitado el Museo antes?
   - Sí
   - No
   - Si su respuesta es afirmativa, ¿cuál recuerda usted que fue el motivo de su última visita?

### DATOS PERSONALES

6. Género
   - M
   - F

7. Edad
   - 10 a 15
   - 16 a 20
   - 21 a 25

8. Estado civil
   - Soltero(a)
   - Casado(a)
   - Separado(a)
   - Unión Libre

9. Lugar de residencia
   - Ciudad / municipio
   - Barrio

### COMENTARIOS

Estaría interesado en participar en una discusión de grupo sobre esta exposición. En caso positivo, por favor déjenos correo electrónico, teléfono donde lo podamos llamar y / o celular.

Le gustaría recibir información sobre las actividades del Museo
   - Sí
   - No

Correo electrónico:
Appendix 1B       Survey questionnaire (English)

Hello my name is Cristina. I am conducting a study on the experiences of visitors to this exhibition. This questionnaire consists of 12 questions and will take 5 to 10 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to stop responding at any time. There are no right or wrong answers but please answer these questions as accurately as possible. Your answers will remain confidential. Please feel free to ask questions if anything is unclear.

Time of survey

Date

Exhibition visit

1. By which means did you find out about the exhibition?

2. Who is accompanying you today?

Friends

Family

Peers (school/ university)

Coworkers

Students

Alone

3. Evaluation of the exhibition

What score would you give the exhibition in a scale from 0 to 10?
Best scores: 8, 9 and 10

Intermediate: 3 to 7

Low 0, 1 and 2

4. Would you recommend visiting the exhibition to friends or family?

Completely possible

Probably

Somewhat possible

Not possible

5. Had you visited the museum before?

Yes

No

If so, what was the reason for your last visit?

Information about the informant

6. Gender

7. Age

10 to 15

26 to 30

41 to 50
16 to 20

31 to 35

51 to 55

21 to 25

36 to 40

56 or older

8. Civil Status

Single

Married

Separated

Domestic partnership

Widow

9. Place of residence

City

Neighborhood

If Bogotá is not your city of origin, how many years have you lived here?

Place of birth

10. Which one of the following best describes your principal activity?
Salaried

Independent worker

Unemployed

Student

Home

Other, Which?

We would like to know whether the participation of people who identify themselves as Black or Afrodescendent is significant. I am going to read all the categories for you to choose from:

11. According to your cultural identity, you consider yourself:

1 Afrocolombian

2 Afrodescendent

3 Member of a Black community

4 Palenquero(a)

5 Raizal from Saint Andrews Islands

6 Cimarrón(a)

7 Black

8 Indigenous; from which group or community?

9 Roma (gypsy)
10 I do not belong to any ethnic group

11 Other; which?

12. According to physical appearance, you consider yourself:

1 Black

2 Mulatto

3 “Moreno(a)”

4 “Mestizo(a)” (Miscegenous)

5 Yellow

6 White

7 Other skin colour; which?

Comments

Would you be willing to participate in a 15-minute interview about this exhibition?

Would you be willing to participate in a group discussion about this exhibition? If so, please leave us your contact information: email address, daytime telephone and/or cell phone. If you would like to receive information about our activities, please leave us your email address.
Appendix 2A Interview protocol questions (Spanish)

Mi nombre es Cristina. Estoy haciendo un estudio sobre cómo los visitantes se relacionan con la exposición Velorios y santos vivos. Me gustaría aprender sobre sus percepciones de la muestra. Quisiera hacerle unas preguntas, sobre las que no hay una respuesta buena o mala y esto tomará unos quince minutos. Esta charla es voluntaria, de manera que si en cualquier momento la quiere interrumpir, puede hacerlo. Lo que hablemos será tratado de una forma confidencial y anónima. La idea es que usted piense en voz alta pues su conocimiento es muy importante para el estudio.

¿Está de acuerdo con que grabe la conversación y tome notas?

La charla está dividida en dos partes: su experiencia en la exposición y su experiencia en el Museo.

1. ¿Qué motivó su visita a la exposición?

2. ¿Qué elementos le causaron el mayor impacto?

3. ¿Basándose en su experiencia, cuál es el mensaje de la exposición? ¿Qué le dice la exposición sobre las comunidades?

4. ¿Qué ideas tenía usted sobre estas comunidades? ¿Qué aspectos conocía usted sobre estas comunidades?

5. ¿Vio el video sobre los contextos? ¿Qué pensamientos o emociones le produjo? ¿era relevante? ¿Le ayudó o le impidió a comprender la exposición?

6. ¿Cómo se sintió recorriendo la exposición? ¿Qué emociones le produjo?
7. ¿Hubo temas de la exposición que tuvieron eco en su propia experiencia?

Ahora quisiera que me contara un poco sobre su experiencia en el Museo

8. ¿Visitó otras salas del Museo?

Si la respuesta es negativa: ¿Estaría interesado en visitarlas? ¿Por qué? (Pasar a la última pregunta)

a. ¿Cómo se sintió?

b. ¿Encontró objetos o historias que sintió hablaban sobre experiencias suyas?

c. ¿Cree que hay historias importantes que no están incluidas?

9. Supongamos que un extranjero que no tiene conocimiento alguno sobre Colombia visita el Museo hoy.

¿Cree que él o ella se podría armar una imagen completa de lo que es la nación?

10. Por último quisiera pedirle que imaginara que lo han contratado para construir de la nada el Museo Nacional de Colombia

¿Cómo sería la representación de la nación?

¿Qué historias contaría?

¿Habría grupos o temas a los que usted les daría protagonismo?

¿Cómo sería la relación entre los distintos grupos que componen la nación?

11. ¿Hay alguna otra idea sobre la exposición o el Museo que quiera comentar?
Appendix 2B   Interview protocol questions (English)

Hello, my name is Cristina and I’m doing a study to learn about the perception of the visitors to this exhibition. Would you agree to have a talk with me about your experience in the exhibition? This will take about 15 minutes. (If visitors agreed then they were given further information). I’m doing a study on how visitors relate to this exhibition and I’d like to learn about your perceptions. I will ask you some questions for which there are no right or wrong answers. This talk is voluntary, so if at any point to wish to leave or stop, you may do so. Our discussions will be treated confidentially and your identity will remain anonymous. The idea is for you to speak your mind out loud, your knowledge is very important for this study. Would you mind if I take notes? May I record this conversation, or would you rather that I don’t? (Visitors were also given consent forms in order for them to agree to the uses of the interview).

This conversation is divided in two parts: your experience in the exhibition and your experience in the Museum.

The exhibition

1. What motivated you to visit the exhibition?

2. What elements of the exhibit caused the greatest impact?

3. Based on your experience, what do you think was the purpose of the exhibition? What does the exhibition tell you about the communities represented?

4. What ideas did you have about these communities?

5. Did you watch the video on the contexts in the first space?
What thoughts or emotions did it produce? Was it relevant? Did it help or hinder your understanding of the exhibition?

6. How did you feel in the exhibit? What emotions did it produce?

7. Are there themes in the exhibition that appealed to your own experience?

I would like to ask you about your experience in the museum.

8. Did you visit any of the other galleries in the museum? (If the answer is negative, go to the last question). If so, how did they make you feel? Did you find objects or stories that you felt spoke about your experiences? Do you think that there are important stories that are not included?

9. Let’s pretend that a foreigner who doesn’t know anything about Colombia visits the museum today. Do you think that he or she would get a good sense of what the nation is?

10. Last, I’d like to ask you to imagine that you have been hired to construct the national museum from scratch.

What would the representation of the nation look like?

What are some of the stories that it would tell?

Would there be any groups that you would give more relevance to?

What would be the relationship between different cultural groups in this museum?

11. Are there any other ideas about the exhibit or the Museum you would like to comment?
Appendix 3A  Letter and consent form (Spanish)

Bogotá, D.C., agosto de 2008

Apreciado participante:

Soy estudiante de doctorado de la Universidad de Leicester en el Reino Unido y hago parte del equipo de trabajo del Museo Nacional de Colombia. Agradezco de antemano su interés por participar en el proyecto de investigación que busca describir e interpretar cómo se relacionan los visitantes con la exposición *Velorios y santos vivos. Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palenqueras.*

Usted fue seleccionado para participar en el estudio porque visitó la exhibición y me interesa aprender acerca de su interpretación, percepción o experiencia al respecto. Aclaro que para el estudio no hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas y que la charla tomará alrededor de quince minutos.

Su participación es totalmente voluntaria y por supuesto está libre de terminar la conversación en cualquier momento. Le garantizo que la información que usted comparta conmigo será tratada de manera confidencial y su identidad se mantendrá anónima.

Si desea colaborarme en el proyecto, tenga la gentileza de firmar el formato adjunto de consentimiento de participación en la investigación.
Finalmente, si tiene dudas sobre algún componente ético del estudio puede contactar a doctora Lisanne Gibson, del Departamento de Ética de la Universidad de Leicester en el correo electrónico lg80@le.ac.uk.

Gracias por su participación

Cordialmente,

CRISTINA LLERAS FIGUEROA
FORMATO DE CONSENTIMIENTO DE PARTICIPACIÓN EN EL PROYECTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN ACERCA DE LA EXPOSICIÓN VELORIOS Y SANTOS VIVOS. COMUNIDADES NEGRAS, AFROCOLOMBIANAS, RAIZALES Y PALENQUERAS

Deseo participar en el proyecto de investigación de la exposición Velorios y santos vivos. Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palenqueras. El objetivo me ha sido mencionado claramente y he leído la hoja explicativa al respecto. Mi participación implica:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Si</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ser entrevistado(a) por el investigador</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permitir que la entrevista sea grabada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permitir que la entrevista sea transcrita</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permitir que la entrevista sea citada directamente</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Entiendo que la información de esta conversación será guardada y procesada por el investigador para los siguientes productos:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Si</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Documento de la tesis doctoral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicación a partir de la tesis doctoral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicación de un documento de resumen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicación de un reporte de investigación</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Por favor escoja la frase abajo que describe como usted quiere aparecer en estos documentos:

Entiendo que el investigador no usará mi nombre ni datos personales que permitan mi identificación de manera que se proteja mi identidad.

Entiendo que he aprobado la aparición de mi nombre y el nombre de mi comunidad para ser utilizado en el proyecto y sus publicaciones.

Appendices 318
Entiendo que esta información será utilizada únicamente para los objetivos de esta investigación.

Mi participación es voluntaria y puedo tomar la decisión de no tomar parte del proyecto y retirarme tranquilamente si así lo deseo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nombre</th>
<th>Firma</th>
<th>Fecha</th>
<th>Hora</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Appendices 319
Appendix 3B  Letter and consent form (English)

Bogotá D.C., August 2008

Dear participant,

I am currently a student of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester and a member of the National Museum staff. I am very grateful that you are willing to take the time to participate in my research project that looks at how visitors engage with and interpret the exhibition *Velorios y santos vivos. Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raízales y palenqueras*.

You were selected to participate in the study because you have visited the exhibition. I am interested in learning about your perceptions and interpretation – knowing that there are no right or wrong answers – of the exhibition and would be grateful if you could respond some questions. This interview will take about fifteen minutes.

Your participation in the project is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the project at any point. Any information you supply will be treated confidentially and anonymously.

If you have any questions about the ethical conduct of the survey please contact the Department Ethics Officer, Dr Lisanne Gibson, on lg80@le.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for participating.

Signature
Research Consent form

I agree to take part in the research project on *Velorios y santos vivos. Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palenqueras*. I have had the project explained to me and I have read the Information statement about the project, which I may keep for my records. I understand that by agreeing to take part I am willing to:

- Be interviewed by the researcher
- Allow the interview to be taped / recorded
- Allow the interview to be transcribed
- Allow my words to be quoted directly

I understand that this information will be held and processed by the researcher for the following purposes:

- Document of doctoral thesis
- Paper on the theme of the doctoral thesis
- Published as a summary document
- Published as a research report

Please choose the statement below that describes how you want to appear in the documents:

I understand that the researcher will not use my name and that no identifiable personal data will be published in order to protect my identity from being made public.

I understand that I have given approval for my name and for the name of my town / community to be used in the final report of the project and future publications.

I understand that this information will be used only for the purposes set out in this statement.
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without prejudice.

Name [PRINT] ……………………………………………

Signature ………………………………………………….

Date ………………………………………………………..
### Description of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of participants (all of them white or mestizo unless noted)</th>
<th>Time of interview</th>
<th>Length (in minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26/08/2008</td>
<td>Two male anthropology students from the National University. Around 22 years old. They turned out to be students of Professor Jaime Arocha.</td>
<td>17:55</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>27/08/2008</td>
<td>Five women around 60 years of age from different regions who were in Bogotá for a librarian`s congress. One of them had heard about the exhibit and motivated the others to come.</td>
<td>17:00</td>
<td>12:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time In</td>
<td>Time Out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/08/2008</td>
<td>17:30</td>
<td>16:50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/08/2008</td>
<td>14:00</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/08/2008</td>
<td>14:45</td>
<td>22:20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/09/2008</td>
<td>11:40</td>
<td>15:00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male and female friends around 45 years of age. She is an assiduous visitor of the Museum and brought her friend.

Young anthropology female with male friend who is about 30 years old. He has been living in the United States since he was 14 and is visiting Colombia.

Female, retired school teacher visiting by herself, around 65 years of age.

Male, older than 56, retired, married, from Bogotá. He had been to the Museum before, found out about the...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 03/09/2008</td>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Afrodescendent woman around 45 years of age visiting with her daughter, around 11. She came to the Museum for a school assignment and found the exhibit by chance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 04/09/2008</td>
<td>17:30</td>
<td>Female school teacher around 50 years of age. She came to the exhibit looking for &quot;culture&quot;. No recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 07/09/2008</td>
<td>15:30</td>
<td>White female around 45 years who is visiting with her family. Found out through the National University where her daughter works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/07/2008</td>
<td>16:30</td>
<td>Male around 50 years visiting with two sons. He is a Xerox machine technician. Takes sons to cultural events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/10/2008</td>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Male around 42 years, visiting from Medellín. Considers himself mestizo and indigenous. Frequently visits the Museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/11/2008</td>
<td>18:00</td>
<td>Male docent around 65 years who has taken courses with Professor Jaime Arocha.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/11/2008</td>
<td>17:30</td>
<td>Group interview with 7 people. Adults ranging from 28 to 50 years. Members of a foundation that works...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with Afrodescendants in the Pacific. Two Afrocolombians were present: one male and one female.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity and Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14/09/2008</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>Mother around 45 and daughter around 10 visiting on heritage day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/09/2008</td>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Young Afrocolombian woman around 20 years. Dancer and friends with Afrocolombian guides to the exhibition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/09/2008</td>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Three women between 65 and 70 years. They frequently visit exhibitions with a larger group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/09/2008</td>
<td>16:40</td>
<td>Single male around 40 years. Had heard about the exhibit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 19/09/2008</td>
<td>17:10</td>
<td>Husband and wife around 40 visiting from Manizales with a younger cousin who is a university student in Bogotá.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 21/09/2008</td>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>Two females who are related, around 60 years, one visiting with husband. The other lives in Bucaramanga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 21/09/2008</td>
<td>13:45</td>
<td>Female around 45 years, divorced with children and male friend who lives in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 23/09/2008</td>
<td>12:20</td>
<td>Psychology student around 22. Is morena but considers herself...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>23/09/2008</td>
<td>Afrodescendent student around 26 years and female friend from Huila. He was dressed in leather and had a ponytail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>24/09/2008</td>
<td>Two female social work students wearing nursing uniforms. One is around 26 and the other around 22 years. The second one considers herself of indigenous ancestry but also mestiza.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>30/09/2008</td>
<td>Young Afrocolombian male around 30 years and female friend. Refused to be recorded and abruptly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Interviewee Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/09/2008</td>
<td>16:15</td>
<td>Young male, Mexican tourist around 28 years with postgraduate education. Felt familiarity with own customs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/01/2008</td>
<td>14:30</td>
<td>Two young male friends around 21 years. One studies communications, wears &quot;ethnic&quot; Peruvian hat and the other studies televisión production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/10/2008</td>
<td>15:30</td>
<td>Male, lawyer around 35 years. Single with postgraduate, had visited the Pacific coast. Was in exhibition with girlfriend. Lives close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Interview Duration</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/04/2008</td>
<td>Male student of</td>
<td>17:00 - 17:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family interview.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2008</td>
<td>Two female</td>
<td>11:00 - 10:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/05/2008</td>
<td></td>
<td>11:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31/08/2008</td>
<td>17:55</td>
<td>Two females from Martinique, one living in Bogotá for a year, around 60 (later found out she is the wife of the French Ambassador) and a friend around 70 who is visiting. Both Afrodescendent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32/10/2008</td>
<td>17:15</td>
<td>Two female schoolgirls who are 15 and 16 years old. One is Afrocolombian. Visiting the museum because of schoolwork and were curious about the exhibition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>15/10/2008</td>
<td>10:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>15/10/2008</td>
<td>17:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>17/10/2008</td>
<td>10:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/10/2008</td>
<td>11:10</td>
<td>Female and male art students from Barranquilla who are in Bogotá for art fair. They are around 22. First time in the Museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/10/2008</td>
<td>17:20</td>
<td>Two males around 25 who had taken the guided tour. One is a psychology student and the other is working with people with brain damage. The second one had a minor limp and used a walking stick. Both had a &quot;grunge&quot; look, had come to other exhibit events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/10/2008</td>
<td>14:30</td>
<td>Couple from Saint Andrews. He is around 45 and is an evangelical pastor,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>335</td>
<td>24/10/08</td>
<td>12:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>24/10/08</td>
<td>20:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>26/10/08</td>
<td>12:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>26/10/2008</td>
<td>16:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>26/10/2008</td>
<td>16:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>31/10/2008</td>
<td>14:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>31/10/2008</td>
<td>19:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>31/10/2008</td>
<td>15:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>01/11/2008</td>
<td>17:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>03/11/2008</td>
<td>16:05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5A  Protocol for group interview with staff (Spanish)

La exposición

¿Qué elementos de la exposición le causaron el mayor impacto? ¿Por qué?

¿Hubo aspectos de la exposición que no le gustaron? ¿Por qué?

¿Desde su punto de vista, como contribuyeron los videos sobre contextos a entender la situación de las comunidades?

El Museo

¿De acuerdo a su punto de vista, como puede el Museo Nacional desarrollarse de manera que sea más representativo de la nación multicultural?

Un sector de las comunidades clama la reparación histórica por medio de la reconstrucción de las narrativas de lo nación y un espacio separado dentro del Museo como una forma de enfrentar los legados de la esclavitud y el racismo. ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre este tema?

Desde su perspectiva, ¿cuál debe ser el siguiente paso que el Museo debe seguir en el trabajo con las comunidades afrocolombianas?
Appendix 5B  Protocol for group interview with staff (English)

The Exhibition

What elements of the exhibit caused the greatest impact for you? Why do you think this?

Were there any aspects of the exhibition that you disliked? Why?

Did you think that the video with the information on the political and economic situation of these communities contributed to the exhibition?

The Museum

In your view, how can the National Museum change in order for it to be representative of the multicultural nation?

A strong sector of the afrocolombian communities is claiming reparation via the reconstrucion of the narratives of the nation and a separate space in the Museum, as a means to come to grips with the legacies of enslavement and racism. What is your view on this matter?

In your view, what should be the next step the Museum should take in working with afrocolombian communities?
Appendix 6A Questions for production team (Spanish)

¿Qué razones lo llevaron a colaborar en este proyecto?

¿Cuáles eran sus expectativas de la exhibición? ¿Se cumplieron?

Desde su punto de vista, ¿cuáles eran las mayores dificultades que afrontaba el proyecto?

¿Qué elementos de la exhibición le causaron mayor impacto? ¿Por qué?

¿Hubo aspectos de la exposición que no le gustaron? ¿Por qué?

¿Desde su punto de vista, como contribuyen los contextos a entender la situación de las comunidades?

¿Cree que es posible reparar las injusticias que afrontan las comunidades afrocolombianos con exposiciones como esta?

¿Desde su perspectiva, cual debe ser el siguiente paso que el Museo debe seguir en el trabajo con las comunidades afrocolombianas?
Appendix 6B  Questions for production team (English)

What reasons led to collaborate closely with this project?

What were your expectations of the exhibition? Were these met?

In your experience, what were the greatest difficulties that the project faced?

What elements of the exhibit caused the greatest impact for you? Why do you think this?

Were there any aspects of the exhibition that you disliked? Why?

Did you think that the video with information on the political and economic situation of these communities was relevant to the exhibition?

Do you think that it is possible to repair injustices that Afrocolombian communities face with exhibits such as this one?

In your view, what should be the next step the Museum should take in working with Afrocolombian communities?
Appendix 7A  Protocol for focus groups (Spanish)

Buenos días a todos. Gracias por asistir a este grupo de discusión sobre la exposición Velorios y santos vivos y sobre la representación de las comunidades afrocolombianas, negras, raizales y palenqueras en el Museo Nacional.

La idea de la reunión es que tengamos una discusión de acuerdo con algunos temas que les voy a plantear y otros que surjan como relevantes. Siéntanse por favor cómodos con sus aportes críticos, la idea es poder escuchar las opiniones de todos y respetar las que no compartamos. Es decir que no hay respuestas correctas e incorrectas, se trata más de una charla y sus opiniones nos van a ayudar a mejorar nuestras acciones.

En otras reuniones similares invitaremos a grupos de jóvenes para también escuchar sus voces. El objetivo de estos encuentros es aprender de lo bueno y lo malo de la exposición y pensar hacia futuro cual puede ser un camino para continuar el trabajo con comunidades que participaron en la exposición.

Estaremos acá, máximo hasta las 12 del medio día. En esa mesa hay tinto y agua aromática, también agua normal, unas galleticas y palitos de queso para que ustedes se paren cuando quieran a tomar o comer algo durante la sesión.

Luisa Córdoba está participando en la exposición realizando observación de los visitantes y encuestas. Hoy va a ser nuestra escriba. También nos acompaña Julián Grueso, quien colaboró con el estudio de público de la exposición y nos va a colaborar como observador.
1. Por favor díganos su nombre y algo sobre usted que quisiera compartir con el grupo que nos permita conocerle mejor.

2. Sobre la exposición *Velorios y santos vivos*. ¿Visitó la exposición? ¿En caso positivo, qué le impactó? ¿En caso negativo, qué lo motivó a no visitarla?

3. ¿Hubo aspectos que no le gustaron?

4. ¿Pudieron ver el video sobre los contextos de cambio y modernización? Para ustedes, cuál sería el lugar de estos temas políticos y económicos dentro del Museo?

5. ¿Cómo podrían las exhibiciones y museos contribuir a las necesidades de las comunidades negras o afrocolombianas? ¿Qué temas resaltarían dentro del Museo?

6. Supongamos que nos dan la oportunidad de volver a armar el Museo Nacional, ¿qué temas, objetos, elementos, imágenes creen que no pueden faltar?

   a) ¿Cómo se llamaría el Museo?

   b) ¿Qué historias nos contarían ese nuevo Museo Nacional?

   c) ¿A quién invitarían a participar en este ejercicio? ¿Por qué?

   d) ¿Creen que se deben tener en cuenta de manera especial a algunos grupos? ¿Cuáles serían y por qué?
e) En este nuevo Museo, ¿cómo debería ser la relación entre las personas y el Museo? ¿Qué tipo de actividades se deberían desarrollar?

f) En este nuevo Museo, ¿cómo se deben presentar los diferentes grupos que han vivido en Colombia, por separado o de forma colectiva?

7. ¿Cree qué nos faltó algún tema por discutir?
Appendix 7B  Protocol for focus groups (English)

Welcome

Introduction to focus group

Purpose of meeting, the topic to be discussed: the impact of the exhibition and thoughts on the future of the work done with Black communities.

Ground rules: no right or wrong answers, introduction of the moderator, assistants and observers

1. Please tell us your name and something about yourself that you would like to share with the group so that we can know you better.

2. Regarding the exhibition *Velorios y santos vivos*, did you visit the exhibit? If so, what elements of the exhibit caused the greatest impact for you? Why do you think this?
   
   If you did not visit, what was your impediment?

3. Were there any aspects of the exhibition that you disliked? Why?

4. The first space room shows a projection where you can see some of the political and economical contexts that affect the Afrocolombian communities. What is the place of these themes inside the Museum?

5. In what way do you think that exhibitions and museums can contribute to the needs of Afrocolombian communities? What themes would you highlight in the Museum?
6. Imagine we are given the opportunity to reconstruct the national museum? What would it look like? What would you call it? What are some of the stories that it would tell? Who would be invited to participate? Are there groups that deserve special attention? What would be the relationship between different cultural groups in this museum? Would groups that have lived in Colombian be set apart or together?

7. Is there some topic that you think is important that we did not cover? Or any comment that needs to be added?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Gable, E. (2009) “Labor and leisure at Monticello: Or representing race instead of class at an inadvertent white identity shrine” in M. Anico and E. Peralta (eds)
Heritage and Identity. Engagement and Demission in the Contemporary World, Oxon, New York: Routledge.


Universidad Nacional de Colombia-Facultad de Ciencias Humanas-Centro de Estudios Sociales.


Misión de los museos nacionales para los ciudadanos del futuro, Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura.


*Sociological Research Online*, vol. 7, no. 1. Online. Available HTTP:


