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### An intriguing historical trace or heritage? Learning about another person's heritage in an exhibition addressing WWII

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**Publication date**

2016

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Sensitive Pasts

**License**

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

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**Citation for published version (APA):**

Savenije, G. M. (2016). An intriguing historical trace or heritage? Learning about another person's heritage in an exhibition addressing WWII. In C. van Boxtel, M. Grever, & S. Klein (Eds.), *Sensitive Pasts: Questioning Heritage in Education* (pp. 218-239). (Making sense of history; Vol. 27). Berghahn Books.

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## CHAPTER 11

# An Intriguing Historical Trace or Heritage?

### *Learning about Another Person's Heritage in an Exhibition Addressing the Second World War*

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GEERTE M. SAVENIJE

Many students visit historical museums, archives or sites during their secondary history education. Often, students remember these types of visit years later. Because of expanding research and improved evaluation techniques, this area of extracurricular learning has increasingly gained recognition as a complement to history education.<sup>1</sup> There are various reasons for visiting such out-of-school learning environments and teaching with historical traces (such as historic sites, museum artefacts, customs and ritual).<sup>2</sup> The use of historical traces during an educational visit to a museum, archive or site can be motivational and stimulate historical inquiry and historical imagination.<sup>3</sup> Particularly with regard to sensitive topics such as the Second World War, the topic of the case study presented in this chapter, students may encounter difficulty understanding a historical reality that is unjust, cruel or horrible in their eyes.<sup>4</sup> Historical traces may help students adopt a historical perspective to understand how people in the past thought and how their values and feelings differed from the students' ideas. As in numerous other European countries, the Netherlands provide various opportunities to include historical traces in history education about the Second World War. Students can visit historical sites, such as the former concentration camps in Vught, Westerbork and Amersfoort, meet concentration camp survivors in the classroom or visit the various war museums and war memorials throughout the country. However, what is often overlooked in teaching with such historical traces is that in many cases, these traces are also presented as Dutch

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heritage. Particularly in diverse, urban classrooms, this perspective may not necessarily be shared by all students. This raises the question of how these students learn in such educational settings.

By heritage I mean traces of the past that are considered valuable in the present and for the future by a particular group of people.<sup>5</sup> The distinction between traces and heritage emphasizes the dynamic character of heritage. Within the context of museums, heritage institutions, tourism and education, heritage is often used as a governmental strategy for social inclusion that may not necessarily lead to the acknowledgement of diversity.<sup>6</sup> However, considered from a dynamic approach to heritage, material and immaterial traces of the past are not self-evident and do not have an eternal essence but instead answer to the specific needs and aims of communities that use these traces as a source for creating identities.<sup>7</sup>

The issue of which story is selected as the 'official' one is particularly urgent and apparent in the way in which a topic is taught at school as part of the history curriculum or presented in museums.<sup>8</sup> Although there are diversity and dynamics in Second World War narratives in museums and schools, the Second World War narrative that is currently presented in many Dutch schools and European museums and heritage institutions focuses on the various victim groups of the war, often stimulating empathy and identification through personal stories and emotional experiences.<sup>9</sup> Education about the Second World War is usually accompanied by a strong moral message that people should seek to prevent a war of such catastrophic, horrifying and global dimensions in the future. However, this narrative has been called into question in recent years. For example, some students consider the Holocaust to be Jewish history and equate 'Jews' with 'Israel'.<sup>10</sup> Theories regarding the instrumental use of the Holocaust by Israel, the denial of the Holocaust and the equation between the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have circulated in the countries of origin of many European immigrants, reaching Europe through the media and presenting a challenge in European urban classrooms.<sup>11</sup>

The challenges described above to the dominant narrative about the Second World War may lead to difficulties in teaching about the war, particularly in urban classrooms. Such tensions may be intensified by an encounter with the historical traces related to this history, particularly when these traces are considered heritage and are assigned significance by a majority, a minority or both, but in different ways. Students' historical understanding is influenced by their cultural and ethnic background.<sup>12</sup> Students from various backgrounds may connect with Second World War history in different ways, and these connections can emerge in the forefront when students are confronted with 'the Dutch heritage' of the war. This situation may create tension among students or between students and their teacher.<sup>13</sup> However,

the idea that students are studying things that are considered valuable in the society in which they live can motivate students.<sup>14</sup> Further, studying heritage may stimulate students' awareness that history is built on stories that are significant to particular groups of people. This awareness can help students reflect on their own criteria for historical significance.<sup>15</sup> One of the aims of history education is to understand the ways in which history is constructed and is subject to the changing viewpoints of its present creators.<sup>16</sup> However, the ways in which the often multi-layered or disputed heritage status of particular traces of the past influences the learning of history remain understudied. Concerns regarding teaching the Holocaust to students of Arabic backgrounds because of references to the Middle East conflict, as described above, and their assumed anti-Semitic attitude have produced numerous initiatives in schools, museums and historical sites related to the topic.<sup>17</sup> This case study explores the attribution of significance by Dutch students of immigrant descent engaged in a project that presents Second World War historical traces as Dutch heritage. Students were queried using questionnaires and interviews and were videotaped during three lessons, including a museum visit. In the following sections, I present the methods and the results of this case study.

## Method

This case study was conducted in 2011 in The Hague.<sup>18</sup> I followed secondary education students who participated in a project addressing the topic of the Second World War within the context of history education. The project included an introductory lesson at school, a visit to *Museon* and a closing lesson at school. At *Museon*, the students visited the permanent exhibition about the Second World War 'Child in War'.

### *Museon Exhibition 'Child in War'*

The *Museon* exhibition includes the personal belongings and stories of 35 persons with different backgrounds and experiences, all of whom were children when the Second World War began. Several stories refer to the countries of origin of some of the largest immigrant groups in the Netherlands. The exhibition's donated objects (documents, objects, and audio and film fragments) are stored in a 'filing cabinet' in the back of the exhibition room, simulating the idea of stepping into an archive (see figure 11.1). In addition to the personal drawers, the cabinet also contains drawers with background information about key concepts, developments and figures in the Second World War. Some of the personal stories are exhibited in large crooked pillars with show cases (see figure 11.2). At the entrance of the



**Figure 11.1** The 'Filing Cabinet'. (Photo: Ebbert Olierook / Museon)



**Figure 11.2** The theme pillars. (Photo: Ebbert Olierook / Museon)

room, one pillar shows videotaped interviews with refugee children who recently moved to the Netherlands to escape war situations in their home countries. The short introductory text of the exhibition explains its theme: to discover the ways in which war radically changes children's lives. The

video segments of refugees in the Netherlands are meant to emphasize that some children still grow up in wartime.

The exhibition's concept of featuring 35 real people who donated their own real objects provides an interesting case for my research question addressing teaching with historical traces that are presented as Dutch heritage. These objects are considered to be heritage not only by a majority of Dutch citizens as part of Second World War history and by *Museon* as part of its collection but also by the 35 persons themselves. The knowledge that these persons provided their personal belongings to *Museon* for preservation and exhibition adds depth to the concept of heritage and makes the abstract concept more penetrable. Further, the presentation of different experiences of the war relates to the idea of multiperspectivity in history and heritage.

### *Project Procedure*

In the introductory lesson at school, the teacher briefly introduced the topic of the Second World War by showing the students some recent examples of societal debate about the history of the war. The students then discussed a few statements formulated by the teacher.

At *Museon*, the students participated in a workshop titled 'War Children in Dialogue', which was designed to align with the exhibition. The students gathered information about the lives of the 35 persons by investigating the donated objects and stories. Each triad investigated two different persons. The groups then wrote an imaginary dialogue between these two persons that could have occurred at the exhibition's opening in 2004 when the exhibition donors met for the first time and exchanged stories about their war experiences. The students presented their dialogues to the group at the end of the workshop.

In the closing lesson at school, the triads of students created scripts for a documentary about the Second World War. The students were required to address several topics in their film. For each topic, the groups could choose from three different perspectives or approaches (e.g., different historical actors; a local, national or global perspective; different present-day representations). They had to choose, first for themselves and then as a group, which approach was the most important for their film.

### *Participants*

The participants included 22 fourth- and fifth-year pre-university education students aged 15 to 19 years (the majority of students were 16 to 17 years old) from two classes at a secondary school. Because of the small groups, the two classes were merged for their history course. The classes were culturally and ethnically diverse (e.g., the students' backgrounds included Moroccan, 35 per cent; Surinamese, 30 per cent; and Turkish, 15 per cent). Although

**Table 11.1** Students in the selected triad.

Student	Gender	Age	Birth country	Parents' birth country (F – M)	Religion
Ravi	M	17	Netherlands	Suriname – Suriname	Muslim
Sofia	F	16	Netherlands	Morocco – Morocco	Muslim
Salima	F	15	Netherlands	Morocco – Morocco	Muslim

80 per cent of the students were born in the Netherlands, none of their parents were. A total of 60 per cent of the participating students were female, and 74 per cent were Muslim (the remaining students were Christian or Hindu).<sup>19</sup> History was a compulsory subject consisting of three hours per week. The class had already studied the Second World War when I began my research. The project was scheduled as an extracurricular activity for which the teacher accompanied the classes.

Of the 22 participants in the study, 12 students were selected to be interviewed individually and videotaped in triads during the lessons. Of the four triads, one triad was selected to be discussed in depth in this chapter. The triad included three fourth-year students, denoted as Ravi, Sofia and Salima (see table 11.1). In two triads, one of the students was absent during one of the lessons. Of the remaining two triads, one triad had more verbal interactions among the students during the lessons, particularly during the museum lesson. Because verbalization is essential to my understanding and analysis of the students' perspectives and of the interaction in the triad, the triad with more verbal interactions was selected to be presented in this chapter. The results of this triad are not meant to be representative of the other students of my study; rather, the results provide insight into the variety of perspectives that students of immigrant descent may possess about the Second World War and into the possible results of students' encounters with Second World War heritage during a museum visit.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

To investigate my research question regarding how students in Dutch urban classrooms attribute significance to Second World War history while engaged in a project that presents historical traces as Dutch heritage, I used the following sub-questions:

1. In what ways do students attribute significance to the history and heritage of the Second World War, and how is this related to their self-reported ethnic identity?
2. To what extent do students encounter and acknowledge multiple perspectives on the Second World War history and heritage and their significance?

I conducted questionnaires with the entire class at the beginning of the project and after the closing lesson. Short free recall questionnaires after each lesson informed me about the students' initial thoughts about the lessons. Twelve students were interviewed individually before and after the project and observed in four triads during the lessons.

(1) To investigate the students' understandings of the significance of Second World War history and heritage at the beginning of the project, the first questionnaire examined their opinions regarding the preservation of Second World War objects and stories. The questionnaire also included a closed question regarding the students' interest in learning about Second World War history and heritage. In the interview, I asked the students to explain their responses. For example, I said, 'The next two questions concern the preservation of objects and stories of the Second World War. You indicated you find it important to preserve these. Could you explain your answer to me?' I also asked them to describe their ethnic identity and to reflect on its influence on their responses to the questionnaire and in the interview. These questions were based on literature concerning students' understandings of historical significance in relation to their self-reported ethnic identity.<sup>20</sup> The transcribed interviews were examined thoroughly, analysing the students' understandings of the significance of Second World War history and heritage and the interrelationships between their understandings and their self-reported ethnic identity.

The questionnaire after the closing lesson repeated the question about the importance of the preservation of Second World War objects and stories in the first questionnaire. In the interview after the closing lesson, we compared the responses to both questionnaires. I asked, for example, 'In the previous interview, you explained to me that you thought this was not important. Can you describe what made you change your mind?' I analysed the interviews and the video recordings of the group work for the students' attribution of significance during the project and their reflections on the 'heritage status' of the historical traces. The questionnaire after the closing lesson also repeated the interest question and it asked for written argumentation addressing whether the students would regret it if their school could not visit the *Museon* exhibition as a way to examine their opinions regarding learning history in that exhibition.

(2) To examine the students' prior knowledge of multiple perspectives on Second World War history and heritage, the first questionnaire included a mind map and a closed question regarding the students' familiarity with various historical actors or groups that were involved in the war. In the interview, I asked whether the students thought others would agree with them on their opinions about the significance of Second World War history and heritage, and if not, who would not and why. These questions allowed



me to gain additional insight into their adoption of multiple perspectives and their ideas regarding what determines one's opinion.

The extent to which the students acknowledged different perspectives on Second World War history and heritage and their significance (encountered within the triad or in the exhibition) was examined with the free recall, the video recordings and the interviews. In the interview, I raised specific issues in their discussion and sought their opinions on the differences in perspective. I also asked whether they understood others' opinions and whether they were satisfied with the solution that was reached during the lesson. I analysed the free recall responses, the video recordings and the interviews to study the students' remarks about new or different perspectives in the exhibition and the triad and to examine how the students discussed these issues. Previous literature on students' discussion of different perspectives provided a sensitizing framework.<sup>21</sup>

I present my results in detail by closely examining one triad throughout the project to explore and describe the experiences of these three students in depth. For the closed questions in the questionnaires, I also provide the results of the entire class to show the extent to which these three students were extraordinary within their own class. First, I discuss the understanding of Second World War history and heritage of the three students prior to the project. Then, I elaborate on the students' learning while engaged in the project, specifically their encounter with multiple perspectives on the Second World War and their attribution of significance to its history and heritage.

## **Results**

### *The Second World War: Interesting and Important, but not Their Heritage*

The analysis of the students' understandings of Second World War history and heritage and their significance at the beginning of the project showed both the variety and the similarities in the understandings with which these students entered the learning process about this topic. All three students already possessed some knowledge about the history of the Second World War, particularly regarding the persecution of Jews and the concentration camps. These narratives were also known by the rest of the class. Both girls of Moroccan background knew about the history of Morocco during the Second World War. Salima was the only student in the class who said she knew this narrative well. Ravi, of Surinamese background, did not know about the history of Suriname during the war. Although all of the students were interested in learning more about the Second World War, Ravi and Sofia were more interested than Salima. Ravi and Sofia found it very

important to preserve the objects and stories of the Second World War, whereas Salima did not. However, all three attributed significance to these objects and stories for persons involved in the war or their children. Sofia and Ravi also attributed significance for themselves: for Sofia, to obtain a better image and understanding of the past; and for Ravi, to connect his learning on an emotion level. Conversely, it was the emotions that objects and stories of the Second World War could evoke that made Salima believe that it was better not to preserve them.

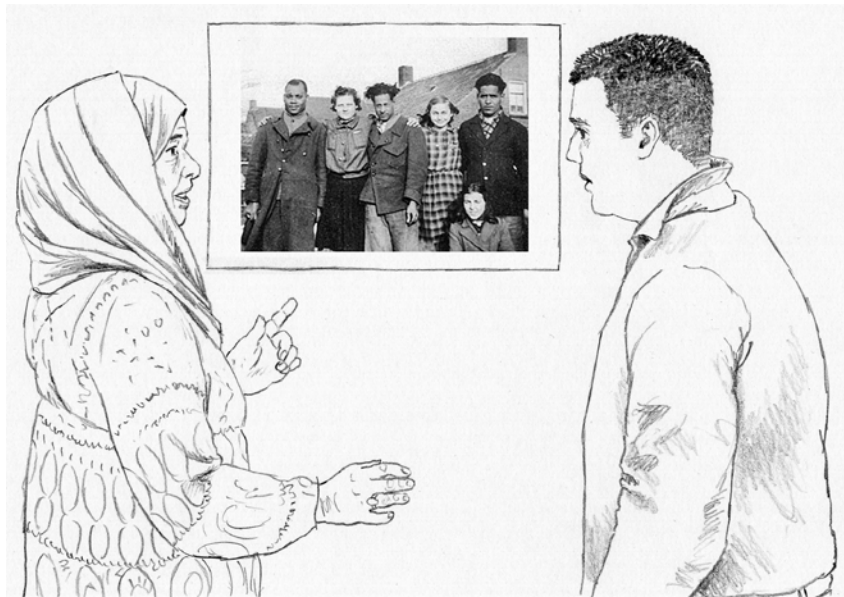
Regarding the relationship between identity and understandings, all three students believed that the fact that their non-native Dutch family had not been involved in the Second World War determined their emotionally distanced stance towards the war. Further, both Sofia and Salima felt that they were too young to really care about the war and believed that this way of thinking was typical of adolescents. However, they said that they found the war to be an important topic in history education, a perspective that they related to their Dutch identity and their education at a Dutch school. For Ravi, his interest in history was the most important determinant regarding his understandings. All three students were Muslim, but they felt differently regarding the interrelationship between their religious identity and their understandings. For Ravi, this relationship was certain because he empathized with Jews during the Second World War because of his Muslim identity. He seemed to conceive of Jews and Muslims as victims of religious discrimination and regarded himself as part of this group because of his religious beliefs. For Salima, it was quite the opposite; she felt that the war concerned people from a different religious group and therefore did not affect her. Sofia believed that her religion played a role on a meta-level of general values and norms. The students thus differed in which sides of their identity they emphasized and in the roles they believed these factors played.

### *Encountering Multiple Perspectives on the History and Heritage of the Second World War*

During the introductory lesson, Ravi, Sofia and Salima discussed different perspectives within the group. For example, Salima agreed with the statement ‘the current attention to the Second World War is exaggerated because it was 70 years ago’. Ravi and Sofia tried to convince her that the war should never be forgotten because of its impact on people and in order to prevent such a war from occurring again. In the interview afterwards, they all said that they enjoyed listening to each other and weighing the others’ opinions. Ravi said that although he found Salima’s opinion to be strange, he could understand her line of reasoning that the war did not affect her family and therefore does not affect her now.

During the museum visit, the students noticed the multiperspectivity of the exhibition. Sofia, for example, was interested in how the exhibition was designed to bring many different stories from around the globe into one small room and found this approach to be effective. As an example, she mentioned the story of the Moroccan soldiers in the French army. She found that story to be impressive because these men set aside their own interests to fight for people they did not even know. She found the stories that her triad had investigated to be less interesting than other stories she had heard because the two girls 'just ran away from danger and had not really faced it'. She would have preferred to investigate all the stories by herself to determine which stories were interesting. When describing the museum, Ravi found it interesting to learn how the different experiences from around the world were all related somehow.

In the closing lesson, the issue of multiperspectivity was raised in the students' discussion as they worked on their documentary script. Within the first theme of 'stories told by Dutch families about the Second World War', Salima chose picture 3 (see figure 11.3). The others chose picture 2 (see figure 11.4).



**Figure 11.3** Picture 3 within the Theme 'Stories told by Dutch Families about the Second World War' (drawing by Wim Euverman). Caption provided to the students: In 1943, several hundred Moroccan war prisoners worked as forced labourers for the Germans in Zeeland (Dutch province). Some of them made friends among the people of Zeeland.



**Figure 11.4** Picture 2 within the Theme ‘Stories told by Dutch Families about the Second World War’ (drawing by Wim Euverman). Caption provided to the students: Various people in the Netherlands allowed persons to hide in their homes during the Second World War.

The students discussed these differences as follows:

Sofia: Ok, why do you have picture 3?

Salima: It appeals to me.

Sofia: Why does it appeal to you? Because she is wearing a kerchief?

Salima: No, because Moroccan, she is Moroccan [talks in Arabic, Sofia laughs], she is just Moroccan, [talks in Moroccan] little grandma.

Sofia: No, you need to take picture 2; you know why?

Salima: No, I just want to do this.

Sofia: Look, because different people.

Salima: Why does that appeal to you?

Sofia: Because this, what did I write down? Um, this is how different people encountered different stories because of those people in hiding they took in their homes, is just much better than, um, is just, this is diverse [points to picture 2] and this is not. [points to picture 3]

Salima: If you think so.

Ravi: Ok, so you have 3, just because there is a Moroccan in it.

Salima: Yes, I feel related to that.

Ravi: I have 2 as well.

Salima: Because?

Ravi: Because there you can see that different cultures are involved, like you said already in fact [to Sofia], that is more important.

Salima: Ok then we will do picture 2.

Ravi: Not just the Moroccans!

Salima: Ok then we will do picture 2.

This example reveals the way in which Salima's self-reported Moroccan identity influenced her opinion regarding which Second World War story was important to tell. Interestingly, she spoke in Arabic during this specific instance, which she did not do at any other moment during the project. Whether she intended to use a language unknown to Ravi or me or to emphasize her shared identity with Sofia or whether this language was evoked by the picture remains unclear. The students had a similar conversation regarding the theme 'commemoration of the Second World War', for which they could choose from the Liberation monument in The Hague, the National Monument in Amsterdam and the Holocaust monument in Berlin (the students were given pictures of the three monuments with short descriptions regarding what they were and what they represented). Ravi and Sofia chose the National Monument, whereas Salima chose the one in The Hague. She explained that it appealed to her because she lived in The Hague herself. Again, Ravi and Sofia argued she should think more broadly and select the National Monument, which is in the news every year when the war is commemorated with a moment of silence. In the interviews after the closing lesson, Ravi and Sofia again stressed the importance of including multiple perspectives by including persons and stories from different cultures and focusing on their encounters. They seemed to equate multiperspectivity with multiculturalism. Conversely, Salima sought to focus on the history of her parents' country of origin and the city in which she lived. Salima's preferences aligned with an earlier study on the perspectives on history of Dutch students of immigrant descent.<sup>22</sup> Compared with the results of that study, Ravi's and Sofia's emphasis on national history was atypical. Salima explained that she found Moroccan history to be more interesting and the monument in The Hague to be more important. However, when asked if she related more closely to the monument in The Hague than the other monuments, she said she did not feel related to any of them, but that if she had to choose, she would select The Hague because she found it to be the prettiest.

The students' discussions during the lessons at school revealed differences in their understandings of Second World War history and heritage and their significance. The lessons enabled the students to explore and compare their perspectives, for example, regarding their criteria for attributing historical significance to the war and the ways in which one's identity shapes these understandings. The multiperspectivity of the *Museon* exhibition was noticed and appreciated by Ravi and Sofia. Sofia also explicitly mentioned the story of the Moroccan soldiers about whom she had learned. Although Salima did not express her opinion in this area, in the closing lesson she made a case for the inclusion of specific perspectives on Second World War history that particularly appealed to her in the documentary about the war.



**Figure 11.5** The drawer of Connie Suverkropp with the Chamber Pot. (Photo: Pieter de Bruijn)

### *From Historical Traces to Heritage?*

One of the objects this triad discovered in the cabinet was a chamber pot (see figure 11.5). The object belonged to Connie Suverkropp, a Dutch girl in the Dutch East Indies who was arrested when she put her little sister on the pot. She took the object with her to prison and during their transport, where it enabled them to retain some of their dignity and possibly protected them against diseases. When I discussed the chamber pot with the students in the interview after the closing lesson, it was apparent that this object had stimulated their thinking about its significance and about the historical traces of the Second World War in general. Intrigued by the chamber pot, Ravi found it to be special that such a simple object was considered to be a luxury by people at that time. To him, the chamber pot showed that one should be happy with the smallest things and that one does not need luxury. He also realized how much significance something like a chamber pot could have for people because in the end it helped to save them. When I asked Ravi what he thought of a chamber pot being exhibited in a museum showcase, he asked whether the objects had belonged to real people. When I confirmed this fact, he said that he found it strange that these persons had given the things away that meant so much to them, explaining that he could not have done the same. He then explained what he learned from this realization:

That they give it away to pass on knowledge to others shows how important these objects are to them, and that means a lot. That is what I learned. So that

gave me the picture of, um, it shows how important objects and stories are, also how important it is that just, that it is passed on from generation to generation so they will all become aware. That is what I realized that it is really important.

Although Ravi had already stressed the significance of the history of the Second World War and the importance of the preservation of historical traces of the war in the first interview, he learned more about these topics through the encounter with the heritage objects. His remark shows his awareness that traces can be heritage.

For Sofia, the chamber pot helped her to realize that value exists in even the smallest things and that people differ in how they attribute significance to things. Sofia reflected that significance is not about the object itself but about the story behind it. Further, she said that she realized that these traces were foremost of emotional value for their owners. To her, the traces showed the personal side of the war. For example, she thought that for the persons whom they studied in *Museon*, the founding of NATO was not really the point; for them, it was about their grief over the loss of their mother and the retelling of this type of story that eventually became 'history'. These insights persuaded Sofia to change her perspective on the significance of historical traces of the war. She no longer believed that the traces could help to better understand the war because they did not tell the broad, summarizing story that she learned at school. Instead, the traces showed the small details and the way that people had experienced the war. Therefore, she said, they would remain in her memory forever; compared with her feelings before the visit, she felt more personally that it would be a shame if the traces were not preserved. With these remarks, Sofia contrasts history and heritage, with the first viewed being as distanced and summarizing. The latter was viewed as more personal and detailed; although it serves as the basis of history, it is somehow also separated from it. Another change in Sofia's perspectives concerned the significance for the Netherlands. After the project, she regarded the significance of the traces for the Netherlands to be less important. She explained that historical traces of the Second World War not only belong to the Netherlands but also are significant for the world. These changes suggest an awareness that heritage is inherently related to individual persons or groups, possibly transcending national borders, and therefore can never tell 'the' (hi)story.

Conversely, Salima believed that *Museon* had displayed the chamber pot in the cabinet because the museum did not have anything better or more valuable available, such as letters, photographs or a Star of David. However, she did change her mind regarding the importance of preserving the objects and stories of the Second World War and became more interested in its history and heritage; in this manner, she contrasted with her entire class, although the difference was very small (see table 11.2). In her written

**Table 11.2** Results of the triad and the entire class regarding the interest and preservation questions in the questionnaires at the beginning of the project and after the closing lesson. *Note.* <sup>a</sup>Mean interest scale (8 items; 4-point scale: I want to: know nothing at all, know nothing, know something, know a lot). <sup>b</sup>Score single question regarding preservation (4-point scale: completely disagree, disagree, agree, completely agree).

Student	Interest in learning about Second World War history and heritage <sup>a</sup>		Opinion about the preservation of Second World War objects and stories <sup>b</sup>	
	Beginning of the Project	After the Closing Lesson	Beginning of the Project	After the Closing Lesson
Ravi	3.57	3.14	4	4
Sofia	3.57	2.86	4	4
Salima	2.71	3.14	2	3
Mean whole class	2.91 (sd = .52)	2.78 (sd = .30)	3.45 (sd = .69)	3.15 (sd = .67)

argument about the usefulness of a visit to the *Museon* exhibition, she wrote that because of the visit, she better understood the people of the Second World War. In the interview, she said that she now thought the traces would help people like her and her classmates to understand the war. Contrary to her expectations, she also enjoyed learning about the commemoration of the war. She explained as follows:

Because at first I maybe did not know much about it and stuff, and, um, at the museum we saw those documents and, um, just the things people had preserved and stuff, and so, um, it is quite important how people commemorate the war.

Before the museum visit, Salima already knew that people consider it important to commemorate the war and preserve the related objects and stories, but for her, it seemed too long ago to share this idea. The encounter with historical traces that had been preserved by real people somehow gave her the feeling that commemorating the Second World War is important. Although she did not say commemoration was important for her personally, she appeared to be more engaged in thinking about it. She appeared to have experienced that historical traces can bring the history of the war closer and make it more understandable for people like her, who do not initially feel engaged with this past.

The students in this triad did not consider the history and historical traces of the Second World War as their heritage at the beginning of the project, but they knew that a majority of Dutch citizens did. During the



encounter with the traces, their 'heritage status' did not seem to be sensitive or create tension among these students. Instead, they found heritage intriguing and appeared to realize more concretely what heritage entails. This realization sparked their thinking processes about what it means to consider this particular history and traces to be heritage. The encounter with heritage and the reflections evoked by it enabled these students to value the historical traces themselves.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, I investigated how students in Dutch urban classrooms attribute significance to Second World War history while engaged in a project that presents historical traces as Dutch heritage. First, I examined the students' understandings of the history and heritage of the war and their significance and the ways in which these perspectives were related to the students' self-reported ethnic identity. The students in the triad had prior knowledge about the history of the war and considered its history to be interesting and important. Ravi and Sofia also found the preservation of historical traces of the war important, whereas Salima did not. However, none of the students regarded the history and historical traces of the war as their heritage because of their immigrant backgrounds and lack of family memories of the war. The students were aware of the significance that is attributed to Second World War history and heritage by a majority of Dutch citizens. My analysis showed that the students' self-reported Muslim identity played a role in their perspectives, as also described in the study by Jikeli, but in very different ways.<sup>23</sup> All students, particularly Ravi and Sofia, spoke in a rather sophisticated way about how one's identity – formed by cultural background, education, upbringing, religious beliefs and personal interests – influences one's understandings of history and heritage, and they applied these reflections to themselves. Although the analysis clearly showed the interplay between the students' Surinamese and Moroccan backgrounds and their somewhat distanced stance towards the Second World War heritage, there were no signs of real challenges to the dominant narrative of the war, as found in other studies.<sup>24</sup>

The encounter with Second World War heritage during the project did not seem to create tension or discomfort. On the contrary, the exploration of the heritage objects and stories, of which the significance that was attributed to them was made explicit and personal in the exhibition, was motivational. It stimulated reflection on the nature of heritage, and it enriched and sometimes even changed the students' understandings of its significance. My analysis showed that although the heritage objects were presented in an

archive, suggesting a disciplinary sphere of investigating the past, the students discerned the message of the significance of the personal belongings of persons who were involved in the war. These objects and stories were preserved for a reason. Keeping in mind Sofia's and Ravi's remarks about the difference between school history and historical traces (that traces are of emotional value but cannot tell the larger story), my study also showed the overly simple distinction between history and heritage that an encounter with heritage may elicit. The students noticed the pluralistic and daily life perspectives that traces can add, as described by Nakou.<sup>25</sup> However, they had difficulty including this perspective in their existing narrative about the war. It is important that teachers and educators are aware that an engagement with heritage may encourage such processes, and they must ensure that, as teachers, they can add nuance to students' thinking. Educators may seek to stimulate critical reflection on the construction of both history and heritage, and on the unquestioned 'heritage status' of the traces at hand, to enable students to express alternative perspectives. Based on existing literature, one would expect this task to be difficult with regard to Second World War traces and students of immigrant descent. My case study, however, suggests that this may not necessarily be the case. One could even argue that to discuss multiple perspectives on Second World War heritage may sometimes be more challenging in a classroom of students who do not question the 'heritage status' ascribed to it in society.

Second, I discussed the extent to which the students acknowledged different perspectives on the war when encountered within the triad or in the exhibition. The students discovered that they differed in their attribution of significance to the history of the war and in the extent to which they considered it their history or even heritage. Ravi related Salima's perspectives to her Moroccan background, and although all the students were of immigrant descent, this discussion demonstrated some of the tension between 'native' and 'immigrant' perspectives. It showed how students can experience this tension internally. All three said that their immigrant descent made them feel somewhat distanced from the history of the war; notably, however, they explained that the Dutch side of their identity 'made' them attribute significance to that history. Ravi and Sofia felt much more strongly about this phenomenon than Salima did, at least at the beginning of the project. Thus, both 'native' and 'immigrant' perspectives were present in the individual students, who differed in the weight that they gave to each perspective. The students' discussions brought these differences to the surface. Instead of obstructing learning, these differences provided an opportunity to reflect on which criteria can be used for the attribution of significance and whether and in what ways these criteria are related to ethnic background. For example, these discussions made the students consider whether

choosing a Moroccan image because one identifies as a Moroccan is simple and narrow-minded or is a legitimate argument. However, the sometimes blunt and otherwise subtle differences in the students' understandings of significance and the complexity of the interplay with different parts of their identity demand a nuanced approach by teachers and museum educators when discussing these issues.

The idea of multiperspectivity clearly appealed to the students in this triad. Salima and Sofia seemed to appreciate the inclusion of a Moroccan perspective on the Second World War in the *Museon* exhibition. Further, Ravi and Sofia explicitly stressed the importance of including people from different cultures in the narrative of the war and found the various perspectives gathered in the exhibition room interesting. Gryglewski also found that students of immigrant descent emphasized the inclusion of different cultures and related this finding to the students' socioeconomic position in society.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Ravi and Sofia outvoted an explicitly different perspective on the war from their documentary because the perspective was not diverse enough. From this perspective, one could also argue that it was Salima who attempted to include multiple perspectives in their product by selecting stories and pictures that normally were not included in the Dutch national narrative about the war. The question here is whether a gathering of perspectives as in the *Museon* exhibition encourages students to combine multiple perspectives or whether students will merely choose what they like. The task in *Museon*, including the dialogue between different perspectives and the plenary presentation of all perspectives, together with the making of a documentary in the closing lesson in school, played an important role in bringing the different threads together and stimulating the students to comprehend how all the perspectives together formed history.

Despite the limitations of this small case study, my in-depth analysis of one triad provides a rich understanding of the students' attribution of significance and acknowledgement of multiple perspectives during the project. It shows the complexities and nuances of these learning processes in educational settings in which historical traces that are presented as national heritage are used to teach history. The students gained an understanding of the various ways in which people attribute significance to the Second World War traces and learned that they can be a shared heritage for different countries. Viewing the traces that people had donated to *Museon* to educate youngsters also had an impact on the students in this triad and added to their understandings of their significance. However, the study also revealed the importance of critical reflection on the ways in which significance is attributed to history and heritage and the need to discuss with students their constructed nature and interrelatedness.

## Notes

1. J. Falk and L. Dierking, *The Museum Experience Revisited*, Walnut Creek, 2013; V. Gosselin, 'Open to Interpretation: Mobilizing Historical Thinking in the Museum' (PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2011).

2. J. Hamer, 'History Teaching and Heritage Education: Two Sides of the Same Coin, or Different Currencies?', in *The Politics of Heritage*, eds J. Littler and R. Naidoo, New York, 2005, 159.

3. B. Von Borries, 'Lernende in Historischen Museen und Ausstellungen: Erhoffter Kompetenzerwerb und Kritische Ruckfragen', in *Historische Kompetenzen und Museen*, eds S. Popp and B. Schonemann, Idstein, 2009, 116–117; A.S. Marcus, J.D. Stoddard and W.W. Woodward, *Teaching History with Museums: Strategies for K-12 Social Studies*, New York, 2012, 192; I. Nakou, 'Children's Historical Thinking within a Museum Environment: An Overall Picture of a Longitudinal Study', in *Raising Standards in History Education*, eds A. Dickinson, P. Gordon and P. Lee, London, 2001, 73–96.

4. A. Pettigrew, P. Salmons and S. Foster, *Teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools: An Empirical Study of National Trends, Perspectives and Practice. HEDP-report*, London, 2009, 11; G.M. Savenije, C. van Boxtel and M. Grever, 'Learning about Sensitive History: "Heritage" of Slavery as a Resource', *Theory and Research in Social Education* 42, 4 (2014): 516–547.

5. Savenije et al., 'Learning about Sensitive History'.

6. J. Littler and R. Naidoo, eds, *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of 'Race'*, New York, 2005; E. Waterton and L. Smith, 'The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, 1 (2010): 4–15.

7. L. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, New York, 2006; C. van Boxtel, 'Something to Talk about: The Potential of a Dynamic Approach of Heritage in Heritage Education', *Eurodio Bulletin* 30 (2010): 53–63.

8. J. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, Cambridge, 2002, 202; T. Goldberg, D. Porat and B. Schwarz, "'Here Started the Rift we See Today": Student and Textbook Narratives Between Official and Counter Memory', *Narrative Inquiry* 16, 2 (2006): 319–347; B. VanSledright, 'Narratives of Nation-state, Historical Knowledge and School History Education', *Review of Research Education* 32 (2008): 109–146.

9. D. Hondius, *Oorloglessen*, Amsterdam, 2010; E. Somers, *De oorlog in het museum: Herinnering en verbeelding*, Zwolle, 2014.

10. B. van Driel and L. van Dijk, 'Diverse Classrooms – Opportunities and Challenges', *Intercultural Education* 21, Supplement 1 (2010): 4.

11. J. Allouche-Benayoun and G. Jikeli, 'Introduction', in *Perceptions of the Holocaust in Europe and Muslim Communities*, eds J. Allouche-Benayoun and G. Jikeli, Dordrecht, 2013, 5–6.

12. G.M. Savenije, C. van Boxtel and M. Grever, 'Sensitive "Heritage" of Slavery in a Multicultural Classroom: Pupils' Ideas Regarding Significance', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 62, 2 (2014): 127–148; P. Seixas, 'Historical Understanding among Adolescents in a Multicultural Setting', *Curriculum Inquiry* 23, 3 (1993): 301–327; T. Epstein, 'Deconstructing Differences in African-American and European-American Adolescents' Perspectives on U.S. History', *Curriculum Inquiry* 28, 4 (1998): 397–423.

13. R. Ensel and H. Stremmelaar, 'Speech Acts: Observing Antisemitism and Holocaust Education in the Netherlands', in *Perceptions of the Holocaust in Europe and Muslim Communities*, eds J. Jikeli and G. Allouche-Benayoun, Dordrecht, 2013, 153–171.

14. Hamer, 'History Teaching and Heritage Education'.

15. P. Seixas and P. Clark, 'Murals as Monuments: Students' Ideas about Depictions of Civilization in British Columbia', *American Journal of Education* 110, 2 (2004): 146–171; J. van

Drie, C. van Boxtel and B. Stam, "'But Why is this so Important?'" Discussing Historical Significance in the Classroom', *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research* 12, 1 (2014): 146–168.

16. P. Seixas and T. Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts*, Toronto, 2013.

17. Ensel and Stremmelaar, 'Speech Acts'; E. Gryglewski, 'Teaching about the Holocaust in Multicultural Societies: Appreciating the Learner', *Intercultural Education* 21, Supplement 1 (2010): 41–49.

18. See also G.M. Savenije, 'Sensitive History under Negotiation: Students' Historical Imagination and Attribution of Significance while Engaged in Heritage Projects' (PhD dissertation, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2014).

19. According to the last estimations (in 2010) 5 per cent of the Dutch population is Muslim. The majority of the Dutch Muslims have a Turkish or Moroccan background and live in one of the four major cities of the country, one of which is The Hague. Central Statistical Office, *Religie aan het begin van de 21e eeuw*, The Hague, 2009.

20. L. Levstik, 'Articulating the Silences: Teachers' and Adolescents' Conceptions of Historical Significance', in *Researching History Education*, eds L. Levstik and K.C. Barton, New York, 2008, 273–291; C. Peck, "'It's Not Like I'm Chinese and Canadian. I'm in Between": Ethnicity and Students' Conceptions of Historical Significance', *Theory and Research in Social Education* 38, 4 (2010): 574–618.

21. T. Goldberg, "'It's in my Veins": Identity and Disciplinary Practice in Students' Discussions of a Historical Issue', *Theory and Research in Social Education* 41, 1 (2013): 33–64; K.C. Barton and A. McCully, 'Trying to "See things Differently": Northern Ireland Students' Struggle to Understand Alternative Historical Perspectives', *Theory and Research in Social Education* 40, 4 (2012): 371–408.

22. M. Grever, T. Haydn and K. Ribbens, 'Identity and School History: The Perspective of Young People from the Netherlands and England', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 56, 1 (2008): 86–87.

23. G. Jikeli, 'Perceptions of the Holocaust among Young Muslims in Berlin, Paris and London', in *Perceptions of the Holocaust in Europe and Muslim Communities*, eds J. Allouche-Benayoun and G. Jikeli, Dordrecht, 2013, 105–132.

24. Ibid.

25. Nakou, 'Children's Historical Thinking within a Museum Environment'.

26. Gryglewski, 'Teaching about the Holocaust in Multicultural Societies', 46–47.

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