

ICOFOM Study Series



**Challenging the silences:
Confronting taboos
in museums and museology**

ICOFOM ICOM
international
committee
for museology

Vol. 51.1-2 — 2023

51(1-2) | 2023

Challenging the silences: Confronting taboos in museums and museology

Remettre en question les silences : Confronter les tabous dans les musées et la muséologie

Desafiar los silencios: Enfrentarse a los tabúes en los museos y la museología

M. Elizabeth Weiser, Marion Bertin et Anna Leshchenko (dir.)



Édition électronique

URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/iss/4848>

ISSN : 2306-4161

Éditeur

ICOM - International Council of Museums

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 10 octobre 2023

ISSN : 2309-1290

Référence électronique

M. Elizabeth Weiser, Marion Bertin et Anna Leshchenko (dir.), *ICOFOM Study Series*, 51(1-2) | 2023, « Challenging the silences: Confronting taboos in museums and museology » [En ligne], mis en ligne le 10 octobre 2023, consulté le 16 octobre 2023. URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/iss/4848>

Description de couverture

The Tolai people of Papua New Guinea continue to make and use *tabu*, strings of a marine snail shell, as a local currency, particularly for sacred ceremonies, celebrations, and resolutions of disputes.

Le peuple Tolai de Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée continue de fabriquer et d'utiliser le *tabu*, des cordes de coquille d'escargot marin, comme monnaie locale, notamment pour les cérémonies sacrées, les célébrations et la résolution des conflits.

El pueblo Tolai de Papúa Nueva Guinea sigue fabricando y utilizando *tabu*, cuerdas de una concha de caracol marino, como moneda local, sobre todo para ceremonias sagradas, celebraciones y resolución de disputas.

Le texte et les autres éléments (illustrations, fichiers annexes importés), sont « Tous droits réservés », sauf mention contraire.

ICOFOM Study Series



**Challenging the silences:
Confronting taboos
in museums and museology**

M ICOFOM ICOM
international
committee
for museology

Vol. 51.1-2 — 2023

ICOFOM Study Series
Vol. 51, Issue 1-2 — 2023

**Challenging the silences:
Confronting taboos
in museums and museology**

**Remettre en question les silences :
Confronter les tabous dans
les musées et la muséologie**

**Desafiar los silencios:
Enfrentarse a los tabúes en
los museos y la museología**

ICOFOM STUDY SERIES, Vol. 51, Issues 1-2 – 2023

International Journal of the ICOM International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM)
The ICOFOM Study Series is a double-blind peer reviewed journal.

Guest Editors / Editoras / Rédactrices

M. Elizabeth Weiser
The Ohio State University, USA

Marion Bertin
Université Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne, France¹

Anna Leshchenko
Eberhard Karls Universität, Deutschland

Editorial Team / Equipo editorial / Équipe éditoriale

Managing Editor, ICOFOM: M. Elizabeth Weiser

Communication Manager, ICOFOM: Anna Leshchenko

Editorial Coordinator: Allison Daniel

Copy Editors: Allison Daniel (English); Amandine Martin (French); Melissa Aguilar (Spanish)

Designer: Melissa Aguilar

Editorial Committee / Consejo editorial / Comité éditorial, 2023

Melissa Aguilar, Museum of Identity and Pride (MIO), Costa Rica

Marion Bertin, Université Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne, Paris, France

Bruno Brulon Soares, University of St. Andrews, Scotland

Supreo Chanda, University of Calcutta, India

Scarlet Galindo, Museo Nacional de la Acuarela Alfredo Guati Rojo, México

Ernest Kpan, National Institute of Art and Cultural Action (INSAAC), Côte d'Ivoire

Lynn Maranda, Emerita Curator, Museum of Vancouver, Canada

Margaret Zheng Yi, Fudan University, China

ISSN: 2309-1290 ICOFOM STUDY SERIES (Print)

ISSN: 2306-4161 ICOFOM STUDY SERIES (Online)

© International Committee for Museology of the International Council of Museums (ICOM/UNESCO)

Published by ICOFOM, Paris, in 2023

¹ As of November 1, 2023.

Table of Contents

Introduction / Introducció:

M. Elizabeth Weiser, Marion Bertin, Anna Leshchenko

Challenging the silences: Confronting taboos in museums and museology	7
Remettre en question les silences : Confronter les tabous dans les musées et la muséologie	18
Desafiar los silencios: Enfrentarse a los tabúes en los museos y la museología	28

Papers / Textos:

Les registres d'interdictions au sein du champ muséal <i>François Mairesse</i>	39
Identitarian museums: From visibility to recognition <i>Rogério Victor Satil Neves</i>	49
Le regard porté sur les corps féminins dans les musées au prisme du genre et des tabous sur la sexualité <i>Julie Botte</i>	61
Exhibiting the taboo of museums of ethnography <i>Clémentine Debrosse</i>	73
Repatriation: A trending taboo in journalistic media <i>Mariana Tezoto de Lima</i>	84
Taboos of coloniality when collaborating on Google Arts and Culture <i>Leonie Leeder</i>	96
Co-creating the values of Indigenous museums in Taiwan <i>Hsiao-Chiang Wang</i>	109
From values to strong policy making – implementing collection-focused museology <i>Nina Robbins</i>	124
From self-exploration to self-exploitation in digitally innovative museums <i>Elīna Vikmane</i>	138

Introduction:

Challenging the silences: Confronting taboos in museums and museology

M. Elizabeth Weiser

The Ohio State University – Columbus, USA

Marion Bertin

Université Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne – Paris, France¹

Anna Leshchenko

Eberhard Karls Universität – Tübingen, Germany²

By naming "The Power of Museums" as the theme for its 26th General Conference in Prague (Czechia), the International Council of Museums (ICOM) gave its members, national committees, international committees and regional alliances the opportunity to develop themes highlighting the role of museums to counter the world's major upheavals. After the intervening three years of pandemic and dissension, it was a rich and varied program signalling the resilience of the museum sector.

Yet the theme chosen by ICOFOM (the International Committee for Museology) for its meetings questioned this "power" by discussing "how museums and museology could also have the potential to take power away, to *disempower*, by preventing the discussion of sensitive subjects" (ICOFOM, 2022). In other words, ICOFOM's symposium invited participants to discuss Taboos in Museology.

Taboos are a complex societal phenomenon, rooted in historical, cultural, or political contexts. Originally a Polynesian word used to describe forbidden cultural practices, "taboo" carries the double meaning of practices either too special and sacred or too repugnant and repulsive to be casually undertaken. While the word's entrance into the Western vocabulary is a lesson in colonialism, carried to England by the published accounts of Captain James Cook's voyages of so-called discovery in the 18th century (Taboo, 2023), the concept of "things prohibited" exists in all societies. It has proven useful to the social sciences in the 20th-21st centuries, and its usage was expanded by psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud (*Totem und Tabu*, 1913); anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss (*Mythologiques*, 1964-71) and Edmund Leach (*Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, 1989); and by scholars of religion and mythology, such as Joseph Campbell (*The Power*

¹ As of November 1, 2023

² Emails: weiser.23@osu.edu, marionbbertin@gmail.com, ann.leshchenko@gmail.com

of *Myth*, 1988). In our symposium, taboos in museology were meant to bring to light the ways in which museum *power* carries with it concurrent *responsibilities*.

Museum neutrality: The original taboo

As the papers at the symposium and in this collection demonstrate, one of the key taboos that need addressing in the museal world is the belief that museums are neutral. According to the recently published *Dictionary of Museology*, museums came into being for the development of knowledge and became modern as they grew open to developing that knowledge with the public (Mairesse, 2023, p. 334). Museums, for centuries, have preserved human history, knowledge, and culture, encapsulating a collective narrative of the societies they represent.

However, they have *never* been neutral repositories because to tell that collective narrative, museum staff must continually make choices: selecting from the world at large what to collect, selecting from their collections what to display, selecting from everything on display what to highlight, selecting from the myriad words in the language which ones will be used to explain those artefacts and contextualise them into an exhibition. At each stage of the process the narrative of the ongoing reality is carefully selected, and therefore, inevitably, at each stage other possible pieces of that reality – a different artefact, a different sign, a different exhibition – are deflected from (Burke, 1943, p. 27). Thus, by its very nature as a microcosm of the larger world, run by people who must use symbolic communication (visual and verbal) to select for and deflect from the larger reality, the idea of the museum as neutral repository is rendered impossible. Indeed, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argued in an ICOM Prague plenary on the museum’s place in civil society, neutrality discussions merely distract from the museum’s real potential to serve as an agora, a marketplace of ideas informing civic debates.

Yet to say that museums are not neutral is still in many circles to break a longstanding taboo against calling these institutions partisan, even as the narratives that museums choose to represent are often subject to the societal taboos that govern them. Lévi-Strauss’s anthropological notion may prove analogous here: For him, the original human taboo was the prohibition against incest because the resultant need to go outside the family group for a mate necessarily required humanity to forge the social relational systems that make us human (1949). The ICOFOM symposium raised for us the possibility that neutrality as a norm confines the museum to insularity — a site focused on its internal functions of collection/preservation — while non-neutrality, with its focus on the social role of the museum, pushes the institution out into the social-relational world, the human world.

That dilemma -- the inevitability and perhaps even the desirability of museal partisanship and the taboo against naming it -- formed the backdrop to our 2022 symposium. For two days, participants theorised the nature of museological taboos and presented examples of and reasons for confronting them (see Weiser et al., 2022). Four panels on the themes of “Neutrality and Activism”, “Collections and Audiences”, “Problematic Museology”, and “Coloniality, Collaboration and Working Conditions” were held at the National Museum of Technology (Prague) and Masaryk University (Brno) in the form of sessions designed to encourage dialogue and discussion between participants and the public. This issue of the *ICOFOM Study Series* follows on that discussion and its *Materials* publication of short abstracts with a series of more richly explored articles.

The nature of taboo

The different themes and questions raised by speakers at the symposium inspired Marion Bertin, along with her co-writer Olivia Guiragossian, to question our initial notion of taboo as a shared “silence” in their Metis-Lab report (Bertin & Guiragossian, 2022). They point out that contributions and discussions in Czechia raised questions about the conditions under which taboos are expressed: Is there a strict boundary between what is taboo and what is not, or are taboos instead characterised by a blurred zone, with variable and sometimes never clearly established dimensions? Is it even possible to make a clear distinction between a “sensitive” subject and a “taboo” subject? Further, do museum communities all deal with taboos in the same manner, or are the considerations of taboos as diverse and complex as are taboos themselves?

Canonically, those who break a taboo may be shunned by their community -- they have failed to follow the unwritten social rules. But the ability to break a taboo may also mark one as special, an insider to the community with unwritten permission to transgress. We can see both these implications in modern museum practices. For instance, museum administrators may actively avoid discussions that seem to threaten the status quo of their institutions on topics ranging from collection repatriation to the influence of donors on display decisions to the working conditions of their staff (see for example Debrosse, Duarte Cândido & Pappalardo, Galssini, Leeder, Tezoto de Lima, Vikmane in Weiser et al., 2022). Heritage curators may feel pressure, consciously or unconsciously, to avoid topics and histories deemed controversial or uncomfortable (see Zabalueva, Viita-aho, Scheiner, Maranda, Jagodzińska in Weiser et al., 2022), while art curators may argue for respecting one set of social, moral, or religious beliefs over another in display choices (see Botte, Pauliac in Weiser et al., 2022). Many of our symposium participants, meanwhile, argued that museums should use their “special” authority in society to break – or at least bend – longstanding exhibit taboos that marginalised non-dominant groups (see Galla, Satil Neves, Niangao, Cury in Weiser et al., 2022). In other words, they argued for museum activism.

As Joan Anim-Addo, Viv Golding, and Wayne Modest (2023) explain in the *Dictionary of Museology*, activism in museums means becoming more attuned to the changing nature of their publics. As they write:

[S]ome museums are engaging in grassroots collaborative work with diverse communities, to re-imagine the status quo and open up their spaces for dialogue, critical reflection and action, in order to meaningfully tackle historical and contemporary injustice, discrimination, prejudice and stereotype. ... Activism argues that museums are not neutral spaces but play key social roles, of connectivity and engagement, at local and global levels. (pp. 18-19)

What was seen as appropriately shunned or silenced in an earlier, more homogenous or more narrowly focused social group may well be seen as desperately needing to be uncovered, discussed, and dealt with by a more diverse society today – and museums are ideal public spaces for such discussions.

Yet museum professionals and their communities frequently struggle to find a balance between upholding, questioning, and breaking taboos as they try to take a more activist

stance. As we see in our own nations, in countries around the world, this struggle is getting more difficult as populism and authoritarianism combine to censor ideas and actions that critique the status quo or show support for the human rights many activists call on museums to address, as multiple speakers noted in ICOM Prague sessions. The liberalist economy also generates precarity for museums and museum professionals. The need for money, at a time when public funds are more and more reduced, creates taboos regarding private funds and conditions of working. The rise in such censorship, making it taboo to discuss social problems and changing norms, is a clear hallmark of the *precarity* of our times, or what theorist Judith Butler (2009) called the “politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support” (p. ii). Communications scholar Kundai Chirindo (2021) notes that in the age of pandemics and the climate disruption of the Anthropocene, precarity has spread well beyond the most vulnerable, such that the “affective register of precarity – feeling at once exposed to, vulnerable to, dependent upon, and impinged upon by others” – has become a universal trait (p. 432). “One’s life,” as Butler observes, “is always in some sense, in the hands of the other” (p. 14). All these elements – who approves, who visits, who pays and who works – have consequences in museums, whether they concern exhibitions, relationships with communities, or acquisitions and collections management. How, then, can museums answer the call to break the taboos that would name their exhibitions on contested issues as “overly disruptive”? How do they fully partner with tabooed LGBTQ communities, Indigenous activists, or denigrated ethnic minorities when the dominant culture cries foul? One key component symposium participants alluded to is simply better listening, more attention paid to what the minoritised group is actually saying. The more power that subaltern communities have in crafting their own vision, the more that their version of truth-telling and their understanding of resilience can make their ways from the old margins to the new centre of the museum narrative. This is apparent in a place like the recently opened First Americans Museum, an Indigenous-run collaborative effort of the 39 tribal nations in Oklahoma, U.S. The museum’s deputy director Shoshana Wasserman (Muscogee Creek) commented on its first anniversary: “Because everything is in first-person voice, our Native communities have walked out very empowered and very grateful that, finally, they feel like their perspective of history has been added to the greater dialogue” (McDonnell, 2022). Elizabeth Weiser (2023) called this “restorative rhetoric”: the pairing of truth-telling by marginalised voices with celebration of the resilience of the everyday community and the re-centring of “othered” life as mainstream life.

Involving previously marginalised stakeholders in their own truth-telling may mean not only better understanding and valuing what had previously been overlooked or hidden away, it may also mean respecting community decisions over what needs to *not* be on display. The situation of human remains in museums and laws such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) offer clear examples, and the acceptance of this form of community participation, having a say over display practices, is growing. As Bertin's (2021) work in Oceania demonstrates, since the 1980's, Indigenous communities have been more and more recognised as stakeholders in museums, both in Oceania and in other parts of the world (Peers & Brown, 2003; Hooper et al., 2012). In Oceania (a region with more than 25,000 islands), taboos are connected to ancestors, to the sacred, and to power. They refer to a wide range of social practices which entail both interdictions and obligations that may differ from one individual to another, depending on their social status. A person, an object, a word, a social practice or a place can all be *tabu*, either permanently or for a certain period. In museum collections, some taboo objects are

considered as secret and can be seen or touched only by a few members of the community, or only at certain times.

The increased recognition of Indigenous opinion on how to display these objects is having a strong impact on the management of collections: Taboo prohibitions regarding objects and human remains are now being acknowledged. As the First Americans Museum staff note in their Indigenous art collection *Winiko: Life of an Object*, they are inviting visitors to move “from collecting to decolonizing,” noting, “Today, as more Native people enter the museum field, we are effecting positive change. With our guidance, museums have instituted new standards in consideration of Native perspectives” (First Americans Museum, 2021). Fulfilling taboo restrictions means dealing with contradictions regarding the classical goals devoted to museums: public exhibition vs. secret conservation; sharing knowledge with a wide audience vs. restricting knowledge to a few people. Indigenous curators and collaborations with communities help to handle these challenges (De Lary Healy, 2011; McCarthy et al., 2013), particularly as museums find themselves under financial and political pressure to display every visitor-attracting artefact.

A second key component in the response to felt precarity of both institution and individual, then, lies in restorative rhetoric’s emphasis on care. Rather than condemn prior curators or current visitors for their ignorance and inaction in the face of ongoing injustice or bureaucratic inertia, restorative rhetoric frames re-narration of the old story as part of a larger attempt at healing division. For instance, Lonnie Bunch, the first African American Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, says that he worked to found their National Museum of African American History and Culture in the hope that it would become “a site of transformation that would make America better ... by helping to bridge the chasms like race that have divided America since its inception, ... [crafting] a vision that we hoped would help a country heal” (Bunch, 2019, p. 31).

This emphasis on truth that heals and teaches rather than shames and blames is crucial for museums that wish to persuade their visitors of new perspectives in a precarious world, because the desire to avoid painful heritage can so easily make any effort to reveal it into a taboo topic, as we see in current censorship efforts around the world. As German educator Stephan Marks (2011) notes, writing of his work on the Nazi legacy, the emotion of shame “is a much deeper fear than that of punishment: [shame] is the fear of psychological annihilation, of expulsion from society,” and our mind and body “focus only on escape from the source of the fear” (p. 98). This escape takes the form not only of avoidance – visitors choosing not to enter a museum and therefore not escape their own narrow perspective – but of the same kinds of toxic divisions that simply add to communal precarity. “Obviously,” Marks writes, “unconscious, defended shame is poisoning our relations with arrogance, humiliation, cynicism, and violence” (p. 99). A fear of shame forestalls the healing of community brokenness by perpetuating one group’s pain and another’s blindness. This poison has only spread in the intervening decade since he wrote.

When exhibitions are censored in ways that avoid causing discomfort to the dominant, all groups lose the possibility of the healing power of what Marks (2011) calls “healthy shame”, which “protects our integrity, so that we know how to act in accordance with our conscience, values, and ideals, so we can look at ourselves in the mirror each day” (p. 97). Accepting and acknowledging that visitors may indeed experience a degree of “healthy shame” – that this discomfort is to be celebrated as the vulnerability inherent in

challenging previously unspoken taboos – would make material the oft-repeated mantra of museums as “safe places for unsafe ideas”: safe places to bring precarity out in the open so its shameful fear can be overcome. Addressing this silenced approbation can help the museum world to challenge existing perceptions and promote critical thinking through plural voices and narratives, avoiding what Chimamanda Adichie (2009) refers to as “the danger of a single story.” Rather than aiming for an impossible neutrality, then, museums may instead aim for transparency, being open about the choices they necessarily make in filling their sites, the internal disputes that lead to certain choices over others, and the inevitable mistakes made along the way that lead to critical self-corrections.

Taboos in museology

In that spirit, we in the International Committee for Museology acknowledge the multiple ways in which scholarship deems itself taboo, too special to be casually undertaken, and therefore its practices serve to silence less-dominant voices. In many ways, “people issues” play a role in museology taboos. For instance, decolonising is a process that involves so much more than a degree of power-sharing, as Shahid Vawda (2019) notes: “It is to question and unmask the epistemological, sometimes the ontological, foundations of such ideas, which inform the knowledge that make the societies and people of Africa, Asia and Latin America ‘invisible’ for the colonisers” (p. 76). Such processes are in their infancy in a field still dominated by scholars (writing in languages) of the global North and West. We pride ourselves on publishing new voices in the *ICOFOM Study Series* ... but we prioritise those voices which had the means to travel to a symposium, the global understanding to make their topic interesting to a diverse audience, the educational background to know the often unwritten – but unbending – rules of academic scholarship (from what a scientific research investigation looks like to how to write a scholarly argument to how to appropriately cite other scholars), and, of course, the ability to convey this information in one of the three official ICOFOM languages. We admit to being uncertain how to reconcile our commitment to global inclusivity with our commitment to the unwritten scholarly code that establishes our place among our peers. Yet the barriers to participation in global meetings and journals are a reminder that equality within the museum community is far from a given.

As Bertin and Guiragossian (2022) have written, participants in the symposium also led us to question whether all silences in museology are “taboo”. The question seems intrinsically linked to issues of participation and transparency, and to the different voices that can express so many narratives. Here again, selection and deflection come into play. What is the boundary, for instance, between a taboo and the ways in which lines of research are subject to rapid movements of fashion and interest/disinterest? Is the response “no one studies that anymore” indicative of an unacknowledged taboo?

On the other side, what of the issues that are, today, “fashionable”? Only a few years ago, discussing the legacy of colonialism and the idea of repatriation were anathema to both nations and major museums among the former colonisers, while today decolonisation is a major topic of both scholarly and geopolitical interest, including at our symposium. Is this spotlight just a fad? And does the transition from taboo silence to visibility create a new set of taboos – is it now taboo to *not* discuss repatriation, for example (Bertin & Guiragossian, 2022)? As another example, collaborative projects are now almost *de rigueur* for funded efforts, but there is still a great deal of compromise, giving greater power to host museums

and funders to the detriment of the communities or groups of people invited to collaborate – and these inequities are much less discussed in the circles of those who have the power to evince change. In similar fashion, ICOM celebrated the rise of LGBTQI+ museums at its 2022 conference, while at the same time celebrating its upcoming 2025 conference in Dubai, where homosexuality can lead to a ten-year prison sentence (Bureau of Democracy, 2021) and there is no legal protection against identity discrimination. The celebration was widely pronounced; the approbation muted, made taboo.

Weiser (2022) points to the importance of having subaltern and minoritised communities themselves enter the conversations both in the museum and in the university. As curators and scholars, diverse scholars raise questions and provide interpretations that the dominant do not consider. They move their views to the centre of history. “Without marginalised voices taking the lead,” Weiser noted in her Prague address, “I believe we who are not marginalised can never really break the taboos because we will always see ourselves as both the storytellers and the audience.”

Indeed, most participants at the ICOFOM symposium pointed to the broad spectrum of political and power issues that lurk behind many taboos. These issues were evident throughout the years-long ICOM debate over a renewed definition of “museum,” including both the failure of the initial Western-dominated attempt in 2019 to define its own version of the new “inclusivity” and the successful attempt in 2022, moderated by two representatives of the Global South who focused on creating a fully participatory and transparent process for decision-making. Through our taboos – and our restorative transparencies – we are highlighting the power issues underlying all museum work and the production of knowledge about museums.

For the taboo issues of power to continue to be addressed, we need to celebrate the uncomfortable dialogues that inevitably occur. For instance, Muthoni Twanga (2022), a Kenyan museologist, insisted in her keynote address at ICOFOM Prague on the need to address the power differentials of our global world. “If your history makes you proud,” she told this roomful of mainly Western museologists, “maybe it's not history at all”. Or perhaps, we add, a sense of pride is a necessary but contingent reality – necessary to bind one to fellow citizens in a shared project but also necessarily treated cautiously, with an awareness that power dynamics like the legacy of colonialism are also a part of any history – and it is these latter stances that are so often hidden away, unspoken and tabooed. With conflicting perspectives, it can seem difficult, even impossible, to choose the best path forward, but we know that not acknowledging and dealing with our uncertainty or unease is its own kind of taboo.

Confronting our taboos in museum studies, then, is not just morally important but also imperative for the progress of the field. If we refuse to consider alternatives which might require breaking with tradition, we perpetuate not only the taboo, but the precarity – the feeling that we stand on a precipice from which we are constantly in danger of falling. Stepping away from that false abyss is an exercise in honesty, inclusivity, and intellectual maturity, capable of fostering an environment of intellectual growth and mutual respect. As Bryan Stevenson (2022), founding director of the U.S.’s Legacy Museum – an institution focused on historical and ongoing racial violence – puts it in his welcome video, “It is hard to confront these painful truths. But the powerful thing is, when we have the courage to learn the truth, we open up doors that permit justice, that permit reckoning, that permit healing.”

Structure of the issue

François Mairesse begins the issue with an overview of three levels of prohibition in the museum world: those dealing more internally with the presentation of objects and subjects or relating to the rules and practices of museum professionals, and a third more external level concerning political and economic inequality in a museal context more generally. As we will see throughout this collection, many of the taboos with which museums struggle have to do with their relationships to their communities and the changing roles both they and the communities are undergoing. First, Rogerio Satil Neves looks at the history and future of identitarian museums, focusing on the rise of LGBTQ+ museums and exhibitions to argue that, by engaging with these communities as counterpublics, such sites symbolise a call for recognition rather than just visibility. Then Julie Botte surveys exhibitions that subvert gender norms and transgress the taboos that enclose female bodies, focusing on three aspects of women's bodies in museums: the erotic view of female nudity, the display of gynaecological parts, and the discussion of sexual violence. She argues that these initiatives modify the vision of women's bodies in museums and the relationship between seeing subject and seen object.

The next section of the issue places into dialogue several writers considering some of the issues broadly raised by decolonisation. First, Clementine Debrosse considers how power dynamics influence what display decisions are made, and who is allowed to make them, for the artefacts and human remains still in the collections of ethnography museums across Europe. Then Mariana Tezoto de Lima looks at how assumptions are perpetuated in public discourse in both the Global North and South over who has the “right” to objects in the repatriation process. The press, she argues, play an important role in moving that discourse into the public arena. Next Leonie Leeder examines the ways that power is perpetuated when a “universal” museum collaborates digitally with Indigenous Maya communities. And Hsiao-Chiang Wang presents her model from Taiwan for improved collaboration with Indigenous communities, in which the values of the community itself subvert traditional, prohibitory practices of museum experts and become the foremost consideration for museal actions.

The issue ends with two writers considering the benefits and potential pitfalls of innovative museum work. First, Nina Robbins tackles the unspoken values assumptions that can impede both community/museum collaboration and student success in the field, proposing via an extended example that open discussion of differing values structures can function as a bridge between museum professionals and municipal stakeholders. Then Elina Vikmane provides evidence of how the youngest, most digitally savvy staff members may be overworked, their enthusiasm exploited in the contemporary rush toward online, digital content. Working conditions are often a taboo so internalised in institutions committed to doing good that we fail to recognise their existence, and so we end on this sober note that reminds us all to question the secret-sacred amongst ourselves as well as in the outside world.

References

- Adichie, C. (2009, October 7). *The danger of a single story* [Video]. TED Talk. youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg
- Anim-Addo, J., Golding, V., & Modest, W. (2023). Activism. In F. Mairesse (Ed.), *Dictionary of museology* (pp. 17-21). Routledge.
- Bertin, M. (2021). Circulations et valeurs des objets océaniques dans les collections privées et publiques (1980-2020) [Unpublished PhD dissertation]. La Rochelle Université & École du Louvre.
- Bertin, M., & Guiragossian, O. (2022, October 18). *Parlons tabous! Quelques réflexions sur le symposium de l'ICOFOM, Prague et Brno (22 au 27 août 2022)*. Metis: Un regard sur le monde muséal. metis-lab.com/2022/10/18/parlons-tabous-quelques-reflexions-sur-le-symposium-de-licofom-prague-et-brno-22-au-27-aout-2022/
- Bunch III, L. G. (2019). *A fool's errand: Creating the National Museum of African American History and Culture in the age of Bush, Obama, and Trump*. Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (2021). Section 6. Discrimination and societal abuses. In *2021 Country reports on human rights practices: United Arab Emirates*. United States Department of State. www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/united-arab-emirates/
- Burke, K. (1943). The tactics of motivation. *Chimera*, 1(4), 21–33.
- Butler, J. (2009). Performativity, precarity and sexual politics. *Revista de antropología Iberoamericana*, 4(3), i-xiii. www.aibr.org
- Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of war: When is life grievable?* Verso.
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Pantheon Press.
- Chirindo, K. (2021). Precarious publics. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 107(4), 430–434. doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2021.1983192
- De Largy Healy, J. (2011). Pour une anthropologie de la restitution. Archives culturelles et transmissions des savoirs en Australie. *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie*, 24, 45-65.
- First Americans Museum. (2021). *Winiko: Life of an object* [Exhibition]. famok.org/winiko/
- Freud, S. (1913). *Totem und tabu*. Hugo Heller.
- Hooper, S., Jacobs, K., Jessop, M., & Nuku, G. (2012). Encounters with Polynesia in Britain: Art, ancestors, artists, and curators. *Museum Anthropology*, 35, 10-22.
- ICOFOM. (2022). Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory. Call for papers. icofom.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2022/02/ICOFOM_Call_Taboo_ENG-2.pdf
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2022, August 23). *Purpose: Museums and the civil society* [Panel]
- Leach, E. (1967). *The structural study of myth and totemism*. Tavistock Publications.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1949). *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*. Presses Universitaires de France.

- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1964–1971). *Mythologiques*, 1-5. Plon-Nourrit.
- McCarthy, C., Dorfman, E., Hakiwai, A., & Twomey, Ā. (2013). Mana Taonga: Connecting communities with New Zealand museums through ancestral Māori culture. *Museum International*, 65, 5-15.
- Mairesse, F. (Ed.). (2023). *Dictionary of museology*. Routledge.
- Marks, S. (2011). Hidden stories, toxic stories, healing stories: The power of narrative in peace and reconciliation. *Narrative Matters*, 1(1), 95–106.
- McDonnell, B. (2022, September 15). First Americans Museum celebrates first anniversary with big attendance and bigger plans. *Oklahoman*. www.oklahoman.com/story/entertainment/2022/09/15/one-year-after-opening-okcs-first-americans-museum-has-big-plans/69492261007/
- Peers, L. & Brown, A. K. (Eds.). (2003). *Museums and source communities*. Routledge.
- Sandell, R. (2017). *Museums, moralities and human rights*. Routledge.
- Taboo. (2023). *Projects at Harvard*. [Projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/cb45/files/taboo.pdf](https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/cb45/files/taboo.pdf)
- Twanga, M. (2022, August 22). *Unspoken histories – legacies of trauma [Keynote address]*. ICOFOM Symposium Taboos in Museology
- Vawda, S. (2019). Museums and the epistemology of injustice: From colonialism to decoloniality. *Museum International*, 71(1-2), 72-79.
- Weiser, M. E. (2022, August 23). *Breaking taboos without breaking the nation [Keynote address]*. ICOFOM Symposium Taboos in Museology.
- Weiser, M. E., Bertin, M., & Leshchenko, A. (Eds.). (2022). *Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory. Materials for a discussion*. ICOM/ICOFOM.
- Weiser, M.E. (2023). Celebrating bad times: The epideictic work of museums of racial trauma. In *Museums, narratives, and critical histories: Narrating the past for present and future*, K. Barndt and S. Jaeger (Eds.). De Gruyter. In press.

Introduction :

Remettre en question les silences : Confronter les tabous dans les musées et la muséologie

M. Elizabeth Weiser

The Ohio State University – Etats-Unis

Marion Bertin

Université Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne – Paris, France¹

Anna Leshchenko

Eberhard Karls Universität – Tübingen, Allemagne²

En choisissant « Le pouvoir des musées » comme thème de sa 26ème Conférence générale à Prague (Tchéquie), le Conseil international des musées (ICOM) a donné à ses membres, comités nationaux, comités internationaux et alliances régionales l'opportunité de développer des thèmes mettant en avant le rôle des musées pour contrer les grands bouleversements du monde. Après trois années de pandémie et de dissensions, le programme a été riche et varié, témoignant de la résilience du secteur muséal.

Pourtant, le thème choisi par le Comité international de muséologie (ICOFOM) pour ses réunions interrogeait ce « pouvoir » en discutant « comment les musées et la muséologie pourraient aussi avoir le potentiel d'enlever du pouvoir, de déresponsabiliser, en empêchant la discussion de sujets sensibles » (ICOFOM, 2022). En d'autres termes, le symposium de l'ICOFOM invitait les participants à discuter des tabous en muséologie.

Les tabous sont un phénomène sociétal complexe, enraciné dans des contextes historiques, culturels ou politiques. D'origine polynésienne, le mot « tabou » désigne des pratiques culturelles interdites. Il a le double sens de pratiques soit trop spéciales et sacrées, soit trop répugnantes et repoussantes pour être pratiquées communément. Si l'entrée du mot dans le vocabulaire occidental est une leçon de colonialisme, apportée en Angleterre par les récits publiés des voyages de soi-disant découverte du capitaine James Cook au dix-huitième siècle (Taboo, 2023), le concept de « choses interdites » existe dans toutes les sociétés. Il s'est avéré utile aux sciences sociales aux vingtième et vingt-et-unième siècles, et son usage a été étendu par des psychanalystes tels que Sigmund Freud (*Totem und Tabu*, 1913), des anthropologues tels que Claude Lévi-Strauss (*Mythologiques*, 1964-71) et Edmund Leach (*Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, 1989), et des spécialistes de la religion et de la mythologie, tels que Joseph Campbell (*The Power of Myth*, 1988). Dans notre symposium, les tabous en muséologie avaient pour but de mettre en lumière la manière dont le pouvoir muséal s'accompagne de responsabilités concomitantes.

1 Au 1er novembre 2023.

2 Courriels: weiser.23@osu.edu, marionbbertin@gmail.com, ann.leshchenko@gmail.com

La neutralité des musées : Le tabou originel

Comme le montrent les communications du colloque et de ce recueil, l'un des principaux tabous qui doit être abordé dans le monde muséal est la croyance en la neutralité des musées. Selon le *Dictionary of Museology* récemment publié, les musées sont nés pour le développement des connaissances et sont devenus modernes en s'ouvrant au développement de ces connaissances avec le public (Mairesse, 2023, p. 334). Depuis des siècles, les musées préservent l'histoire, le savoir et la culture de l'humanité, en résumant le récit collectif des sociétés qu'ils représentent.

Cependant, ils n'ont jamais été des dépositaires neutres, car pour raconter ce récit collectif, le personnel des musées doit continuellement faire des choix : sélectionner dans le monde entier ce qu'il faut collecter, sélectionner dans leurs collections ce qu'il faut exposer, sélectionner dans tout ce qui est exposé ce qu'il faut mettre en valeur, sélectionner dans la myriade de mots de la langue ceux qui seront utilisés pour expliquer ces artefacts et les contextualiser dans le cadre d'une exposition. À chaque étape du processus, le récit de la réalité en cours est soigneusement sélectionné et, par conséquent, inévitablement, à chaque étape, d'autres éléments possibles de cette réalité – un artefact différent, un signe différent, une exposition différente – sont écartés (Burke, 1943, p. 27). Ainsi, de par sa nature même de microcosme du monde, dirigé par des personnes qui doivent utiliser la communication symbolique (visuelle et verbale) pour sélectionner et détourner la réalité plus large, l'idée du musée en tant que dépositaire neutre est rendue impossible. En effet, comme l'a soutenu Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett lors d'une séance plénière de l'ICOM Prague sur la place du musée dans la société civile, les discussions sur la neutralité ne font que détourner l'attention du potentiel réel du musée à servir d'agora, de marché d'idées informant les débats civiques.

Pourtant, dire que les musées ne sont pas neutres revient encore, dans de nombreux cercles, à briser un tabou de longue date qui interdit de qualifier ces institutions de partisans, alors même que les récits que les musées choisissent de représenter sont souvent soumis aux tabous sociétaux qui les régissent. La notion anthropologique de Lévi-Strauss peut s'avérer analogue ici : pour lui, le tabou humain originel est la prohibition de l'inceste, car la nécessité qui en résulte de sortir du groupe familial pour trouver un partenaire a nécessairement obligé l'humanité à forger les systèmes relationnels sociaux qui font d'elle un être humain (1949). Le symposium de l'ICOFOM a soulevé pour nous la possibilité que la neutralité en tant que norme confine le musée à l'insularité, autrement dit un site centré sur ses fonctions internes de collection/préservation. À l'inverse, la non-neutralité, avec son accent sur le rôle social du musée, pousse l'institution vers le monde socio-relationnel, le monde humain.

Ce dilemme – l'inévitabilité et peut-être même le bien-fondé de la partisanerie muséale et le tabou qui empêche de la nommer – a constitué la toile de fond de notre symposium de 2022. Pendant deux jours, les participants ont théorisé la nature des tabous muséologiques et ont présenté des exemples et des raisons de les affronter (voir Weiser, Bertin, Leshchenko, 2022).

La nature du tabou

Les différents thèmes et questions soulevés par les intervenants du symposium ont incité Marion Bertin et sa co-rédactrice Olivia Guiragossian à remettre en question notre notion initiale du tabou en tant que « silence » partagé dans leur rapport Metis-Lab (Bertin et Guiragossian, 2022). Elles soulignent que les contributions et les discussions en Tchéquie ont permis de s'interroger sur les conditions d'expression des tabous : Existe-t-il une frontière stricte entre ce qui est tabou et ce qui ne l'est pas, ou les tabous se caractérisent-ils plutôt par une zone floue, avec des dimensions variables et parfois jamais clairement établies ? Est-il même possible de faire une distinction claire entre un sujet « sensible » et un sujet « tabou » ? Par ailleurs, les communautés muséales abordent-elles tous les tabous de la même manière ou les considérations sur les tabous sont-elles aussi diverses et complexes que les tabous eux-mêmes ?

D'un point de vue canonique, ceux qui enfreignent un tabou peuvent être mis au ban de leur communauté – ils n'ont pas respecté les règles sociales non écrites. Mais la capacité à briser un tabou peut aussi faire de la personne un être à part, un membre de la communauté qui a la permission non écrite de le transgresser. Ces deux implications se retrouvent dans les pratiques des musées modernes. Par exemple, les administrateurs de musée peuvent activement éviter les discussions qui semblent menacer le statu quo de leurs institutions sur des sujets allant du rapatriement des collections à l'influence des donateurs sur les décisions d'exposition, en passant par les conditions de travail de leur personnel (voir par exemple Debrosse, Duarte Cândido et Pappalardo, Galssini, Leeder, Tezoto de Lima, Vikmane dans Weiser et al., 2022). Les conservateurs du patrimoine peuvent ressentir une pression, consciente ou inconsciente, pour éviter les sujets et les histoires jugés controversés ou inconfortables (voir Zabalueva, Viita-aho, Scheiner, Maranda, Jagodzińska dans Weiser et al., 2022), tandis que les conservateurs d'art peuvent défendre le respect d'un ensemble de croyances sociales, morales ou religieuses plutôt que d'un autre dans les choix d'exposition (voir Botte, Pauliac dans Weiser et al., 2022). De nombreux participants à notre symposium ont affirmé que les musées devraient utiliser leur autorité "spéciale" dans la société pour briser – ou au moins faire plier – des tabous d'exposition de longue date qui marginalisent les groupes non dominants (voir Galla, Satil Neves, Niangao, Cury dans Weiser et al., 2022). En d'autres termes, ils ont plaidé en faveur de l'activisme muséal.

Comme l'expliquent Joan Anim-Addo, Viv Golding et Wayne Modest dans le *Dictionary of Museology* (2023), l'activisme dans les musées consiste à s'adapter à la nature changeante de leurs publics. Comme ils l'écrivent :

[C]ertains musées s'engagent dans un travail de collaboration au niveau local avec diverses communautés, pour réimaginer le statu quo et ouvrir leurs espaces au dialogue, à la réflexion critique et à l'action, afin de s'attaquer de manière significative à l'injustice, à la discrimination, aux préjugés et aux stéréotypes historiques et contemporains. ... L'activisme soutient que les musées ne sont pas des espaces neutres, mais qu'ils jouent un rôle social clé, de connectivité et d'engagement, aux niveaux local et mondial. (pp. 18-19)

Ce qui était considéré comme devant être évité ou réduit au silence dans un groupe social antérieur, plus homogène ou plus étroitement ciblé, peut très bien être considéré

comme ayant désespérément besoin d'être découvert, discuté et traité par une société plus diversifiée aujourd'hui. Les musées sont d'ailleurs des espaces publics idéaux pour de telles discussions.

Pourtant, les professionnels des musées et leurs communautés ont souvent du mal à trouver un équilibre entre le maintien, la remise en question et la rupture des tabous lorsqu'ils tentent d'adopter une position plus militante. Comme nous le voyons dans nos propres pays, dans les pays du monde entier, cette lutte devient de plus en plus difficile car le populisme et l'autoritarisme se combinent pour censurer les idées et les actions qui critiquent le statu quo ou montrent un soutien aux droits de l'homme que de nombreux activistes demandent aux musées d'aborder, comme l'ont noté de nombreux orateurs lors des sessions de l'ICOM de Prague. L'économie libérale génère également de la précarité pour les musées et leurs professionnels. Le besoin d'argent, à une époque où les fonds publics sont de plus en plus réduits, crée des tabous concernant les fonds privés et les conditions de travail. L'augmentation de cette censure, qui rend tabou le débat sur les problèmes sociaux et l'évolution des normes, est un signe évident de la précarité de notre époque, ou de ce que la théoricienne Judith Butler a appelé la « condition politiquement induite dans laquelle certaines populations souffrent de l'échec des réseaux sociaux et économiques de soutien » (2009, p. ii). Le spécialiste des communications Kundai Chirindo note qu'à l'ère des pandémies et du dérèglement climatique de l'Anthropocène, la précarité s'est propagée bien au-delà des plus vulnérables, de sorte que le « registre affectif de la précarité – se sentir à la fois exposé, vulnérable, dépendant et empiété par les autres » – est devenu un trait universel (2021, p. 432). Comme l'observe Butler, « la vie d'une personne est toujours, d'une certaine manière, entre les mains de l'autre » (2009, p. 14). Tous ces éléments – qui approuve, qui visite, qui paie et qui travaille – ont des conséquences dans les musées, qu'il s'agisse des expositions, des relations avec les communautés ou des acquisitions et de la gestion des collections.

Comment, dès lors, les musées peuvent-ils répondre à l'appel à briser les tabous qui qualifieraient de « trop perturbantes » leurs expositions sur des questions contestées ? Comment peuvent-ils s'associer pleinement à des communautés LGBTQ taboues, à des activistes indigènes ou à des minorités ethniques dénigrées lorsque la culture dominante crie au scandale ? Les participants au symposium ont fait allusion à un élément clé : une meilleure écoute, une plus grande attention portée à ce que le groupe minoritaire dit réellement. Plus les communautés subalternes ont le pouvoir d'élaborer leur propre vision, plus leur version de la vérité et leur compréhension de la résilience peuvent passer de l'ancienne marge au nouveau centre du récit muséal. Cela est évident dans un lieu comme le First Americans Museum, qui a récemment ouvert ses portes et qui est le fruit d'une collaboration entre les 39 nations tribales de l'Oklahoma, aux États-Unis. La directrice adjointe du musée, Shoshana Wasserman (Muscogee Creek), a commenté le premier anniversaire du musée en ces termes : « Parce que tout est dit à la première personne, nos communautés amérindiennes sont sorties très fortes et très reconnaissantes d'avoir enfin l'impression que leur point de vue sur l'histoire a été ajouté au dialogue général » (McDonnell, 2022). Elizabeth Weiser (2023) a appelé cela la « rhétorique réparatrice » : l'association de l'expression de la vérité par des voix marginalisées avec la célébration de la résilience de la communauté de tous les jours et le recentrage de la vie des « autres » dans la vie courante.

Impliquer des acteurs précédemment marginalisés dans leur propre récit de la vérité peut signifier non seulement mieux comprendre et valoriser ce qui a été précédemment négligé ou caché, mais aussi respecter les décisions de la communauté quant à ce qui ne doit pas être exposé. La situation des restes humains dans les musées et les lois telles que la Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) offrent des exemples clairs, et l'acceptation de cette forme de participation de la communauté, qui a son mot à dire sur les pratiques d'exposition, est de plus en plus grande. Comme le montre le travail de Bertin en Océanie (2021), depuis les années 1980, les communautés indigènes sont de plus en plus reconnues comme parties prenantes des musées, tant en Océanie que dans d'autres parties du monde (Peers & Brown, 2003 ; Hooper et al., 2012). En Océanie (une région qui compte plus de 25 000 îles), les tabous sont liés aux ancêtres, au sacré et au pouvoir. Ils renvoient à un large éventail de pratiques sociales qui impliquent à la fois des interdits et des obligations qui peuvent différer d'un individu à l'autre, en fonction de leur statut social. Une personne, un objet, un mot, une pratique sociale ou un lieu peuvent être tabous, de manière permanente ou pour une certaine période. Dans les collections des musées, certains objets tabous sont considérés comme secrets et ne peuvent être vus ou touchés que par quelques membres de la communauté, ou seulement à certains moments.

La prise en compte croissante de l'opinion des autochtones sur la manière d'exposer ces objets a un impact important sur la gestion des collections : les interdits tabous concernant les objets et les restes humains sont désormais reconnus. Comme le souligne le personnel du First Americans Museum dans sa collection d'art indigène *Winiko : Life of an Object*, ils invitent les visiteurs à passer « de la collection à la décolonisation », en précisant : « Aujourd'hui, alors que de plus en plus d'autochtones entrent dans le monde des musées, nous sommes en train d'opérer un changement positif. Grâce à nos conseils, les musées ont instauré de nouvelles normes en matière de prise en compte des perspectives autochtones » (First Americans Museum, 2021). Respecter les restrictions liées aux tabous signifie gérer les contradictions concernant les objectifs classiques des musées : exposition publique contre conservation secrète ; partage des connaissances avec un large public contre restriction des connaissances à un petit nombre de personnes. Les conservateurs autochtones et les collaborations avec les communautés aident à relever ces défis (De Largy Healy, 2011 ; McCarthy et al., 2013), d'autant plus que les musées sont soumis à des pressions financières et politiques pour exposer tous les artefacts susceptibles d'attirer les visiteurs.

Lorsque les expositions sont censurées de manière à éviter de gêner les dominants, tous les groupes perdent la possibilité de bénéficier du pouvoir de guérison de ce que Marks appelle la « honte saine », qui « protège notre intégrité, afin que nous sachions comment agir en accord avec notre conscience, nos valeurs et nos idéaux, afin que nous puissions nous regarder dans le miroir chaque jour » (2011, p. 97). Accepter et reconnaître que le fait que les visiteurs peuvent en effet éprouver un certain degré de « honte saine » matérialiserait le mantra souvent répété des musées en tant que « lieux sûrs pour des idées dangereuses », c'est-à-dire, des lieux sûrs pour faire apparaître la précarité au grand jour afin que sa peur honteuse puisse être surmontée. Cet inconfort doit être célébré comme la vulnérabilité inhérente à la remise en question de tabous précédemment inexprimés. S'attaquer à cette approbation silencieuse peut aider le monde des musées à remettre en

question les perceptions existantes et à promouvoir la pensée critique par le biais de voix et de récits pluriels, en évitant ce que Chimamanda Adichie (2009) appelle « le danger d'une histoire unique ». Plutôt que de viser une impossible neutralité, les musées peuvent donc viser la transparence, en étant ouverts sur les choix qu'ils font nécessairement pour remplir leurs sites, les conflits internes qui conduisent à certains choix plutôt qu'à d'autres, et les erreurs inévitables commises en cours de route qui conduisent à des autocorrections critiques.

Les tabous de la muséologie

Dans cet esprit, le Comité international de muséologie reconnaît les multiples façons dont la recherche se considère comme « trop spéciale pour être entreprise avec désinvolture » et dont ses pratiques servent à faire taire les voix moins dominantes. À bien des égards, les « questions de personnes » jouent un rôle dans les tabous de la muséologie. Par exemple, la décolonisation est un processus qui implique bien plus qu'un certain partage du pouvoir, comme le note Shahid Vawda : « Il s'agit de questionner et de démasquer les fondements épistémologiques, parfois ontologiques, de ces idées, qui informent les savoirs qui rendent les sociétés et les peuples d'Afrique, d'Asie et d'Amérique latine 'invisibles' pour les colonisateurs » (2019, p. 76). Ces processus n'en sont qu'à leurs débuts dans un domaine encore dominé par des chercheurs (écrivant dans des langues) du Nord et de l'Ouest. Nous sommes fiers de publier de nouvelles voix dans la série d'études de l'ICOFOM ... mais nous donnons la priorité aux voix qui ont eu les moyens de se rendre à un symposium, la compréhension globale pour rendre leur sujet intéressant pour un public diversifié, le niveau d'éducation pour connaître les règles souvent non écrites – mais inflexibles – de la recherche universitaire (de ce à quoi ressemble une enquête de recherche scientifique à la façon de rédiger un argumentaire savant, en passant par la façon de citer correctement d'autres chercheurs), et, bien sûr, la capacité de transmettre ces informations dans l'une des trois langues officielles de l'ICOFOM. Nous admettons ne pas savoir comment concilier notre engagement en faveur de l'inclusion mondiale avec notre engagement en faveur du code scientifique non écrit qui établit notre place parmi nos pairs. Pourtant, les obstacles à la participation aux réunions et revues internationales nous rappellent que l'égalité au sein de la communauté muséale est loin d'être acquise.

Comme l'ont écrit Bertin et Guiragossian (2022), les participants au symposium nous ont également amenés à nous demander si tous les silences en muséologie sont « tabous ». Cette question semble intrinsèquement liée aux questions de participation et de transparence, et aux différentes voix qui peuvent exprimer autant de récits. Ici encore, la sélection et la déviation entrent en jeu. Quelle est la limite, par exemple, entre un tabou et la manière dont les lignes de recherche sont sujettes à des mouvements rapides de mode et d'intérêt/désintérêt ? La réponse « plus personne n'étudie cela » est-elle révélatrice d'un tabou non reconnu ?

D'autre part, qu'en est-il des questions qui sont aujourd'hui « à la mode » ? Alors qu'il y a encore quelques années, parler de l'héritage du colonialisme et de l'idée de rapatriement était un anathème pour les nations et les grands musées des anciens colonisateurs, la décolonisation est aujourd'hui un sujet majeur d'intérêt scientifique et géopolitique, y compris dans le cadre de notre symposium. Ce coup de projecteur n'est-il qu'un effet de mode ? Et le passage du silence tabou à la visibilité crée-t-il une nouvelle série de tabous – est-il désormais tabou de ne pas parler de rapatriement, par exemple (Bertin et

Guiragossian, 2022) ? Autre exemple, les projets collaboratifs sont maintenant presque de rigueur pour les efforts financés, mais il y a encore beaucoup de compromis, donnant plus de pouvoir aux musées hôtes et aux bailleurs de fonds au détriment des communautés ou des groupes de personnes invitées à collaborer – et ces inégalités sont beaucoup moins discutées dans les cercles de ceux qui ont le pouvoir d'évoquer le changement. De la même manière, l'ICOM a célébré l'essor des musées LGBTQI+ lors de sa conférence de 2022, tout en célébrant sa prochaine conférence de 2025 à Dubaï, où l'homosexualité est passible d'une peine de prison de dix ans (Bureau of Democracy, 2021) et où il n'existe aucune protection juridique contre la discrimination identitaire. La célébration a été largement prononcée ; l'approbation a été étouffée, rendue taboue.

Weiser (2022) souligne l'importance de faire participer les communautés subalternes et minoritaires aux conversations, tant au musée qu'à l'université. En tant que conservateurs et chercheurs, les divers chercheurs soulèvent des questions et fournissent des interprétations que les dominants ne prennent pas en compte. Ils placent leurs points de vue au centre de l'histoire. « Si les voix marginalisées ne prennent pas l'initiative », a noté Weiser à Prague, « je pense que nous, qui ne sommes pas marginalisés, ne pourrions jamais vraiment briser les tabous parce que nous nous considérerons toujours comme les conteurs et le public ».

En effet, la plupart des participants au symposium de l'ICOFOM ont souligné le large éventail de questions politiques et de pouvoir qui se cachent derrière de nombreux tabous. Ces questions ont été évidentes tout au long des années de débat de l'ICOM sur une nouvelle définition du terme « musée », y compris l'échec de la tentative initiale dominée par l'Occident en 2019 pour définir sa propre version de la nouvelle « inclusivité » et la tentative réussie en 2022, modérée par deux représentants du Sud global qui se sont concentrés sur la création d'un processus de prise de décision entièrement participatif et transparent. Grâce à nos tabous et à nos transparences réparatrices, nous mettons en lumière les questions de pouvoir qui sous-tendent tout travail muséal et la production de connaissances sur les musées.

Pour que les questions taboues de pouvoir continuent d'être abordées, nous devons célébrer les dialogues inconfortables qui se produisent inévitablement. Par exemple, Muthoni Twanga, muséologue kenyane, a insisté dans son discours d'ouverture à ICOFOM Prague sur la nécessité d'aborder les différences de pouvoir dans notre monde global. « Si votre histoire vous rend fier », a-t-elle déclaré à cette assemblée composée principalement de muséologues occidentaux, « peut-être que ce n'est pas du tout de l'histoire ». Ou peut-être, ajoutons-nous, le sentiment de fierté est-il une réalité nécessaire mais contingente, nécessaire pour se lier à ses concitoyens dans un projet commun, mais aussi nécessairement traitée avec prudence, avec la conscience que les dynamiques de pouvoir comme l'héritage du colonialisme font également partie de toute histoire. Ce sont ces dernières positions qui sont si souvent cachées, inexprimées et taboues. Avec des perspectives contradictoires, il peut sembler difficile, voire impossible, de choisir la meilleure voie à suivre, mais nous savons que ne pas reconnaître et traiter notre incertitude ou notre malaise est une sorte de tabou en soi.

Confronter nos tabous dans les études muséales n'est donc pas seulement important d'un point de vue moral, mais aussi impératif pour le progrès du domaine. Si nous refusons d'envisager des alternatives qui pourraient nécessiter de rompre avec la tradition, nous perpétons non seulement le tabou, mais aussi la précarité, soit le sentiment de se trouver sur un précipice d'où nous risquons constamment de tomber. S'éloigner de ce faux

abîme est un exercice d'honnêteté, d'inclusion et de maturité intellectuelle, capable de favoriser un environnement de croissance intellectuelle et de respect mutuel. Comme le dit Bryan Stevenson (2022), directeur fondateur du Legacy Museum aux Etats-Unis – une institution axée sur la violence raciale historique et actuelle – dans sa vidéo de bienvenue : « Il est difficile de se confronter à ces vérités douloureuses. Mais ce qui est puissant, c'est que lorsque nous avons le courage d'apprendre la vérité, nous ouvrons des portes qui permettent la justice, qui permettent de faire le point, qui permettent de guérir ».

Structure du numéro de revue

François Mairesse commence le numéro par un aperçu des trois niveaux de prohibition dans le monde des musées : ceux qui traitent plus intérieurement de la présentation des objets et des sujets ou qui concernent les règles et les pratiques des professionnels des musées, et un troisième niveau plus externe concernant l'inégalité politique et économique dans un contexte muséal plus général. Comme nous le verrons tout au long de cette collection, bon nombre des tabous avec lesquels les musées doivent composer sont liés à leurs relations avec leurs communautés et à l'évolution de leurs rôles et de ceux des communautés. Rogerio Satil Neves se penche tout d'abord sur l'histoire et l'avenir des musées identitaires, en se concentrant sur l'essor des musées et des expositions LGBTQ+ pour soutenir qu'en s'engageant auprès de ces communautés en tant que contre-publics, ces sites symbolisent un appel à la reconnaissance plutôt qu'à la simple visibilité. Julie Botte passe ensuite en revue les expositions qui subvertissent les normes de genre et transgressent les tabous qui enferment les corps féminins, en se concentrant sur trois aspects du corps des femmes dans les musées : la vision érotique de la nudité féminine, l'exposition de parties gynécologiques et la discussion de la violence sexuelle. Elle affirme que ces initiatives modifient la vision du corps des femmes dans les musées et la relation entre le sujet voyant et l'objet vu.

La section suivante du numéro met en dialogue plusieurs auteurs qui se penchent sur certaines des questions largement soulevées par la décolonisation. Tout d'abord, Clémentine Debrosse étudie la manière dont les dynamiques de pouvoir influencent les décisions d'exposition, et qui est autorisé à les prendre, pour les artefacts et les restes humains qui se trouvent encore dans les collections des musées d'ethnographie à travers l'Europe. Ensuite, Mariana Tezoto de Lima examine la façon dont les hypothèses sont perpétuées dans le discours public, tant dans le Nord que dans le Sud, sur qui a le "droit" aux objets dans le cadre du processus de rapatriement. Selon elle, la presse joue un rôle important en faisant passer ce discours dans l'arène publique. Ensuite, Leonie Leeder examine la façon dont le pouvoir est perpétué lorsqu'un musée "universel" collabore numériquement avec des communautés indigènes mayas. Et Hsiao-Chiang Wang présente son modèle taïwanais d'amélioration de la collaboration avec les communautés indigènes, dans lequel les valeurs de la communauté elle-même subvertissent les pratiques traditionnelles et prohibitives des experts en muséologie et deviennent la considération première des actions muséales.

Tout d'abord, Nina Robbins s'attaque aux valeurs non exprimées qui peuvent entraver la collaboration entre la communauté et le musée ainsi que la réussite des étudiants sur le terrain. Elle propose, à l'aide d'un exemple détaillé, qu'une discussion ouverte sur des structures de valeurs différentes puisse servir de pont entre les professionnels des musées et les parties prenantes municipales. Elīna Vikmane démontre ensuite que les membres du personnel les plus jeunes et les plus compétents en matière de numérique peuvent être surchargés de travail et que leur enthousiasme est exploité dans la course contemporaine

au contenu numérique en ligne. Les conditions de travail sont souvent un tabou tellement intériorisé dans les institutions engagées à faire le bien que nous ne parvenons pas à reconnaître leur existence. Nous terminons le journal donc sur cette note sobre qui nous rappelle à tous de remettre en question le secret-sacré entre nous comme dans le monde extérieur.

Références

- Adichie, C. (2009, octobre 7). *The danger of a single story* [Video]. TED Talk. youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg
- Anim-Addo, J., Golding, V., & Modest, W. (2023). Activism. In F. Mairesse (Dir.), *Dictionary of museology* (pp. 17-21). Routledge.
- Bertin, M. (2021). Circulations et valeurs des objets océaniques dans les collections privées et publiques (1980-2020) [Thèse de doctorat inédite]. La Rochelle Université & École du Louvre.
- Bertin, M., & Guiragossian, O. (2022, octobre 18). *Parlons tabous! Quelques réflexions sur le symposium de l'ICOFOM, Prague et Brno (22 au 27 août 2022)*. Metis: Un regard sur le monde muséal. metis-lab.com/2022/10/18/parlons-tabous-quelques-reflexions-sur-le-symposium-de-licofom-prague-et-brno-22-au-27-aout-2022/
- Bunch III, L. G. (2019). *A fool's errand: Creating the National Museum of African American History and Culture in the age of Bush, Obama, and Trump*. Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (2021). Section 6. Discrimination and societal abuses. Dans *2021 Country reports on human rights practices: United Arab Emirates*. United States Department of State. www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/united-arab-emirates/
- Burke, K. (1943). The tactics of motivation. *Chimera*, 1(4), 21–33.
- Butler, J. (2009). Performativity, precarity and sexual politics. *Revista de antropología Iberoamericana*, 4(3), i-xiii. www.aibr.org
- Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of war: When is life grievable?* Verso.
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Pantheon Press.
- Chirindo, K. (2021). Precarious publics. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 107(4), 430–434. doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2021.1983192
- De Largy Healy, J. (2011). Pour une anthropologie de la restitution. Archives culturelles et transmissions des savoirs en Australie. *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie*, 24, 45-65.
- First Americans Museum. (2021). *Wimiko: Life of an object* [Exhibition]. famok.org/wimiko/
- Freud, S. (1913). *Totem und tabu*. Hugo Heller.
- Hooper, S., Jacobs, K., Jessop, M., & Nuku, G. (2012). Encounters with Polynesia in Britain: Art, ancestors, artists, and curators. *Museum Anthropology*, 35, 10-22.
- ICOFOM. (2022). *Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory [Appel à contributions]*. icofom.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2022/02/ICOFOM_Call_Taboo_ENG-2.pdf

- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2022, août 23). *Purpose: Museums and the civil society* [Présentation du panel]. ICOM-Prague.
- Leach, E. (1967). *The structural study of myth and totemism*. Tavistock Publications.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1949). *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1964–1971). *Mythologiques*, 1-5. Plon-Nourrit.
- McCarthy, C., Dorfman, E., Hakiwai, A., & Twomey, Ā. (2013). Mana Taonga: Connecting communities with New Zealand museums through ancestral Māori culture. *Museum International*, 65, 5-15.
- Mairesse, F. (Ed.). (2023). *Dictionary of museology*. Routledge.
- Marks, S. (2011). Hidden stories, toxic stories, healing stories: The power of narrative in peace and reconciliation. *Narrative Matters*, 1(1), 95–106.
- McDonnell, B. (2022, September 15). First Americans Museum celebrates first anniversary with big attendance and bigger plans. *Oklahoman*. www.oklahoman.com/story/entertainment/2022/09/15/one-year-after-opening-okcs-first-americans-museum-has-big-plans/69492261007/
- Peers, L., & Brown, A. K. (Dirs.). (2003). *Museums and source communities*. Routledge.
- Sandell, R. (2017). *Museums, moralities and human rights*. Routledge.
- Taboo. (2023). *Projects at Harvard*. [Projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/cb45/files/taboo.pdf](https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/cb45/files/taboo.pdf)
- Twanga, M. (2022, août 22). *Unspoken histories – legacies of trauma* [Discours d'ouverture]. ICOFOM Symposium Taboos in Museology.
- Vawda, S. (2019). Museums and the epistemology of injustice: From colonialism to decoloniality. *Museum International*, 71(1-2), 72-79.
- Weiser, M. E. (2022, août 23). *Breaking taboos without breaking the nation* [Discours d'ouverture]. ICOFOM Symposium Taboos in Museology.
- Weiser, M. E., Bertin, M., & Leshchenko, A. (Dirs.). (2022). *Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory*. Materials for a discussion. ICOM/ICOFOM.
- Weiser, M.E. (2023). Celebrating bad times: The epideictic work of museums of racial trauma. Dans *Museums, narratives, and critical histories: Narrating the past for present and future*, K. Barndt and S. Jaeger (Dirs.). De Gruyter. In press.

Introducción:

Desafiar los silencios: Enfrentarse a los tabúes en los museos y la museología

M. Elizabeth Weiser

The Ohio State University – EE.UU.

Marion Bertin

Université Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne – Paris, Francia¹

Anna Leshchenko

Eberhard Karls Universität – Tübingen, Alemania²

Al nombrar “El poder de los museos” como tema de su 26ª Conferencia General en Praga (República Checa), el Consejo Internacional de Museos (ICOM) dio a sus miembros, comités nacionales, comités internacionales y alianzas regionales la oportunidad de desarrollar temas que pusieran de relieve el papel de los museos para contrarrestar las grandes convulsiones del mundo. Tras los tres años intermedios de pandemia y aislamiento, tuvimos un programa enriquecedor y variado que puso de manifiesto la capacidad de resiliencia del sector museístico.

Sin embargo, el tema elegido por ICOFOM (el Comité Internacional de Museología) para sus reuniones cuestionó este “poder” al debatir “cómo los museos y la museología también podrían tener el potencial de quitar poder, de desempoderar, al impedir la discusión de temas delicados” (ICOFOM, 2022). En otras palabras, el simposio del ICOFOM invitó a los participantes a debatir sobre los tabúes en museología.

Los tabúes son un fenómeno social complejo, arraigado en contextos históricos, culturales o políticos. Originalmente una palabra polinesa utilizada para describir prácticas culturales prohibidas, “tabú” conlleva el doble significado de prácticas demasiado especiales y sagradas, o demasiado repugnantes y repulsivas, para ser realizadas casualmente. Aunque la integración de la palabra en el vocabulario occidental es una lección de colonialismo, llevada a Inglaterra por los relatos publicados de los viajes del llamado descubrimiento del capitán James Cook en el siglo XVIII (Tabú, 2023), el concepto de “cosas prohibidas” existe en todas las sociedades.

Ha resultado útil para las ciencias sociales en los siglos XX y XXI, y su uso fue ampliado por psicoanalistas como Sigmund Freud (*Totem und Tabu*, 1913) antropólogos como Claude Lévi-Strauss (*Mythologiques*, 1964-71) y Edmund Leach (*Structural Study of Myth and*

¹ Al 1 de noviembre de 2023

² Emails: weiser.23@osu.edu, marionbbertin@gmail.com, ann.leshchenko@gmail.com

Totemism, 1989), y por estudiosos de la religión y la mitología, como Joseph Campbell (*The Power of Myth*, 1988). En nuestro simposio, los tabúes en museología pretendían sacar a la luz las formas en que el *poder museístico* conlleva *responsabilidades* concurrentes.

La neutralidad del museo: El tabú original

Como demuestran las ponencias del simposio y de esta colección, uno de los tabúes clave que hay que abordar en el mundo museístico es la creencia de que los museos son neutrales. Según el recientemente publicado *Dictionary of Museology*, los museos surgieron para el desarrollo del conocimiento y se modernizaron al abrirse a desarrollar ese conocimiento con el público (Mairesse, 2023, p. 334). Durante siglos, los museos han preservado la historia, el conocimiento y la cultura de la humanidad, encapsulando una narrativa colectiva de las sociedades a las que representan.

Sin embargo, *nunca* han sido repositorios neutrales porque, para contar esa narrativa colectiva, el personal del museo debe tomar decisiones continuamente: seleccionar del mundo en general qué coleccionar, seleccionar de sus colecciones qué exponer, seleccionar de todo lo expuesto qué destacar, seleccionar de la miríada de palabras del lenguaje cuáles se utilizarán para explicar esos artefactos y contextualizarlos en una exposición. En cada fase del proceso se selecciona cuidadosamente la narrativa de la realidad en curso y, por lo tanto, inevitablemente, en cada fase se desvían otras posibles piezas de esa realidad: un artefacto diferente, un signo diferente, una exposición diferente (Burke, 1943, p. 27). Así, por su propia naturaleza de microcosmos del mundo más amplio, dirigido por personas que deben utilizar la comunicación simbólica (visual y verbal) para seleccionar y desviarse de la realidad más amplia, la idea del museo como depósito neutral se hace imposible. De hecho, como argumentó Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett en una sesión plenaria del ICOM de Praga sobre el lugar del museo en la sociedad civil, los debates sobre la neutralidad no hacen más que desviar la atención del verdadero potencial del museo para servir de ágora, un mercado de ideas que informa los debates cívicos.

Sin embargo, decir que los museos no son neutrales sigue siendo en muchos círculos romper un antiguo tabú que impide calificar a estas instituciones de partidarias, incluso cuando las narrativas que los museos deciden representar suelen estar sujetas a los tabúes sociales que las rigen. La noción antropológica de Lévi-Strauss puede resultar análoga en este caso: Para él, el tabú humano original fue la prohibición del incesto porque la necesidad resultante de salir del grupo familiar en busca de pareja obligaba necesariamente a la humanidad a forjar los sistemas relacionales sociales que nos hacen humanos (1949). El simposio de ICOFOM nos planteó la posibilidad de que la neutralidad como norma confine al museo a la insularidad – un lugar centrado en sus funciones internas de colección/conservación – mientras que la no neutralidad, con su enfoque en el papel social del museo, empuja a la institución hacia el mundo social-relacional, el mundo humano.

Ese dilema – la inevitabilidad y quizá incluso la conveniencia del partidismo museístico y el tabú que impide nombrarlo – constituyó el telón de fondo de nuestro simposio de 2022. Durante dos días, los participantes teorizaron sobre la naturaleza de los tabúes museológicos y presentaron ejemplos y razones para enfrentarse a ellos (véase Weiser et al., 2022). Se celebraron cuatro paneles sobre los temas “Neutralidad y activismo,” “Colecciones y público,” “Museología problemática” y “Colonialidad, colaboración y condiciones de trabajo” en el Museo Nacional de Tecnología (Praga) y la Universidad Masaryk (Brno), en forma de sesiones diseñadas para fomentar el diálogo y el debate entre los participantes

y el público. Este número de la *Serie de Estudios ICOFOM* da continuidad a ese debate y a la publicación de sus materiales de breves resúmenes con una serie de artículos más profusamente explorados.

La naturaleza del tabú

Los diferentes temas y cuestiones planteados por los ponentes del simposio inspiraron a Marion Bertin, junto con su coautora Olivia Guiragossian, a cuestionar nuestra noción inicial del tabú como un “silencio” compartido en su informe del Metis-Lab (Bertin & Guiragossian, 2022). Señalan que las contribuciones y los debates en República Checa plantearon preguntas sobre las condiciones en las que se expresan los tabúes: ¿Existe un límite estricto entre lo que es tabú y lo que no lo es, o por el contrario los tabúes se caracterizan por una zona borrosa, con dimensiones variables y a veces nunca claramente establecidas? ¿Es siquiera posible establecer una distinción clara entre un tema “sensible” y un tema “tabú”? Más aún, ¿tratan todas las comunidades museísticas los tabúes de la misma manera, o las consideraciones sobre los tabúes son tan diversas y complejas como los propios tabúes?

Canónicamente, quienes rompen un tabú pueden ser rechazados por su comunidad: han incumplido las normas sociales no escritas. Pero la capacidad de romper un tabú también puede marcar a uno como especial, un miembro interno de la comunidad con permiso no escrito para transgredirlo. Podemos ver estas dos implicaciones en las prácticas museísticas modernas. Por ejemplo, los administradores de museos pueden evitar activamente discusiones que parezcan amenazar el status quo de sus instituciones sobre temas que van desde la repatriación de colecciones a la influencia de los donantes en las decisiones de exposición o las condiciones laborales de su personal (véase por ejemplo Debrosse, Duarte Cândido & Pappalardo, Galssini, Leeder, Tezoto de Lima, Vikmane en Weiser et al., 2022). Los conservadores de patrimonio pueden sentirse presionados, consciente o inconscientemente, para evitar temas e historias considerados controvertidos o incómodos (véase Zabalueva, Viita-aho, Scheiner, Maranda, Jagodzińska en Weiser et al., 2022), mientras que los conservadores de arte pueden abogar por respetar un conjunto de creencias sociales, morales o religiosas frente a otro en las elecciones de exposición (véase Botte, Pauliac en Weiser et al., 2022). Muchos de los participantes en nuestro simposio, por su parte, argumentaron que los museos deberían utilizar su autoridad “especial” en la sociedad para romper – o al menos doblegar – tabúes expositivos arraigados que marginaban a los grupos no dominantes (véase Galla, Satil Neves, Niangao, Cury en Weiser et al., 2022). En otras palabras, abogaron por el activismo museístico.

Como explican Joan Anim-Addo, Viv Golding y Wayne Modest (2023) en el *Dictionary of Museology*, el activismo en los museos significa estar más en sintonía con la naturaleza cambiante de sus públicos. Como escriben (2023):

[A]lgunos museos están emprendiendo un trabajo de colaboración de base con comunidades diversas, para reimaginar el statu quo y abrir sus espacios al diálogo, la reflexión crítica y la acción, con el fin de abordar de forma significativa la injusticia histórica y contemporánea, la discriminación, los prejuicios y los estereotipos. ... El activismo sostiene que los museos no son espacios neutrales, sino que desempeñan funciones sociales clave, de conectividad y compromiso, a escala local y mundial. (pp. 18-19)

Lo que se consideraba adecuadamente rechazado o silenciado en un grupo social anterior, más homogéneo o más estrechamente centrado, puede muy bien considerarse como algo que necesita desesperadamente ser descubierto, debatido y tratado por una sociedad más diversa en la actualidad – y los museos son espacios públicos ideales para tales debates.

Sin embargo, los profesionales de los museos y sus comunidades luchan a menudo por encontrar un equilibrio entre mantener, cuestionar y romper tabúes cuando intentan adoptar una postura más activista. Como vemos en nuestras propias naciones, en países de todo el mundo, esta lucha se está volviendo más difícil a medida que el populismo y el autoritarismo se combinan para censurar ideas y acciones que critican el status quo o muestran apoyo a los derechos humanos que muchos activistas piden a los museos, como señalaron múltiples ponentes en las sesiones del ICOM de Praga. La economía liberalista también genera precariedad para los museos y sus profesionales. La necesidad de dinero, en un momento en que los fondos públicos son cada vez más reducidos, crea tabúes en relación con los fondos privados y las condiciones de trabajo. El aumento de este tipo de censura, que convierte en tabú el debate sobre los problemas sociales y el cambio de las normas, es un claro distintivo de la precariedad de nuestro tiempo, o lo que la teórica Judith Butler (2009) denominó la “condición políticamente inducida en la que ciertas poblaciones sufren el fracaso de las redes sociales y económicas de apoyo” (p. ii). El estudioso de la comunicación Kundai Chirindo (2021) señala que en la era de las pandemias y la alteración climática del Antropoceno, la precariedad se ha extendido mucho más allá de los más vulnerables, de tal forma que el “registro afectivo de la precariedad – sentirse a la vez expuesto a, vulnerable a, dependiente de, e impactado por otros” – se ha convertido en un rasgo universal (p. 432). “La propia vida,” como observa Butler, “está siempre, en cierto sentido, en manos del otro” (2009, p. 14). Todos estos elementos – quién aprueba, quién visita, quién paga y quién trabaja – tienen consecuencias en los museos, ya se trate de exposiciones, de relaciones con las comunidades o de adquisiciones y gestión de colecciones.

Entonces, ¿cómo pueden los museos responder a la llamada a romper los tabúes que calificarían de “excesivamente disruptivas” sus exposiciones sobre temas controvertidos? ¿Cómo pueden asociarse plenamente con las comunidades LGBTQ consideradas tabú, los activistas indígenas o las minorías étnicas denigradas cuando la cultura dominante pone el grito en el cielo? Un componente clave al que aludieron los participantes en el simposio es simplemente escuchar mejor, prestar más atención a lo que dice realmente el grupo minorizado. Cuanto más poder tengan las comunidades subalternas a la hora de elaborar su propia visión, más posibilidades tendrán de que su versión de contar la verdad y su comprensión de la resiliencia se abran camino desde los viejos márgenes hasta el nuevo centro de la narrativa museística. Esto es evidente en un lugar como el recientemente inaugurado First Americans Museum, un esfuerzo de colaboración dirigido por indígenas de las 39 naciones tribales de Oklahoma, EE.UU. La subdirectora del museo, Shoshana Wasserman (Muscogee Creek), comentó en su primer aniversario (McDonnell, 2022): “Como todo está en primera persona, nuestras comunidades nativas han salido muy empoderadas y muy agradecidas de que, por fin, sientan que su perspectiva de la historia se ha añadido al diálogo mayor.” Elizabeth Weiser (2023) ha llamado a esto “retórica restaurativa”: el emparejamiento de la narración de la verdad por voces marginadas con la celebración de la resistencia de la comunidad cotidiana y el *recentramiento* de la vida “de los otros” como vida común.

Implicar a las partes interesadas anteriormente marginadas en su propia narración de la verdad puede significar no sólo comprender y valorar mejor lo que antes se había pasado por alto u ocultado, sino también respetar las decisiones de la comunidad sobre lo que no debe exponerse. La situación de los restos humanos en los museos y leyes como la Ley de Protección y Repatriación de Tumbas de Nativos Americanos (NAGPRA) ofrecen claros ejemplos, y la aceptación de esta forma de participación comunitaria, teniendo voz y voto sobre las prácticas de exhibición, es cada vez mayor. Como demuestra el trabajo de Bertin (2021) en Oceanía, desde la década de 1980, las comunidades indígenas son cada vez más reconocidas como partes interesadas en los museos, tanto en Oceanía como en otras partes del mundo (Peers & Brown, 2003; Hooper et al., 2012). En Oceanía (una región con más de 25.000 islas), los tabúes están relacionados con los antepasados, con lo sagrado y con el poder. Hacen referencia a una amplia gama de prácticas sociales que conllevan tanto interdicciones como obligaciones que pueden diferir de un individuo a otro, dependiendo de su estatus social. Una persona, un objeto, una palabra, una práctica social o un lugar pueden ser tabúes, ya sea de forma permanente o durante un periodo determinado. En las colecciones de los museos, algunos objetos tabú se consideran secretos y sólo pueden ser vistos o tocados por unos pocos miembros de la comunidad, o sólo en determinados momentos.

El creciente reconocimiento de la opinión indígena sobre la forma de exponer estos objetos está teniendo un fuerte impacto en la gestión de las colecciones: Las prohibiciones tabúes relativas a los objetos y a los restos humanos están siendo ahora reconocidas. Como señala el personal del First Americans Museum en su colección de arte indígena *Winiko: La vida de un objeto*, invitan a los visitantes a pasar “del coleccionismo a la descolonización,” y señalan: “Hoy en día, a medida que más nativos entran en el campo de los museos, estamos efectuando un cambio positivo.” Con nuestra orientación, los museos han instituido nuevas normas en consideración a las perspectivas nativas" (First Americans Museum, 2021). Cumplir las restricciones de los tabúes significa enfrentarse a contradicciones relativas a los objetivos clásicos dedicados a los museos: exposición pública frente a conservación secreta; compartir el conocimiento con un público amplio frente a restringir el conocimiento a unas pocas personas. Los conservadores indígenas y las colaboraciones con las comunidades ayudan a gestionar estos retos (De Laryg Healy, 2011; McCarthy et al., 2013), sobre todo porque los museos se encuentran bajo presión financiera y política para exponer todos los artefactos que atraigan a los visitantes.

Así pues, un segundo componente clave en la respuesta a la sensación de precariedad tanto de la institución como del individuo reside en el énfasis que la retórica restauradora pone en el cuidado. En lugar de condenar a los conservadores anteriores o a los visitantes actuales por su ignorancia e inacción ante la injusticia continua o la inercia burocrática, la retórica restauradora enmarca la renarración de la vieja historia como parte de un intento más amplio de sanar la división. Por ejemplo, Lonnie Bunch, el primer secretario afroamericano de la Institución Smithsonian, afirma que trabajó para fundar su Museo Nacional de Historia y Cultura Afroamericanas con la esperanza de que se convirtiera en “un lugar de transformación que mejorara a Estados Unidos ... ayudando a salvar los abismos como la raza que han dividido a Estados Unidos desde su creación, ... [elaborando] una visión que esperábamos que ayudara a sanar a un país” (Bunch, 2019, p. 31).

Este énfasis en la verdad que cura y enseña en lugar de avergonzar y culpar es crucial para los museos que desean persuadir a sus visitantes de nuevas perspectivas en un mundo

precario, porque el deseo de evitar la herencia dolorosa puede convertir fácilmente cualquier esfuerzo por revelarla en un tema tabú, como vemos en los actuales esfuerzos de censura en todo el mundo. Como señala el pedagogo alemán Stephan Marks (2011), al escribir sobre su trabajo sobre el legado nazi, la emoción de la vergüenza “es un miedo mucho más profundo que el del castigo: [la vergüenza] es el miedo a la aniquilación psicológica, a la expulsión de la sociedad,” y nuestra mente y nuestro cuerpo “sólo se centran en escapar de la fuente del miedo” (p. 98). Esta huida adopta la forma no sólo de evasión – los visitantes deciden no entrar en un museo y, por tanto, no escapar de su propia perspectiva estrecha – sino del mismo tipo de divisiones tóxicas que no hacen sino aumentar la precariedad comunitaria. “Obviamente,” escribe Marks, “la vergüenza inconsciente y defendida está envenenando nuestras relaciones con arrogancia, humillación, cinismo y violencia” (p. 99). El miedo a la vergüenza se adelanta a la curación de las rupturas comunitarias perpetuando el dolor de un grupo y la ceguera de otro. Este veneno no ha hecho más que extenderse en la década transcurrida desde que escribió.

Cuando las exposiciones se censuran de forma que eviten causar incomodidad a los grupos dominantes, todos los grupos pierden la posibilidad del poder curativo de lo que Marks (2011) denomina “vergüenza sana,” que “protege nuestra integridad, para que sepamos cómo actuar de acuerdo con nuestra conciencia, valores e ideales, para que podamos mirarnos en el espejo cada día” (p. 97). Aceptar y reconocer que los visitantes pueden de hecho experimentar cierto grado de “vergüenza sana” – que esta incomodidad debe celebrarse como la vulnerabilidad inherente al desafío de tabúes previamente tácitos-materializaría el mantra tantas veces repetido de los museos como “lugares seguros para ideas inseguras” – lugares seguros para sacar a la luz la precariedad de modo que pueda superarse su miedo vergonzoso. Abordar esta aprobación silenciada puede ayudar al mundo de los museos a desafiar las percepciones existentes y promover el pensamiento crítico a través de voces y narrativas plurales, evitando lo que Chimamanda Adichie (2009) denomina “el peligro de una historia única.” Así pues, en lugar de aspirar a una neutralidad imposible, los museos pueden aspirar a la transparencia, siendo abiertos sobre las decisiones que necesariamente toman a la hora de llenar sus sedes, las disputas internas que llevan a ciertas elecciones en detrimento de otras y los inevitables errores cometidos por el camino que conducen a autocorrecciones críticas.

Tabúes en museología

Con ese espíritu, en el Comité Internacional de Museología reconocemos las múltiples formas en que la academia se considera a sí misma tabú, demasiado especial para ser emprendida casualmente y, por tanto, sus prácticas sirven para silenciar las voces menos dominantes. En muchos sentidos, las “cuestiones de las personas” desempeñan un papel en los tabúes de la museología. Por ejemplo, descolonizar es un proceso que implica mucho más que un cierto reparto de poder, como señala Shahid Vawda (2019): “Es cuestionar y desenmascarar los fundamentos epistemológicos, a veces ontológicos, de tales ideas, que informan los conocimientos que hacen que las sociedades y los pueblos de África, Asia y América Latina sean 'invisibles' para los colonizadores” (p. 76). Tales procesos están en pañales en un campo todavía dominado por estudiosos (que escriben en lenguas) del Norte y el Oeste globales. Nos enorgullecemos de publicar nuevas voces en la Serie de Estudios ICOFOM ... pero damos prioridad a aquellas voces que tienen los medios para viajar a un simposio, la comprensión global para hacer que su tema sea interesante para un público diverso, la formación académica para conocer las reglas a menudo no escritas – pero inflexibles – de la erudición académica (desde cómo es una investigación

científica hasta cómo escribir un argumento erudito o cómo citar adecuadamente a otros eruditos) y, por supuesto, la capacidad de transmitir esta información en una de las tres lenguas oficiales del ICOFOM. Admitimos no estar seguros de cómo conciliar nuestro compromiso con la inclusividad global con nuestro compromiso con el código académico no escrito que establece nuestro lugar entre nuestros pares. Sin embargo, las barreras a la participación en reuniones y revistas mundiales son un recordatorio de que la igualdad dentro de la comunidad museística dista mucho de ser un hecho.

Como han escrito Bertin y Guiragossian (2022), los participantes en el simposio también nos llevaron a preguntarnos si todos los silencios en museología son “tabú,” La pregunta parece intrínsecamente ligada a cuestiones de participación y transparencia, y a las diferentes voces que pueden expresar tantas narrativas. También aquí entran en juego la selección y la desviación. ¿Cuál es el límite, por ejemplo, entre un tabú y la forma en que las líneas de investigación están sujetas a rápidos movimientos de moda e interés/desinterés? ¿La respuesta “eso ya no lo estudia nadie” es indicativa de un tabú no reconocido?

Por otro lado, ¿qué ocurre con los temas que están, hoy en día, “de moda”? Hace sólo unos años, debatir el legado del colonialismo y la idea de la repatriación eran anatema tanto para las naciones como para los principales museos de los antiguos colonizadores, mientras que hoy en día la descolonización es un tema de gran interés tanto académico como geopolítico, incluso en nuestro simposio. ¿Es este foco de atención sólo una moda pasajera? Y la transición del silencio tabú a la visibilidad, ¿crea un nuevo conjunto de tabúes? ¿Es ahora tabú no hablar de repatriación, por ejemplo (Bertin & Guiragossian, 2022)? Como otro ejemplo, los proyectos de colaboración son ahora casi de rigueur para los esfuerzos financiados, pero sigue habiendo mucho compromiso, dando más poder a los museos anfitriones y a los fundadores en detrimento de las comunidades o grupos de personas invitados a colaborar – y estas desigualdades se discuten mucho menos en los círculos de los que tienen el poder de evocar el cambio. De forma similar, el ICOM celebró el auge de los museos LGBTQI+ en su conferencia de 2022, al tiempo que celebraba su próxima conferencia de 2025 en Dubai, donde la homosexualidad puede acarrear una pena de diez años de prisión (Bureau of Democracy, 2021) y no existe protección legal contra la discriminación por motivos de identidad. La celebración fue ampliamente pronunciada; la aprobación silenciada, convertida en tabú.

Weiser (2022) señala la importancia de que las propias comunidades subalternas y minorizadas participen en las conversaciones tanto en el museo como en la universidad. Como conservadores y estudiosos, los estudiosos diversos plantean preguntas y aportan interpretaciones que los dominantes no tienen en cuenta. Traslada sus puntos de vista al centro de la historia. “Sin voces marginadas que tomen la iniciativa,” señaló Weiser en su discurso en Praga, “creo que los que no estamos marginados nunca podremos romper realmente los tabúes porque siempre nos veremos a nosotros mismos como los narradores y el público.”

De hecho, la mayoría de los participantes en el simposio del ICOFOM señalaron el amplio espectro de cuestiones políticas y de poder que se esconden tras muchos tabúes. Estas cuestiones se pusieron de manifiesto a lo largo de los años de debate en el ICOM sobre una definición renovada de “museo,” incluyendo tanto el fracaso del intento inicial dominado por Occidente en 2019 de definir su propia versión de la nueva “inclusividad” como el exitoso intento de 2022, moderado por dos representantes del Sur Global que se centraron en crear un proceso totalmente participativo y transparente para la toma

de decisiones. A través de nuestros tabúes – y de nuestras transparencias restauradoras – estamos poniendo de relieve las cuestiones de poder que subyacen a todo el trabajo museístico y a la producción de conocimiento sobre los museos.

Para que las cuestiones tabú de poder sigan abordándose, necesitamos celebrar los diálogos incómodos que inevitablemente se producen. Por ejemplo, Muthoni Twanga (2022), museóloga keniana, insistió en su discurso de apertura de ICOFOM Praga en la necesidad de abordar las diferencias de poder de nuestro mundo global. “Si su historia le enorgullece,” dijo a esta sala repleta de museólogos en su mayoría occidentales, “quizá no sea historia en absoluto.” O quizá, añadimos nosotros, el sentimiento de orgullo sea una realidad necesaria pero contingente – necesaria para vincularse a los conciudadanos en un proyecto compartido pero también necesariamente tratada con cautela, con la conciencia de que las dinámicas de poder como el legado del colonialismo también forman parte de cualquier historia – y son estas últimas posturas las que tan a menudo se ocultan, no se hablan y se convierten en tabú. Con perspectivas contradictorias, puede parecer difícil, incluso imposible, elegir el mejor camino a seguir, pero sabemos que no reconocer y afrontar nuestra incertidumbre o malestar es su propio tipo de tabú.

Enfrentarse a nuestros tabúes en los estudios museísticos, por tanto, no sólo es moralmente importante, sino también imperativo para el progreso del campo. Si nos negamos a considerar alternativas que puedan requerir romper con la tradición, perpetuamos no sólo el tabú, sino la precariedad: la sensación de que nos encontramos en un precipicio del que corremos constantemente el peligro de caer. Alejarse de ese falso abismo es un ejercicio de honestidad, inclusividad y madurez intelectual, capaz de fomentar un entorno de crecimiento intelectual y respeto mutuo. Como dice Bryan Stevenson (2022), director fundador del Legacy Museum de Estados Unidos – una institución centrada en la violencia racial histórica y actual – en su vídeo de bienvenida: “Es difícil enfrentarse a estas dolorosas verdades. Pero lo poderoso es que, cuando tenemos el valor de conocer la verdad, abrimos puertas que permiten la justicia, que permiten el ajuste de cuentas, que permiten la sanación.”

Estructura del número

François Mairesse comienza el número con una visión general de tres niveles de prohibición en el mundo de los museos: los que tienen que ver más internamente con la presentación de objetos y temas o con las normas y prácticas de los profesionales de los museos, y un tercer nivel más externo relativo a la desigualdad política y económica en un contexto museístico más general. Como veremos a lo largo de esta colección, muchos de los tabúes con los que luchan los museos tienen que ver con sus relaciones con sus comunidades y con los cambios de roles que tanto ellos como las comunidades están experimentando. En primer lugar, Rogerio Satil Neves examina la historia y el futuro de los museos identitarios, centrándose en el auge de los museos y exposiciones LGBTQ+ para argumentar que, al comprometerse con estas comunidades como contrapúblicos, dichos lugares simbolizan una llamada al reconocimiento más que a la mera visibilidad. A continuación, Julie Botte examina las exposiciones que subvierten las normas de género y transgreden los tabúes que encierran los cuerpos femeninos, centrándose en tres aspectos del cuerpo de la mujer en los museos: la visión erótica de la desnudez femenina, la exhibición de partes ginecológicas y el debate sobre la violencia sexual. Sostiene que estas iniciativas modifican la visión de los cuerpos de las mujeres en los museos y la relación entre el sujeto que ve y el objeto que ve.

La siguiente sección del número pone en diálogo a varios escritores que examinan algunas de las cuestiones que plantea ampliamente la descolonización. En primer lugar, Clementine Debrosse examina cómo influye la dinámica de poder en las decisiones que se toman sobre la exposición de los objetos y restos humanos que aún se conservan en las colecciones de los museos etnográficos de toda Europa, y a quién se permite tomarlas. A continuación, Mariana Tezoto de Lima examina cómo se perpetúan las suposiciones en el discurso público, tanto en el Norte como en el Sur Global, sobre quién tiene "derecho" a los objetos en el proceso de repatriación. La prensa, argumenta, desempeña un papel importante a la hora de trasladar ese discurso al ámbito público. A continuación, Leonie Leeder examina las formas en que se perpetúa el poder cuando un museo "universal" colabora digitalmente con comunidades indígenas mayas. Y Hsiao-Chiang Wang presenta su modelo de Taiwán para mejorar la colaboración con las comunidades indígenas, en el que los valores de la propia comunidad subvierten las prácticas tradicionales y prohibitivas de los expertos de los museos y se convierten en la consideración principal de las acciones museísticas.

El número termina con dos escritores que consideran los beneficios y los posibles escollos del trabajo museístico innovador. En primer lugar, Nina Robbins aborda los supuestos de valores tácitos que pueden impedir tanto la colaboración entre la comunidad y el museo como el éxito de los estudiantes en este campo, y propone, mediante un extenso ejemplo, que el debate abierto sobre las diferentes estructuras de valores puede servir de puente entre los profesionales de los museos y las partes interesadas municipales. A continuación, Elina Vikmane aporta pruebas de cómo los miembros del personal más jóvenes y con más conocimientos digitales pueden estar sobrecargados de trabajo, explotando su entusiasmo en la carrera contemporánea hacia los contenidos digitales en línea. Las condiciones de trabajo son a menudo un tabú tan interiorizado en las instituciones comprometidas a hacer el bien que no reconocemos su existencia, por lo que terminamos con esta sobria nota que nos recuerda a todos que debemos cuestionar el secreto-sagrado tanto entre nosotros como en el mundo exterior.

Referencias

- Adichie, C. (2009, October 7). *The danger of a single story* [Video]. TED Talk. youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg
- Anim-Addo, J., Golding, V., & Modest, W. (2023). Activism. In F. Mairesse (Ed.), *Dictionary of museology* (pp. 17-21). Routledge.
- Bertin, M. (2021). *Circulations et valeurs des objets océaniens dans les collections privées et publiques (1980-2020)* [Unpublished PhD dissertation]. La Rochelle Université & École du Louvre.
- Bertin, M., & Guiragossian, O. (2022, October 18). *Parlons tabous! Quelques réflexions sur le symposium de l'ICOFOM, Prague et Brno (22 au 27 août 2022)*. Metis: Un regard sur le monde muséal. metis-lab.com/2022/10/18/parlons-tabous-quelques-reflexions-sur-le-symposium-de-licofom-prague-et-brno-22-au-27-aout-2022/
- Bunch III, L. G. (2019). *A fool's errand: Creating the National Museum of African American History and Culture in the age of Bush, Obama, and Trump*. Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (2021). Section 6. Discrimination and societal abuses. In *2021 Country reports on human rights practices: United Arab Emirates*. United States Department of State. www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/united-arab-emirates/

- Burke, K. (1943). The tactics of motivation. *Chimera*, 1(4), 21–33.
- Butler, J. (2009). Performativity, precarity and sexual politics. *Revista de antropología Iberoamericana*, 4(3), i-xiii. www.aibr.org
- Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of war: When is life grievable?* Verso.
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. Pantheon Press.
- Chirindo, K. (2021). Precarious publics. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 107(4), 430–434. doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2021.1983192
- De Laryg Healy, J. (2011). Pour une anthropologie de la restitution. Archives culturelles et transmissions des savoirs en Australie. *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie*, 24, 45-65.
- First Americans Museum. (2021). *Winiko: Life of an object* [Exhibition]. famok.org/winiko/
- Freud, S. (1913). *Totem und tabu*. Hugo Heller.
- Hooper, S., Jacobs, K., Jessop, M., & Nuku, G. (2012). Encounters with Polynesia in Britain: Art, ancestors, artists, and curators. *Museum Anthropology*, 35, 10-22.
- ICOFOM. (2022). Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory. Call for papers. icofom.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2022/02/ICOFOM_Call_Taboo_ENG-2.pdf
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2022, August 23). *Purpose: Museums and the civil society* [Panel presentation]. ICOM-Prague.
- Leach, E. (1967). *The structural study of myth and totemism*. Tavistock Publications.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1949). *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1964–1971). *Mythologiques*, 1-5. Plon-Nourrit.
- McCarthy, C., Dorfman, E., Hakiwai, A., & Twomey, Á. (2013). Mana Taonga: Connecting communities with New Zealand museums through ancestral Māori culture. *Museum International*, 65, 5-15.
- Mairesse, F. (Ed.). (2023). *Dictionary of museology*. Routledge.
- Marks, S. (2011). Hidden stories, toxic stories, healing stories: The power of narrative in peace and reconciliation. *Narrative Matters*, 1(1), 95–106.
- McDonnell, B. (2022, September 15). First Americans Museum celebrates first anniversary with big attendance and bigger plans. *Oklahoman*. www.oklahoman.com/story/entertainment/2022/09/15/one-year-after-opening-okcs-first-americans-museum-has-big-plans/69492261007/
- Peers, L. & Brown, A. K. (Eds.). (2003). *Museums and source communities*. Routledge.
- Sandell, R. (2017). *Museums, moralities and human rights*. Routledge.
- Taboo. (2023). *Projects at Harvard*. projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/cb45/files/taboo.pdf
- Twanga, M. (2022, August 22). *Unspoken histories – legacies of trauma* [Keynote address]. ICOFOM Symposium Taboos in Museology.
- Vawda, S. (2019). Museums and the epistemology of injustice: From colonialism to decoloniality. *Museum International*, 71(1-2), 72-79.

- Weiser, M. E. (2022, August 23). *Breaking taboos without breaking the nation* [Keynote address]. ICOFOM Symposium Taboos in Museology.
- Weiser, M. E., Bertin, M., & Leshchenko, A. (Eds.). (2022). Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory. Materials for a discussion. ICOM/ICOFOM.
- Weiser, M.E. (2023). Celebrating bad times: The epideictic work of museums of racial trauma. In *Museums, narratives, and critical histories: Narrating the past for present and future*, K. Barndt and S. Jaeger (Eds.). De Gruyter. In press.

Les registres d'interdictions au sein du champ muséal

François Mairesse¹

Sorbonne nouvelle-Paris 3 – Paris, France

There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us, that it ill behooves any of us to find fault with the rest of us.

James Truslow Adams

Résumé

Cet article tente de définir les différents niveaux d'interdits pouvant être observés au sein du monde muséal. Trois registres ou niveaux d'interdiction ont en ce sens été identifiés, outre les interdictions classiques imposées aux visiteurs (ne pas toucher, etc.). Le premier registre est relatif à la présentation des objets et aux sujets abordés au sein du musée, se rapprochant des pratiques expographiques. Le second niveau d'interdits porte, de manière plus globale, sur l'ensemble des pratiques des professionnels de musées et à la déontologie qui leur est associée. A ces aspects essentiellement pratiques, associés au travail muséal, se superpose un troisième registre d'interdits, qui pourrait être qualifié de muséologique. Ce niveau, plus global, porte sur la notion d'inégalité et est lié au contexte politique et économique dans lequel l'institution du musée s'est développée.

Mots-clés : tabous, muséologie, institution, géopolitique, égalité, inégalité

Abstract

Prohibition registers within the museum field. This article attempts to define the different levels of prohibition that can be observed in the museum world. Three registers or levels of prohibition have been identified, in addition to the classic prohibitions imposed on visitors (do not touch, etc.). The first level relates to the presentation of objects and the subjects dealt with in the museum, in line with expographic practices. The second level of prohibitions relates, more generally, to all the practices of museum professionals and the ethics associated with them. In addition to these essentially practical aspects, associated with museum work, there is a third level of prohibitions, which could be described as museological. This more global level concerns the notion of inequality and is linked to the political and economic context in which the institution of the museum has developed.

Keywords: taboo, museology, institution, geopolitics, equality, inequality

¹ Courriel: francois.mairesse@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr

La notion d'interdiction peut être appréciée de diverses manières au sein des musées². Un certain nombre d'entre elles existent, aussi bien pour les professionnels que pour les visiteurs, et leur intensité peut grandement varier. Il s'agit ici plutôt d'une utilisation métaphorique du terme « tabou » : sauf dans les films (*La momie*, *La nuit au musée*), la plupart de ces interdictions ne sont pas directement liées à une crainte surnaturelle. Pour les visiteurs fréquentant les musées traditionnels, (à l'image du Louvre ou du British Museum), un certain nombre d'interdits « légers » peuvent ainsi être observés. Communément partagés au sein de la plupart des établissements et déjà fustigés par Paul Valéry (1923), ils ne sont pas sans rappeler ceux que l'on retrouve dans de nombreux lieux de culte occidentaux : interdiction de courir, de parler fort, de toucher aux objets, etc. Il s'agit, avant toute chose, de respecter la sacralité du lieu, ce qui, dans le musée, apparaît essentiellement lié au caractère scientifique ou rare et précieux des objets exposés ; il est aussi largement traduit par l'architecture de nombreux édifices rappelant celle des temples ou des églises (Mairesse, 2014). Les visiteurs (touristes ou primo-visiteurs) peu coutumiers de la fréquentation de ces établissements n'éprouvent d'ailleurs aucune gêne à braver ces différentes interdictions – avant d'être rappelés à l'ordre par un surveillant. Si l'observation de ces règles relève très partiellement de la question qui nous occupe, celles que l'on trouve au niveau des pratiques professionnelles apparaissent plus intéressantes à analyser. L'étude des pratiques muséales, aussi bien que celle de l'institution, permet de distinguer, dans cette perspective, trois registres ou niveaux d'interdits : un premier relatif à la présentation des objets et aux sujets abordés au sein du musée, un deuxième lié aux pratiques muséales internes et à leur déontologie, ainsi qu'un troisième, plus global, lié au contexte dans lequel l'institution du musée s'est développée. Les deux premiers niveaux d'interdits, qui sont présentés dans les parties qui suivent, sont essentiellement liés à ce qui pourrait être évoqué comme de la muséologie appliquée. Le dernier niveau, en revanche, peut être associé à une perspective plus vaste, se rapportant à la nature de l'institution et à l'influence du contexte sur cette dernière. J'émet l'hypothèse, dans la dernière partie de cet article, que la notion d'inégalité constitue, au sein du monde actuel et des principales institutions qui le gouvernent, un troisième registre d'interdiction au sein du monde muséal contemporain, conditionnant pourtant largement notre société.

Objets présentés, sujets évoqués

La sélection et les méthodes de présentation des objets ou des sujets abordés par le musée sont actuellement encadrées par de nombreuses interdictions. On songe d'emblée aux musées d'ethnographie et à la présentation des objets évoquant la culture « des autres » qui ont connu une véritable métamorphose au cours des dernières années (Van Geert, 2020). L'évolution des rapports de force entre les sociétés a largement contribué à faire évoluer les pratiques de présentation occidentales. Plusieurs épisodes célèbres sont liés à ces bouleversements, fondés sur le respect des interdits décrétés par les sociétés traditionnelles, comme la restitution de la Vénus Hottentote du musée de l'Homme (Blanckaert, 2013), celle des têtes Maories des musées de France (Bioy, 2011), ou du Boschiman naturalisé du petit musée de Banyoles en Espagne (Westerman, 2006). Dans chacun des cas, le caractère sacré des restes humains exposés à la vue de tous a déclenché des demandes

² La notion de tabou est ici traitée selon l'acception générale qu'en donne le Trésor de la langue française, à savoir une règle d'interdiction, respectée par la collectivité, d'ordre culturel et notamment religieux, « qui pèse sur le comportement, le langage, les mœurs ». Une version abrégée de cet article a déjà été publiée, voir Mairesse, F. (2022). La muséologie au risque de l'inégalité. Dans Weiser, E., Bertin, M., Leshchenko, A. *Taboos in Museology : Difficult issues for museum theory (Materials for a discussion)* (pp. 74-77). ICOFOM/ICOM.

d'aliénation, de restitution et d'enfouissement de ce qui était alors considéré, dans les musées occidentaux, comme des expôts, au même titre que tous les *musealia*. La prise en compte de ces demandes a été partiellement institutionnalisée à la fin du XXe siècle, à travers plusieurs dispositifs législatifs, à l'instar du Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), voté en 1990 aux Etats-Unis. De nombreuses publications attestent des débats et des changements de pratiques autour de l'exposition de ces d'objets, ne pouvant être exposés dans un cadre muséal pour les groupes les ayant produits (Karp & Lavine, 1991, Phillips, 2011). L'évolution de ces interdictions peut être très largement associée au contexte de décolonisation et aux mouvements opérés dès cette époque au sein de l'ethnologie, mais aussi à celle des musées et de la muséologie – notamment la *new museology* et la *critical museology* (Brulon Soares, 2021, Lorente, 2022).

Les musées d'ethnographie ne sont pas les seuls à être soumis à cette logique. On peut ainsi observer une tendance similaire au niveau des musées d'archéologie et d'histoire ou de sciences naturelles, même lorsqu'aucune demande de mise en réserve ou de restitution n'est émise en ce sens. Ces interdits touchent essentiellement au corps humain, mort ou vivant. L'exposition de la mort constitue un sujet de fascination suscitant l'engouement populaire, comme en atteste l'exposition des momies ou celle des corps plastinés du Dr von Hagen (Moore & Mackenzie Brown, 2004), mais l'évolution du rapport occidental à la mort a progressivement conduit au retrait des dispositifs expographiques les plus macabres (Cadot, 2009). À Thanatos est souvent associé Eros, autre dimension majeure de l'interdit occidental : si la libération sexuelle des années 1970 a vu émerger une plus grande tolérance pour aborder le sexe au sein des musées, sa présentation demeure largement restreinte et fait toujours l'objet de mesures particulières quant à ses représentations trop explicites, aussi bien dans les musées d'art (notamment contemporain) que de science (Bergeron, 2014). Cette évolution traduit celle plus générale des sociétés occidentales, longtemps familiarisées avec la mort au travers des conflits armés ou des maladies. L'augmentation de la durée de vie, de même que la diminution des conflits sur le sol occidental, semblent avoir conduit à un mouvement de disparition des systèmes d'exposition des corps humains inanimés. Le temps est loin où la visite de la morgue de Paris constituait, encore au début du XXe siècle, une activité touristique indiquée dans les guides de voyage (voir Paris exposition, 1900).

Alors que de nombreux objets naguère exposés rejoignent les réserves, plusieurs thématiques longtemps occultées font à l'inverse l'objet de nouvelles mesures d'exposition. La plupart d'entre elles sont liées à l'histoire récente, notamment à la décolonisation, mais aussi à des épisodes plus anciens, largement mis en valeur au cours des dernières décennies par les *feminist studies*, les *gender studies* ou les *postcolonial studies*. Ainsi, le traitement réservé aux minorités et notamment aux peuples autochtones, très largement censuré jusque dans les années 1980 (au Canada, en Australie, aux Etats-Unis), n'a pu être évoqué que très récemment dans les musées présentant l'histoire nationale de ces nations (Altayli & Viau-Courville, 2018). Nombre de sujets « sensibles », au passé trop douloureux, continuent en revanche d'être passés sous silence. Si la France, par exemple, a consacré plusieurs espaces d'exposition à l'esclavage, son histoire plus récente, notamment celle liée à la période de décolonisation, est rarement évoquée.

Pratiques professionnelles

Au même titre que l'exposition des restes humains, d'autres pratiques muséales longtemps tolérées au sein de la profession ont été progressivement condamnées et sont aujourd'hui considérées comme inacceptables : le code de déontologie de l'ICOM en évoque l'ensemble du spectre (ICOM, 2017). Les méthodes de collecte « forcées », voire les pillages, parfois encouragés par le système colonial tout au long du XIXe siècle, ont été progressivement bannis des pratiques professionnelles. Durant l'entre-deux-guerres encore, les pratiques de collecte utilisées par les chercheurs des musées d'ethnographie, notamment celles relayées par Michel Leiris au cours de la mission Dakar-Djibouti pour le compte du musée de l'Homme, se fondent encore sur des méthodes pour le moins discutables. On a souvent cité l'enlèvement d'un *kono* sous la menace : « Les 10 francs sont donnés au chef et nous partons en hâte, au milieu de l'ébahissement général et parés d'une auréole de démons ou de salauds particulièrement puissants et osés. À peine arrivés à l'étape (Dyabougou), nous déballons notre butin ... » (Leiris, 1934/1981, p. 104). Les conventions internationales adoptées par l'UNESCO au cours du XXe siècle témoignent de ces changements institutionnels : 1954 pour la protection des biens culturels en cas de conflits armés, 1970 et 1995 pour le trafic des biens culturels. Elles conduisent à jeter l'opprobre sur tout musée suspecté d'avoir acquis un objet dans des conditions d'échange déséquilibrées. C'est dans le même contexte que se situent les demandes de restitution qui figurent notamment au cœur du rapport Sarr & Savoy (2018).

Ce mouvement de transformation ne fonctionne cependant pas de manière unidirectionnelle. Un tabou chasse l'autre : si la présence d'objets sans provenance apparaît aujourd'hui de plus en plus souvent comme répréhensible au sein de la communauté muséale, il en va autrement de deux autres pratiques qui, pendant longtemps, ont fait l'objet d'une interdiction respectée par la plus grande partie du monde muséal : l'aliénation et le développement des activités lucratives. La question de l'aliénation, déjà étudiée par l'ICOFOM en 2010, est peut-être celle qui s'apparente le plus directement à un tabou au sens fort du terme : nombre des conservateurs se réclamant de cette pratique – très respectée dans les pays latins – semblent craindre la disparition totale des collections si elle devrait être appliquée (Rykner, 2008). Longtemps considérée comme impossible au sein des musées, les professionnels se refusaient même d'en parler, puisque la législation en la matière (le principe d'inaliénabilité des collections publiques) en institutionalisait l'impossibilité. Cet interdit n'a pas été suivi de la même manière dans les pays anglo-saxons, bien que le phénomène n'y ait été accepté que très progressivement et ait induit un grand nombre de scandales, notamment au Metropolitan Museum lors de la vente d'œuvres pour financer l'acquisition d'un tableau de Velázquez (Hoving, 1993). Les règles de l'ICOM en matière de vente sont claires : « Les collections des musées sont constituées pour la collectivité et ne doivent en aucun cas être considérées comme un actif financier. Les sommes ou avantages obtenus par la cession d'objets et de spécimens provenant de la collection d'un musée doivent uniquement être employés au bénéfice de la collection et, normalement, pour de nouvelles acquisitions » (ICOM, 2017, 2.16). L'idée de consacrer le produit d'une vente d'objets à d'autres fins que l'acquisition d'objets induit, d'emblée, le rejet des musées « félons » de la communauté muséale. Certains établissements américains ont pu en faire l'amère expérience après la crise des *subprimes*, ayant été mis au ban de l'association des directeurs des musées d'art américains (Mairesse, 2009). L'assouplissement de ces règles – notamment lors de la pandémie de COVID-19, conduisant à l'évolution de ce qui apparaissait comme un interdit suprême, peut être mis en parallèle avec l'évolution plus globale des pratiques muséales en lien avec le commerce.

La question du commerce des musées et de la place des activités lucratives en leur sein a également fait l'objet de nombreux interdits, tout au long des XIXe et XXe siècles. Il est encore impossible, pour un établissement lucratif (comme le musée Grévin), d'espérer être accepté au sein de la communauté muséale institutionnalisée par l'ICOM (Sallois, 1998). Sur un mode mineur, la circulation de l'argent (droits d'entrée, boutiques, activités commerciales), au sein du musée, a également longtemps fait l'objet d'interdictions quasi-similaires, visant à séparer au maximum les deux types d'activités (Mairesse, 2010). Le monde muséal apparaissait ainsi, comme beaucoup de lieux sacrés, séparé du monde profane et de ses pratiques financières (Mairesse, 2014) ; les objets ayant été arrachés à leur contexte antérieur, leur valeur d'usage ou d'échange est symboliquement remplacée par leur muséalité (van Mensch, 2020). Le tournant commercial des musées, dans le sillage de la révolution néolibérale de la fin du XXe siècle, a largement transformé la relation que les conservateurs pouvaient entretenir avec l'argent (Mairesse, 2010), et les interdits en matière de profit ont été de plus en plus régulièrement nuancés, puis modifiés. Récemment, les premiers projets de définition du musée présentés par le Standing Committee on Museum Definition, Prospect and Potentials en 2019 ne présentaient plus de renvoi au caractère non lucratif de l'établissement (il a été rajouté par le Conseil exécutif).

Liberté, égalité et inégalité

L'observation des interdits liés à ces deux premiers registres semble indiquer des évolutions partiellement différentes : si certains nouveaux tabous se renforcent (présentations, acquisitions troubles, traitement de certains sujets), d'autres s'atténuent (argent, commerce). Ces différentes actions ou pratiques peuvent être perçues à partir d'un troisième niveau, lié aux structures conduisant à ces interdictions. Ce niveau s'inscrit sur un plan à la fois plus global et plus institutionnel, porté notamment par l'évolution des mentalités et reflété par les grands organismes régissant l'activité des musées : l'ICOM d'une part, l'UNESCO de l'autre – sans oublier leur intégration au système politico-économique plus général, représenté par ONU et GATT/OMC. Ce système a été mis en place au sortir de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, à partir d'un monde dominé, sur le plan économique, par les États-Unis, dans un climat de guerre froide (Aboudrar, Mairesse & Martin, 2021). Le contexte dans lequel nous vivons actuellement a certes évolué (fin de la guerre froide et passage d'un monde bipolaire à une hégémonie américaine de plus en plus contestée), mais il bénéficie de cette généalogie qui conditionne les actions des principaux protagonistes. La question de l'examen des interdits, à ce troisième niveau, nécessite de se pencher sur les textes régissant l'organisation du système mondial actuel.

Le document le plus emblématique du système de valeurs sur lequel se fonde la communauté internationale actuelle est probablement la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'Homme/humains. « Ce document fondateur – traduit dans plus de 500 langues différentes – continue d'être, pour chacun d'entre nous, une source d'inspiration pour promouvoir l'exercice universel des droits de l'homme » (Nations Unies, 2022). Deux notions figurent de manière centrale dans la déclaration, qui sont évoquées dans la première phrase de l'article premier : « Tous les êtres humains naissent libres et égaux en dignité et en droits ». Liberté et égalité : ces deux principes rejoignent ceux inscrits dans la première *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, rédigée en 1789 par les représentants du peuple français, réunis en Assemblée nationale (« Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits. Les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l'utilité commune »).

Les principes de liberté et d'égalité sont présentés par la Déclaration de 1948 comme « l'idéal commun à atteindre par tous les peuples et toutes les nations ». Ces deux notions diffèrent mais sont largement reliées entre elles : « La liberté individuelle ne trouve son plein épanouissement que parce qu'elle est soutenue par l'égalité en droits » (Sauvé, 2009). L'ouvrage du comte de Gobineau (1853), *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, résume de manière particulièrement glaçante la situation radicalement différente qui prévalait durant les XIXe et XXe siècles. Le dispositif idéologique racialisé mis en place par l'appareil national-socialiste entre 1933 et 1945 en a montré les conséquences les plus inhumaines. L'un des premiers chantiers de l'UNESCO, dès 1949, porte donc sur la *question des races* et la condamnation du racisme, conduisant à travers nombre de conférences mondiales (Genève en 1978 et 1983, Durban en 2001, 2009, 2011 et 2021) à en dénoncer les thèses pour promouvoir l'égalité entre les peuples et les nations. Loin d'être consensuelles, ces conférences – comme celles de Durban – sont progressivement apparues comme le théâtre d'affrontements importants entre les nations, conduisant au boycott de plusieurs d'entre elles par de nombreux États (Lantos, 2002). Quant aux musées, les départements d'anthropologie physique et leurs collections de crânes reflétant les différences en matière de biologie humaine à travers le monde, que l'on pouvait observer dans la plupart des grands musées d'ethnographie ou de sciences naturelles, ont pour la plupart rejoint les réserves au cours des dernières décennies du XXe siècle. *Tous parents, tous différents* : le titre de cette exposition créée par le musée de l'Homme en 1992 et ayant circulé dans plusieurs pays résume bien le message que font passer les musées à l'époque (Blyenburgh, 1994). Différents, mais forcément égaux (et libres).

On peut se demander, actuellement, si la remise en question du principe d'égalité au cœur de notre civilisation n'apparaîtrait pas comme le tabou ou l'interdit ultime de notre société. Qui oserait en contester la justesse ? Sa présence demeure affichée à tous les niveaux, et les valeurs présentes dans la Déclaration des droits de l'Homme / humains sont affichées comme universelles. L'égalité entre les nations demeure ainsi au cœur des structures institutionnelles : au sein de l'ICOM comme de l'UNESCO, tous les États membres disposent ainsi du même droit de vote. Sur le plan muséal, on pourrait traduire ces préceptes par la formule « tous les musées sont libres et égaux en droits », et c'est bien de cette manière qu'ils sont évoqués et discutés lors des assemblées de l'ICOM ou à l'UNESCO. Ces principes ne sont pourtant que de façade : l'inégalité apparaît sur tous les plans : le poids démographique ou économique des nations, leur pouvoir politique et militaire constituent des rapports de force omniprésents et le plus généralement totalement inégaux, au bénéfice des détenteurs de la force (Aboudrar, Mairesse et Martin, 2021). Cette différence apparaît également au niveau des musées. Leur répartition à travers le monde (Unesco, 2021), leur fréquentation – le pouvoir des musées superstars sur les autres (Frey, 1998) – mais aussi la circulation de la pensée muséale et l'hégémonie de certains courants sur les autres (Brulon Soares et Leshchenko, 2018), constituent autant de caractéristiques allant à l'encontre de cette représentation égalitaire. Un tel état de fait est connu ; il est partiellement à l'origine des revendications portées par nombre de pays se vivant comme périphériques (selon la logique coloniale métropole/périphérie) et aspirant à une meilleure prise en compte³. Il est pourtant largement passé sous silence, au profit du cadre général tissé à partir des droits humains. La remise en cause de la notion d'égalité apparaît pratiquement impossible en Occident : la plupart des citoyens en sont d'abord convaincus, et ceux qui s'exprimeraient dans un sens contraire se verraient probablement exclus des débats au sein de la communauté occidentale, voire menacés par

³ Cette notion elle-même s'avère complexe, dès lors que certaines de ces périphéries deviennent de nouveaux centres.

un certain nombre de textes législatifs émanant de ces institutions. Un musée qui, en 2022, présenterait une autre vision que celle développée à partir de ce cadre, pourrait-il encore être accepté au sein de la communauté muséale internationale ? Car la remise en cause de ces principes pourrait conduire à celle de l'équilibre mondial développé après 1948 dans son ensemble, et aux rapports de force implicites (le jeu des grandes puissances de l'époque, et l'hégémonie américaine actuelle) ayant conduit à cette situation. Ultime tabou ? Seuls, les pays (politiquement et militairement forts) accusés régulièrement de non-respect des droits de l'homme s'en prennent directement au cadre mis en place depuis cette époque (French. China.Org.cn, 2021).

Conclusion : Ethique et interdits

Les tabous et interdits reflètent les systèmes généraux de pensée qui les ont mis en place. Sur le plan muséal, le panorama des interdictions rapidement esquissé dans cet article n'est pas sans rappeler celui traditionnellement présentés par les manuels ou la déontologie : ce qu'il convient de faire, et ce qui est désapprouvé voire interdit par la communauté muséale. Sur le plan muséologique, cependant, il importe de dépasser la question déontologique ou morale pour envisager celle de l'éthique. Comme le rappelle Bernard Deloche, l'éthique est « née de l'incertitude métaphysique sur la signification de l'homme et du monde et, sans postuler nécessairement le désordre, elle consiste à confier à l'homme le soin de définir librement ses valeurs pour ensuite mettre en œuvre des moyens de les atteindre » (Deloche, 2011, p. 123). Il s'agit donc moins d'évoquer des tabous ou de présenter la manière dont les fonctions muséales sont accomplies, que de réfléchir sur la structure et les valeurs conditionnant les choix qui sont opérés. Pour Deloche, la nouvelle muséologie française présentait ainsi, sur le plan éthique, l'un des derniers changements au niveau des registres de valeurs, en inversant la place des collections et celles des visiteurs/utilisateurs au sein du fonctionnement muséal. Ce qui apparaissait alors comme tabou (ne pas trop se soucier des objets, parfois les aliéner) voire blasphématoire (la muséologie de la rupture de Jacques Hainard [Mairesse & Van Geert, 2022]), est progressivement apparu comme acceptable, alors que d'autres pratiques (l'élitisme affiché d'un musée envers son public, la présentation de restes humains) ont progressivement été décrétées inadmissibles.

On peut s'interroger, dans cette perspective, sur les principaux vecteurs qui auraient déterminé la transformation des registres de valeurs et, dès lors, des tabous qui en résultent. Deux tendances particulièrement importantes sur le plan muséal peuvent être évoquées dans ce contexte. La première est directement liée à l'évolution du rapport aux sciences, porté par les Lumières, qui s'opposait frontalement au cadre religieux occidental. C'est bien « au nom de la Science » que les artefacts et les êtres vivants, considérés comme autant d'items muséalisables, ont été collectés puis exposés, avec la même objectivité froide que celle conduisant le philosophe Bentham à demander à ses amis de le naturaliser à sa mort pour être exposé au sein de son université, ou le professeur Carlo Giacomini à obtenir que son squelette soit présenté dans le musée d'anatomie de l'université de Turin dont il avait la charge (Giacobini et al., 2008). La Science est alors jugée largement supérieure aux autres « croyances » et systèmes de valeurs des sociétés traditionnelles. Ce rapport à la Science, triomphante à la fin du XIXe siècle, a progressivement été remis en cause après le premier conflit mondial, pour être questionné de plus en plus frontalement au cours des dernières décennies (en biologie, en ethnologie, etc.). La rhétorique du « nom de la Science », argument décisif associé au développement de la société industrielle et au progrès qui devaient en résulter, semble s'éroder progressivement au cours des années 1960, après

les conséquences catastrophiques du conflit mondial et l'entrée dans l'ère atomique, mais aussi au regard des transformations environnementales qui sont progressivement pointées du doigt (Meadows et al., 1972). C'est à partir de cette époque qu'un certain climat de défiance semble se propager au regard de la Science, surtout dans les milieux conservateurs et religieux (Gauchat, 2012, Nadelson & Hardy, 2015). La récente pandémie de Covid-19 confirme, notamment en France, cette évolution : « La majorité des Français se méfient des scientifiques : beaucoup leur reprochent de défendre des intérêts privés et considèrent que la science aurait des effets négatifs sur notre environnement et notre santé » (IPSOS, 2020). Progressivement, donc, le rapport d'inégalité entre les sciences occidentales et les systèmes de savoir traditionnels se modifie en faveur de ces derniers. L'évolution observée au sein des musées en témoigne. Stephen Weil (1990), dans un ouvrage célèbre, évoquait déjà les poursuites judiciaires intentées au cours des années 1980 par un groupe de créationnistes pour changer les dispositifs expographiques du National Museum of Natural History de Washington. C'est au cours des années suivantes que certains musées d'ethnographie commencent à présenter conjointement, sur le même plan, le discours scientifique avec les croyances traditionnelles des sociétés observées (Van Geert, 2020).

À cette première évolution en est associée une autre largement conditionnée par l'équilibre géopolitique des puissances à travers le monde. Cet équilibre, en faveur de l'Occident durant un quart de millénaire, a conduit pendant près d'un siècle à l'hégémonie du Royaume-Uni puis, au sortir de la Première Guerre mondiale, à celle des États-Unis, sur les plans économiques et militaire aussi bien que scientifiques et culturels. Le régime d'économie de marché mis en place en Occident à la fin du XVIIIe siècle à partir des notions de liberté et d'égalité s'est progressivement étendu à l'ensemble du monde, à travers une logique à la fois capitaliste et impérialiste. Un temps remis en cause par le système communiste, il n'a cessé de progresser au cours des dernières décennies, se développant de manière quasi hégémonique après l'effondrement du bloc communiste et faisant tomber les dernières interdictions liées au rôle culturel du musée (notamment sa relation à l'argent). Sans doute le positionnement de la Science, fortement valorisé par le système communiste – une science publique, au bénéfice de tous – a-t-il été longtemps bénéfique au développement des musées. La relation qu'entretiennent le capitalisme et la science apparaît en ce sens plus ambiguë, celle-ci étant largement intégrée au sein du secteur privé et reposant sur des principes de concurrence entre des intérêts divergents, mais aussi entre les différents systèmes de croyance et de valeur portés par les acteurs qui la composent. La révolution néolibérale a-t-elle favorisé le développement d'intérêts et de systèmes de valeurs antagonistes dont la lutte se reflète à travers les systèmes de représentation du musée ? On serait tenté de le penser, les deux connaissant en tout état de cause une évolution chronologique similaire. Quoiqu'il en soit, les grandes notions sur lesquelles l'ensemble du système économique actuel s'appuie – égalité, liberté, droits de l'homme (et propriété privée) – apparaissent comme autant de principes sacrés, sinon dogmatiques, dont la discussion apparaît impossible en son sein, en dehors des puissances cherchant à en contester l'hégémonie.

La période dans laquelle nous vivons, conditionnée par un climat particulièrement belliqueux et anxiogène fondé sur une certaine remise en question des systèmes politiques, économiques et de valeurs actuelles, est loin d'apparaître comme un moment de stabilité pour l'équilibre international. Les registres d'interdiction, que l'on peut trouver au sein du musée comme dans l'ensemble de la société, témoignent des évolutions passées et de l'état actuel des rapports de force en présence. Nul doute qu'un tel état soit amené à évoluer dans

les prochaines décennies, conduisant probablement à d'autres systèmes de valeurs, mais aussi aux tabous qui leur seront associés.

Références

- Aboudrar, N., Mairesse, F., et Martin, L. (2021). *Géopolitiques de la culture*. Armand Colin.
- Altayli, A. et Viau-Courville M. (Eds.) (2018). Museums and contested histories. *Museum International*, 70, 279-280, 1-133.
- Bergeron, Y. (2014). Les liaisons dangereuses ou les relations troubles entre le politique et les musées canadiens. *Thema, la revue des musées de la civilisation*, 1, 127-140.
- Bioy, X. (2011) Le statut des restes humains archéologiques. Commentaire de la loi du 18 Mai 2010 visant à autoriser la restitution par la France des têtes maories à la Nouvelle-Zélande et relative à la gestion des collections. *Revue du droit public et de la science politique en France et à l'étranger* (RDP), 1, 89-111.
- Blancaert, C. (Dir.) (2013). *La Vénus Hottentote, entre Barnum et Muséum*. Muséum d'Histoire naturelle.
- Blyenburgh, N.H. van (1994). Tous parents tous différents, La diversité humaine au musée de l'Homme, *La lettre de l'OCIM*, 32, 25-29.
- Brulon Soares, B. (Dir) (2021). *Decolonizing museology*. ICOM/ICOFOM.
- Brulon Soares, B., Leshchenko, A. (2018). Museology in colonial context: A call for decolonisation of museum theory. *ICOFOM Study Series*, 46, 61-79.
- Cadot, L. (2009). En chair et en os : le cadavre au musée. Ecole du Louvre.
- Deloche, B. (2011). Éthique. Dans Desvallées, A. et Mairesse, F., *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie* (pp. 121-135). Armand Colin.
- French.China.org.cn (2021, January 04). *La Chine confrontée à une « guerre prolongée » sur les droits de l'homme avec les États-Unis*. http://french.china.org.cn/china/txt/2021-04/01/content_77368485.htm
- Frey B. (1998). Superstar museums: An economic analysis, *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 22, 113-125.
- Gauchat, G. (2012). Politicization of science in the public sphere: A study of public trust in the United States, 1974 to 2010, *American Sociological Review*, April, 77(2), 167-187.
- Giacobini, G., Cilli, C. et G. Malerba (2008). Il restauro del Museo di Anatomia umana "Luigi Rolando" dell'Università di Torino, *Museologia scientifica memorie*, 2, 228-233.
- Gobineau, A. (1853). *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*. Firmin Didot.
- Hoving, T. (1993). *Making the mummies dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Simon & Schuster.
- ICOM (2017). *Code de déontologie de l'ICOM pour les musées*. ICOM.
- IPSOS / Institut Sapiens. (2020). *Baromètre sur la science et la société*. IPSOS, <https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/barometre-science-et-societe-les-scientifiques-de-moins-en-moins-epargnes-par-la-defiance-des>

- Karp I., Lavine S.D. (1991). *Exhibiting cultures. The poetics and politics of museum display.* Smithsonian Institution.
- Lantos, T. (2002). « The Durban Debacle : An insider's view of the World Racism Conference at Durban », *The Flechter Forum of World Affairs.* Tufts University.
- Leiris, M. (1981). *Miroir de l'Afrique.* Gallimard (Quarto). Œuvre originale publiée en 1934.
- Lorente, J.P. (2022). *Reflections on critical museology : Inside and outside museums.* Routledge.
- Mairesse, F. (2009). *L'inaliénabilité des collections de musée en question,* Actes du colloque tenu au Musée royal de Mariemont le 28 avril 2009. Musée royal de Mariemont.
- Mairesse, F. (2010). *Le musée hybride.* La Documentation française.
- Mairesse, F. (2014). *Le culte des musées.* Académie royale de Belgique.
- Mairesse, F. et Van Geert, F. (Dir.) (2022). Jacques Hainard. *La muséologie entre rupture et transmission.* L'Harmattan.
- Maurel, C. (2007). La question des races, *Gradhiva*, 5, 114-131.
- Meadows, D. et al. (1972). *The limits to growth.* Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Mensch, P. van. (2020). *Vers une méthodologie de la muséologie.* L'Harmattan.
- Moore, C. and Mackenzie Brown, C. (2004). Gunther von Hagens and Body Worlds part 1: The anatomist as prosector and proplastiker, *The Anatomical Record*, 267B(1), 8-14.
- Nadelson, L. & Hardy, K. (2015). Trust in science and scientists and the acceptance of evolution. *Evolution: Education and Outreach*, 8(9). DOI 10.1186/s12052-015-0037-4
- Nations unies. (2022). *La déclaration universelle des droits de l'Homme.* Nations unies, <https://www.un.org/fr/universal-declaration-human-rights/>
- Paris exposition (1900). *Guide pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'Exposition.* Hachette.
- Phillips, R. (2011). *Museum pieces: Towards the indigenization of Canadian museums.* McGill-Queens University Press.
- Rykner, D. (2008). *Le spleen d'Apollon. Musées, fric et mondialisation.* Nicolas Chaudun.
- Sallois, J. (1998). *Les musées de France.* Presses Universitaires de France (2ème éd.).
- Sarr, F. et Savoy, B. (2018). *Restituer le patrimoine africain.* Philippe Rey / Seuil.
- Sauvé, J.M. (2009, September 21). *La liberté et l'égalité au cœur des droits. Discours et interventions,* Conseil d'État. <https://www.conseil-etat.fr/site/publications-colloques/discours-et-interventions/la-liberte-et-l-egalite-au-caeur-des-droits>
- UNESCO (2021). *Museums around the world in the face of Covid-19 – April 2021.* UNESCO (UNESCO Report).
- Valéry, P. (1960). Le problème des musées. Dans *Œuvres, II* (pp. 1290-1293). Gallimard. (Réimprime de *Le Gaulois*, 1923, 4 avril).
- Van Geert, F. (2020). *Du musée ethnographique au musée multiculturel. Chronique d'une transformation globale.* La documentation française.
- Weil, S. (1990). *Rethinking the museum and other meditations.* Smithsonian Institution.
- Westerman, F. (2006). *El Negro et moi.* Christian Bourgeois.

Identitarian museums: From visibility to recognition

Rogério Victor Satil Neves¹

Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) – Budapest, Hungary
Charles University (Univerzita Karlova) – Prague, Czech Republic

*“põe a cara no sol, mona!”
(Brazilian queer slang expression meaning roughly “put your face in the sun, girl!”)*

Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the phenomenon of «identitarian» museums as spaces of memory and counterpublics. It examines their role in producing a counter-discourse and offering a space to suppressed narratives and identities. By focusing on the Schwules Museum in Berlin (SMU), I explore the metaphor of the «museum closet» and its role in public spaces. Using Nancy Fraser's concept of counterpublics, I argue that these museums not only make suppressed narratives visible but also challenge the foundations of dominant discourses and symbolize a call for recognition rather than just visibility.

Keywords: symbolic violence, museum closet, identitarian museums, counterpublics

Resumen

Museos identitarios: De la visibilidad al reconocimiento. Este artículo pretende debatir el fenómeno de los museos “identitarios” como espacios de memoria y contrapúblicos. Examina su papel en la producción de un contradiscurso y en ofrecer un espacio a narrativas e identidades suprimidas. Centrándome en el Museo Schwules de Berlín (SMU), exploro la metáfora del “armario del museo” y su papel en los espacios públicos. Utilizando el concepto de contrapúblicos de Nancy Fraser, sostengo que estos museos no sólo hacen visibles las narrativas reprimidas, sino que también desafían los fundamentos de los discursos dominantes y simbolizan una llamada al reconocimiento más que a la mera visibilidad.

Palabras clave: violencia simbólica, armario de museo, museos identitarios, contrapúblicos

¹ Email: ne vessatil@gmail.com

Museums, as we commonly understand them, operate as sites of cultural memory and historical continuity. However, they also have the potential to embody and enforce structures of “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1991), where the dominant culture’s narrative is prioritized and amplified through selective object display, thus excluding the histories and memories of marginalized groups. Such a process perpetuates a dominant narrative, leaving many stories untold and many identities unacknowledged. This context is paramount to understanding the birth of identitarian museums, a response to this legacy of exclusion that will be discussed later.

The Herculaneum Museum,² established in 1823, provides an illustrative example of the exclusionary practices within museums’ history. The institution hid parts of its Roman cultural heritage, including depictions of same-sex love, considered taboo during its era, in a secret room. This room, later referred to as the “Cabinet of Obscene Objects,” was finally reopened to the public in 2000 (De Caro, 2000, p. 2). The existence of this hidden room figuratively mirrors the persistence of memories and identities that have been suppressed yet managed to endure within society’s metaphorical “closet.”

The idea of a “closet” within museums is critical in understanding the symbol of taboo practices. Museums operate within a complex system of visibility and concealment to uphold societal boundaries and normalize discourse on gender, sexuality, and race, as argued by Chantraine and Brulon (2020). Museums can both protect narratives that threaten established norms and symbolically uphold societal forces attempting to suppress public dialogue surrounding themes that do not fit within a hegemonic narrative. The symbolic “closet” is a term that I use to describe the way that museums often erase or silence queer³ history. This can be done through the exclusion of queer identities and memories, the use of heteronormative language, or the omission of queer perspectives from museum narratives. My objective in this article is to examine a postmodern phenomenon when this metaphorical “closet” is opened to public view in the heritage discourse.

A history of heteronormativity

This hegemonic culture displayed in museums illustrates how museums are complex institutions rooted in the history of a patriarchal transmission and the transfer of objects of power from churches and cabinets of curiosities (Tyburczy, 2016). Originally, museums were part of what Tony Bennett termed the *exhibitionary complex*, designed to make “visible bodies and objects previously displayed only in private settings to a small group of elite individuals” (Tyburczy, 2016, p. 7). This complex is involved in the “construction and dissemination of power” through “historically synchronous institutions” (Tyburczy, 2016, p. 7).

This shift in visibility is implicated in the construction and distribution of power through historically synchronous institutions. In this context, museums are not neutral entities of history and memory preservation. Instead, they also play a role in shaping society’s perception of the past and, consequently, the present. This is because museums shape public knowledge, reinforcing or challenging existing power structures.

² Today it is the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. For more information about the case see Frost, S. (2010). The Warren Cup: Secret museums, sexuality, and society. In A. K. Levin (Ed.), *Gender, sexuality, and museums* (pp. 138-150). Routledge.

³ In this paper the term “queer” is used as an umbrella term for non-heterosexual or non-cisgender individuals.

For example, the dissemination of power can be seen in the heritage preservation process and display practices related to patriarchal transmission and heteronormativity culture. As a result, we can see that the museum closet benefits some realities and suppresses others. Moreover, it illustrates the mechanism of “symbolic violence,” which reproduces and reinforces a heteronormative patriarchal culture.

The concept of symbolic violence was developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1991), who argued that symbolic violence is a form of social control exerted through the use of symbols, language, and other forms of representation. In other words, symbolic violence is a way of dominating others by making them believe that their own domination is natural or inevitable. Bourdieu (1991) discusses the idea of “symbolic violence” within a “symbolic system” in which dominant groups use their dominance to maintain their power.

This article frames the museum as a symbolic system since its mechanism cannot be reduced to simply a neutral system. This is because “relations of communication are always, inseparably, power relations which, in form and content, depend on the material or symbolic power accumulated by the agents (or institutions) involved in these relations” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 167).

In the context of museums, symbolic violence can be seen in the way that museums exclude or marginalize the memories, identities, and histories of specific groups because they are not considered part of a hegemonic group. Museums often privilege the history of white, heterosexual men⁴ over the history of women, LGBTQ+ people, and non-white people. This can have the effect of making these groups feel their memories and identities are being excluded. As Amy K. Levin (2010) put it, “the institution has been complicit in the construction of white male heteronormativity” (p. 6).

The selection and preservation of heritage in museums is often influenced by the desire to uphold societal boundaries and reproduce heteronormativity.⁵ This can be seen in the way that museums have traditionally excluded narratives that represent same-sex relationships or other forms of non-heteronormative practices. This exclusion not only reinforces the social boundaries of a heterosexual culture, but it also exerts symbolic violence on individuals who do not fit in these boundaries.

In this regard, conventional museums play a role in influencing power relations and perpetuating certain communities’ social boundaries and cultural attributes. They delineate the “self” from the “other,” and they perpetuate power dynamics that uphold societal boundaries based on a heteronormative culture. The decision to exclude same-sex practices from display, for instance, reveals the dynamic of visibility and concealment inherent in the museum closet. This dynamic, when employed as a strategy for representation, becomes a form of symbolic violence, confining the “others” to the closet. Consequently, when queer memories and identities remain unexhibited, it signifies a lack of space for their belonging.

4 See, for instance Duncan, C. (1995). *Civilizing rituals: Inside public art museums*. Routledge.

5 On the topics of reproduction and patriarchy, see e.g., Levin, Amy K. (2010). *Straight talk: Evolution exhibitions and the reproduction of heterosexuality*. In A. K. Levin (Ed.), *Gender, sexuality and museums* (pp. 187–200). Routledge; Machin, R. (2010). *Gender representation in the natural history galleries at the Manchester Museum*. In A. K. Levin (Ed.), *Gender, sexuality and museums* (pp. 201–212). Routledge; Haraway, D. (2019). *Teddy bear patriarchy: Taxidermy in the garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936*. In *Grasping the world* (pp. 242-249). Routledge.

The choices of what to display and what to exclude in museums narrate what is considered culture and subculture. Fine and Kleinman (1979) define subculture as a “membership category in which the criterion for belonging is structural or network-based,” and as a result, it is “treated as a subsociety” (p. 2). In this context, “structural” refers to the way specific spaces suppress the belonging of certain communities, keeping them in the closet of society.

Within this history of exclusion, the emergence of identitarian museums is a significant development in the field of museology. These museums offer a new way of thinking about heritage and its role in society. I refer to these institutions as “identitarian” because one of their consolidations illustrates a form of identity politics in the heritage stance. They invert the traditional preservation process and display practices by representing realities excluded in the hegemonic narratives.

Opening the closet

The social movements of the 1960s that demanded recognition and social rights for queer people led to the establishment of institutions dedicated to preserving heritage associated with these issues. These museums, such as the Stonewall National Museum & Archives in the United States (1972), the Schwules Museum in Germany (1985), and the GLBT Historical Society Museum in the United States (2011), were often created by marginalized groups who were seeking to reclaim their histories and memories. They provide a space for these groups to challenge prevailing hegemonic discourse, share their stories, and create a counter-hegemonic narrative that includes the realities excluded from the dominant narrative perpetuated by traditional museums.

The emergence of identitarian museums has played a pivotal role in reshaping heritage discourse by offering public visibility to marginalized narratives and identities. These museums stand as a symbol of identity politics in heritage. They use heritage as a political instrument, giving visibility to memories and identities that were suppressed and not recognized in the public space before. They serve as a counter-narrative to the dominant historical narrative, which has often marginalized or erased LGBTQ+ experiences.

I perceive these identitarian museums as “queer utopias,” (Conlan, 2010) – spaces where queer identities are collectively celebrated, places of belonging. As Conlan (2010) argues, “Queer utopias are not necessarily only desires for individual recognition, but exercises in group loss, collective memory and, thus, opportunities for community” (p. 261). In this sense, LGBTQ+ museums provide a place for queer people to come together and represent their history, memory, and identity. They also serve as a reminder of the violent closet that has suppressed queer existence in the public sphere.

Regarding this “group loss,” historically, the LGBTQ+ community has often been forced into hiding due to the state’s categorization and rejection of queer identities. As a result, queer individuals created clandestine gathering spaces and unique forms of communication to evade state surveillance. Identitarian LGBTQ+ museums can be seen as a continuation of this tradition located in the public space, providing representational spaces of belonging for queer people to come together and express themselves.

The Schwules Museum in Berlin is an example of an identitarian museum. It was founded in 1985 to document and preserve the history of queer people in Germany. The Schwules

Museum creation in fact started before its foundation: In 1984 three museum workers from a traditional Berlin museum convinced the director to organize an exhibition called *Eldorado: Geschichte, Alltag und Kultur homosexueller Frauen und Männer in Berlin von 1850-1950* (Eldorado: The History, Everyday Life and Culture of Homosexual Women and Men in Berlin 1850-1950), which resulted in the creation of the museum in 1985 (Schwules Museum, 1984).

The exhibition *Eldorado*, which was hosted at the Berlin Museum, offered an example of a claim for collective memory. It honored a space of a subculture and collective memory that had been confined to the closet, unable to be accepted in the public space before. The exhibition constructed a counter-narrative, displaying the symbolic violence that had previously been kept out of sight by being out to public view. The title of the exhibition, *Eldorado*, referred to a renowned bar in Berlin that was a prominent Weimar-era gay establishment (Tamagne, 2006). The club was a meeting point for homosexual life in Berlin until it was closed in 1933 by the Nazi regime (see figure 1). The exhibition brought out of the closet the memory of a subculture place where these identities were confined, making it visible and accessible in the public space.



Figure 1. "Homosexuellenlokal 'Eldorado,'" taken on 5 May 1933, after the Nazi seizure of the club. Ó Landesarchiv Berlin, 1993, F Rep. 290 (03) Nr. 116938 Photo: k. A.⁶

Similarly, we can see this construction of a previously suppressed memory with the inaugural exhibition of the Schwules Museum (SMU), entitled *Igitt – 90 Jahre Homopresse*

⁶ According to information from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum about this photo, it depicts "two members of the Berlin Order Police standing guard outside a local Nazi Sturmabteilung (SA) headquarters in March 1933. The windows are boarded up and lined with pro-Hitler posters and Nazi flags. Only weeks earlier, however, this building had hosted the Eldorado nightclub – a central location for Berlin's gay and transgender communities. The only visible remnant of the former venue is the banner above the front door, reading, Hier ist es Richtig or Here it's right."

(Yuck – 90 Years of Homopress). The magazines featured in the exhibition spanned a period starting from the early days of the gay liberation movement (Schwules Museum, 1986). The show underscored the significance of these magazines in chronicling the history and culture of the queer community and documenting the queer struggle, that is, the record of the community's collective memory (Schwules Museum, 1986). Queer periodicals have been a powerful tool in nurturing community collective memory by serving as a common platform where queer individuals can connect and share their narratives and re-interpretation of their identities. The magazines were crucial in facilitating organizational efforts, being described as “essential to the organizational efforts of associations of same-sex-desiring persons across Germany” (Micheler & Szobar, 2002, p. 95).

By highlighting the role of magazines in queer culture and community building, the exhibition underscored the idea of “group loss” collective memory construction (Conlan, 2010). It demonstrated the effort of reconstructing suppressed memories in public spaces, thereby emphasizing the significance of these periodicals as a medium for communication and reinforcement of connections within the queer community. This exhibition demonstrated the powerful imprint that these magazines left on the history of the queer community and the continued impact they have on collective memory and identity. In this sense, the exhibition represented the memory excluded from the official state narrative, a memory that did not have space in traditional museums in that period. As a result, we can argue that the exhibition also implied the symbolic violence that queer people endured through their exclusion from traditional museums.

I argue that identitarian museums can play an important role in producing a counter-hegemonic discourse and representing memories and histories of marginalized groups. For example, the exhibition *Geschichte des § 175 – Strafrecht gegen Homosexuelle* (History of § 175 - Criminal Law Against Homosexuals), presented in 1990, chronicled the legislative repression of homosexuality in Germany. This show illustrated the violence and memory of this history to the public. In this regard, it shows again the “exercises” of the community's collective memory. The exhibition was significant because it openly addressed the history of the criminalization of homosexuality in public German spaces. Consequently, we can say that one role of the show was the process of reconciling history and memory, integrating collective memories into the public history.

Moving beyond visibility

However, it is important to note that the mere visibility of an excluded narrative does not necessarily break the taboo surrounding it. In fact, the breaking of societal taboos is a more complex process than mere visibility in public spaces. There are several factors that contribute to the breaking of a taboo, including essential factors like the level of social support for the tabooed group and the availability of information about the tabooed group in the public space.

For instance, most of the historical information about queer people in Germany was banned or destroyed during the Nazi regime: The Institut *für Sexualwissenschaft*⁷ (Institute of Sexual Science) was destroyed, all queer bars were closed, and queer magazines were banned (Tamagne, 2006). As a result, information about the reality of queer people was kept in the closet of German society, kept as a taboo.

⁷ For more information regarding the Institute of Sexual Science, see for example Whisnant, C. J. (2016). *The politics of homosexuality in Weimar Germany*, in his *Queer identities and politics in Germany: A history, 1880–1945*. Columbia University Press.

The political reclamation of queer rights only began in the 1960s. This was a small window of time, after a long period of suppression, to make available information about the taboo group in public space. The exhibition *Geschichte des § 175 – Strafrecht gegen Homosexuelle* (History of § 175 - Criminal Law Against Homosexuals), after all, was only held in 1990. That exhibition, therefore, showcased a recent reconstruction of memory, demonstrating the limited circulation of information about a group excluded from the public space. The exhibition was a significant step in challenging the heteronormative narrative of German history. However, the exhibition was not the end of the story. Showcasing themes previously excluded from history indicates a new form of claim-making but does not necessarily mean that the taboo is broken.

In fact, the argument that the taboo is broken merely because these themes reach public, democratic spaces may be oversimplified. Such a perspective might falsely imply that these marginalized groups' rights have been fully incorporated into the public sphere simply because they are now visible in it. The breaking of taboos is a complex process that requires sustained effort and activism. For this reason, I argue that these spaces are not breaking the taboo, but rather creating spaces of belonging and membership that allow the community to gain a new perspective about themselves and create resources to break the taboo.

The counterpublic space

To understand the role of museums in breaking taboos, I would like to use Nancy Fraser's (1990) framework and her critique of the public space. I argue that the mere existence of identitarian museums does not break the taboo surrounding the themes they display. Instead, they can be a resource for group organization and reclamation by displaying the symbolic violence inherent in a narrative that has been excluded and confined to the traditional museum closet.

The existence of museums dedicated to queer history and culture does not necessarily mean that the taboo surrounding queerness has been broken. For example, in 2017, an exhibition named *Queermuseu - Cartografias da Diferença na Arte Brasileira* (Queermuseum – Maps of Difference in Brazilian Art) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, was shut down after a month. The exhibition aimed to present diverse perspectives of the Brazilian Colonial period through a queer lens but faced backlash from conservative groups on social media. These critics claimed the exhibition endorsed blasphemy and made apologies for zoophilia and pedophilia (*El Pais*, 2017). Despite its intent to provide an alternate perspective on historical events, the exhibition could not break societal taboos. The public reaction highlighted a rejection of these perspectives, which led to the event's closure, returning queerness to the closet.

The concept of “subaltern counterpublics” is relevant to this discussion. As Nancy Fraser (1990) argues in her work “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” counterpublics are discursive spaces that connect marginalized or subordinated members of society. These spaces do not automatically imply equal rights just because they exist in the public sphere. Fraser (1990) argues that the public space is constituted by ideological exclusions. She uses the work of Mary Ryan to base the argument that the public space was never public. According to her, the idea of the public space is connected to the claims of the bourgeoisie.

The spaces that flourished in the public democratic space that do not follow the ideology of the bourgeoisie are seen as counterpublic spaces. Fraser (1990) defines subaltern counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p. 67). In the context of identitarian museums⁸, subaltern counterpublics are created by marginalized groups to share their memories and experiences, providing a counter-hegemonic narrative. Fraser’s definition of subaltern counterpublics, therefore, describes identitarian museums.

I will use the Schwules Museum (SMU) as an example of a subaltern counterpublic, focusing on some exhibition texts of the museum related to male homosexuality to illustrate her points.

Subaltern memories

The history of male homosexuality in Germany provides a clear example of the ways in which marginalized groups have been targeted and controlled by laws and medical establishments. The World Health Organization (WHO) classified homosexuality as a mental disorder until 1990, and laws criminalizing homosexuality, such as Paragraph 175⁹ in the German Penal Code of 1871, served to further marginalize and stigmatize homosexual behaviors. These institutional actions provide concrete examples of the historical suppression of homosexuality, underscoring the symbolic violence and violence that this community has endured.

The SMU’s founding in 1985 by a group of queer activists who wanted to create a space to preserve and celebrate the history and culture of LGBTQ+ people in Germany was a form of counter-discourse to this classification. Its aim was to present several exhibitions that highlighted the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in Germany. These exhibitions created a different type of narrative about queer history, one that focuses on the collective memory and community interests of this group.

For example, the exhibition text for *Geschichte des § 175 – Strafrecht gegen Homosexuelle* (History of § 175 – Criminal Law Against Homosexuals), in 1990, references Paragraph 175 and its history, narrating a historical context in which the male homosexual identity was subjected to law; that is, the exhibition text connects the history of § 175 to the history of those affected. The exhibition centered on the demand for the unconditional abolition of § 175 (Schwules Museum, 1990). In this sense, we can see the museum creating a counter-narrative to the interpretation of Paragraph 175 presented by the law, reflecting a focus on collective memory and community interests.

This counter-discourse saw further production in another exhibition titled *Verfolgung homosexueller Männer in Berlin 1933-1945* (The Persecution of Homosexual Men in

8 From this viewpoint, examining the LGBTQ+ movement, we see a clear parallel in terms of ideological exclusion. For example, Berlin’s Schwules Museum (SMU) was not supported by public funding until 2009 (as their website describes). It suggests that the SMU was seen as a counter-narrative space (counterpublic) that diverged from the usual heteronormative discourse. However, it is important to extend the analysis to the period after 2009 – the examples used in this study are only from the period 1984 to early 2000s.

9 With the emergence of the German state, the Penal Code brought from the Prussian code the prohibition of sexual acts between men. This law, Paragraph 175, was a mechanism of social order. It prohibited any “unnatural sex act committed between men,” resulting in imprisonment. From May 15, 1871, until March 10, 1994, Paragraph 175 was part of the German Criminal Code. For more information, see Kaczorowski, C. (2015). Paragraph 175. LGBT Archive. www.glbqtarchive.com/ssh/paragraph_175_S.pdf

Berlin 1933-1945), which spotlighted the Nazi regime's persecution of homosexual men (Schwules Museum, 2000). This discourse shows the impact of Paragraph 175 on the narrative¹⁰ of male homosexual history in Germany. Consequently, we see the role of the museum as a parallel arena producing counter-discourses that contributes to the circulation of the information about this tabooed group. Moreover, such production also illustrates the formulation of oppositional interpretation of their identity.

Oppositional interpretations of identity

During the 19th century, part of the German national identity was influenced by Greek antiquity:

Greece played an important role in shaping a national identity defined by the growing awareness among Germans of a shared cultural heritage – one that owed a considerable debt to the legacy of Greek antiquity. Nowhere was this connection more obvious than in the Weimar Classicism of Goethe and Schiller, which represented the pinnacle of German literature and came to symbolize the redemptive power of German culture as a whole. (Geary, 2014, p. 2)

However, there is a marked difference between German and Classical culture in the handling of the narrative of same-sex practices. While the creation of German national identity celebrated its connections to ancient Greece, it concurrently marginalized the historical link to same-sex practices. (The term “homosexual,” coined by psychiatrist Karoly Maria Benkert, originates from Greek terms “homo” and “sexualis,” illustrating a common root in Greek antiquity [William et al., 1990].) This omission points to the symbolic violence endured by the queer community as they were left out of the mainstream narrative of German national identity. This facet was overlooked in the early stages of the German state's formation, indicating the interests of the state in showcasing a heteronormative identity construction. The construction of homosexual identity only began in the early 20th century.

The exclusion of same-sex practices is presented in the discourse of the SMU. For instance, the exhibition text *Die Lust der Götter – Homosexualität und Kunst in der italienischen Renaissance* (Homosexuality and Art in the Italian Renaissance) traced the practices the same-sex-love to ancient practices, exploring the taboo of homosexuality in art history (Schwules Museum, 1993). The exhibition text shows this oppositional interpretation of identity by representing the practices of same-sex love in the past. As a result, the museum's narrative portrays same-sex practices as something with historical continuity. In this sense, we can see a counter-discourse which attends to the needs of this tabooed group, formulating an oppositional interpretation of their identities.

¹⁰ Examining exhibition texts from 1984 – 2000 shows many recurring references to Paragraph 175 at the SMU. This theme surfaces in shows such as *750 warme Berliner zum Stadtjubiläum* (750 Warm Berliners for the City Anniversary) in 1987, *Querschnitt durch die Sammlung* (Cross-Section Through the Collection) in 1988, and *1869-1969: Bilder, Fotos und Dokumente aus 100 Jahren Schwulen Geschichte* (1869-1969: Images, Photos, and Documents from 100 Years of Gay History) in 1991. Similarly, it forms the focal point of *Mach dein Schwulsein öffentlich! – Die 70er Jahre* (Make Your Gayness Public! – The 70's) in 1991-1992 (Schwules Museum).

Final considerations

Identitarian museums, while not directly breaking societal taboos, serve as vital resources in challenging these taboos. They do so by providing space to suppressed narratives, thereby initiating a discourse that can lead to a societal shift in understanding and accepting marginalized identities. This new discourse insists on recognition of a subculture rather than mere visibility, making these museums essential actors in the continuous negotiation of societal norms and boundaries. This recognition can be seen as well in the new emergence of national museums, such as Queer Britain (UK) and The American LGBTQ+ Museum (USA), dedicated to queer history and memory.

Recognition is more than just visibility. It is about acknowledging the validity of marginalized identities and experiences. It is about challenging the dominant narratives that have excluded these groups from society. The case of the SMU discourse is an example of a counterpublic entity providing resources to integrate and reconcile history and memory, incorporating identities and collective memories into public history as a form of contestation.

References

- Bennett, T. (1995). *The birth of the museum: History, theory, politics*. Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.
- Brulon Soares, B., & Chantraine, R. (2020). Introduction and editorial. *Museum International: LGBTQI+ Museums* 72 (3-4).
- Conlan, A. (2010). Representing possibility: Mourning, memorial, and queer museology. In A. K. Levin (Ed.), *Gender, sexuality, and museums*. Routledge.
- De Caro, S. (2000). The secret cabinet in the National Archaeological Museum. *Electa*.
- Fine, G. A., & Kleinman, S. (1979). Rethinking subculture: An interactionist analysis. *American Journal of Sociology*, 85(1), 1–20. [jstor.org/stable/2778065](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2778065)
- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social Text*, 25/26, 56–80. doi.org/10.2307/466240
- Geary, J. (2014). Ancient Greece and the German cultural imagination. In: *The politics of appropriation: German romantic music and the Ancient Greek legacy*. The New Cultural History of Music Series, doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199736119.003.0001
- Levin, A. K. (Ed.). (2010). *Gender, sexuality, and museums: A Routledge reader*. Routledge.
- Micheler, S., & Szobar, P. (2002). Homophobic propaganda and the denunciation of same-sex-desiring men under National Socialism. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11(1/2), 95–130. www.jstor.org/stable/3704553.
- Pais, El. (2017, September 17). Queermuseu: O dia em que a intolerância pegou uma exposição para Cristo. brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/09/11/politica/1505164425_555164.html
- Schwules Museum. (1986, November 16 – 1986, December 28). *Igitt – 90 Jahre Homopresse*. www.schwulesmuseum.de/ausstellung/igitt-90-jahre-homopresse/
- Schwules Museum. (1990, May 17 – 1990, June 7). *Geschichte des § 175 – Strafrecht gegen Homosexuelle*. <https://www.schwulesmuseum.de/ausstellung/geschichte-des-%c2%a7-175-strafrecht-gegen-homosexuelle/> www.schwulesmuseum.de/ausstellung/geschichte-des-%c2%a7-175-strafrecht-gegen-homosexuelle/

- Schwules Museum. (2000, March 26 – 2000, July 30). Verfolgung homosexueller Männer in Berlin 1933-1945. www.schwulesmuseum.de/ausstellung/verfolgung-homosexueller-maenner-in-berlin-1933-1945/?lang=en
- Schwules Museum. (1984, May 26 – 1984, June 8). Eldorado: Geschichte, Alltag und Kultur homosexueller Frauen und Männer in Berlin von 1850-1950. www.schwulesmuseum.de/ausstellung/eldorado-geschichte-alltag-und-kultur-homosexueller-frauen-und-maenner-in-berlin-von-1850-1950/
- Schwules Museum. (1993, May 26 – 1993, August 29). Die Lust der Götter – Homosexualität und Kunst in der italienischen Renaissance. www.schwulesmuseum.de/ausstellung/die-lust-der-goetter-homosexualitaet-und-kunst-in-der-italienischen-renaissance/
- Tamagne, F. (2006). A history of homosexuality in Europe, Vol. I & II: Berlin, London, Paris; 1919-1939. Algora Publishing.
- Tyburczy, J. (2016). *Sex museums: The politics and performance of display*. The University of Chicago Press.
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (n.d.) Photo of the Eldorado Club. perspectives.ushmm.org/item/photo-of-the-eldorado-club
- William, W. R. D. W. J., Percy, A., & Donaldson, S. (1990). *Encyclopedia of homosexuality*. Garland Press.

Le regard porté sur les corps féminins dans les musées au prisme du genre et des tabous sur la sexualité

Julie Botte

Université d'Artois – Arras, France¹

Résumé

Cet article examine de quelles façons des critiques féministes prennent forme dans l'espace muséal pour modifier le regard qui est porté sur les corps féminins, au prisme du genre et des tabous sur la sexualité. Les musées, en tant que « complexe d'exposition », donnent à voir un ordre du monde genré. Ce sont des lieux de domination, mais également de revendication et d'émancipation. Le regard masculin et le regard muséal, qui déterminent le choix et l'interprétation de ce qui est exposé, sont remis en question par un regard critique féministe. En suivant le concept du « musée féministe virtuel », les performances, les actions militantes et les expositions étudiées renouvellent l'interprétation et la vision du corps des femmes dans les musées. Les exemples étudiés transgressent les normes de genre, mettent au jour des impensés, des non-dits et des absences dans les musées.

Mots clés : Muséologie, musée, féminisme, genre, art, tabou

Abstract

Looking at female bodies in museums through the prism of gender and taboos on sexuality. This article examines the ways in which feminist critiques take shape in the museum space to change the way women's bodies are viewed, through the prism of gender and sexuality taboos. Museums, as "exhibitionary complex", display a gendered world order. They are places of domination, but also of assertion and emancipation. The male gaze and the museum gaze, which determine the choice and interpretation of what is exhibited, are challenged by a critical feminist gaze. Following the concept of the "virtual feminist museum", the performances, activist actions and exhibitions studied renew the interpretation and vision of women's bodies in museums. The examples studied transgress gender norms, uncovering unthought, unspoken and absent elements in museums.

Keywords: Museology, museum, feminism, gender, art, taboo

¹ Email: Jule.Botte@live.fr

Cet article examine de quelles façons des critiques féministes prennent forme dans l'espace muséal pour modifier le regard qui est porté sur les corps féminins, au prisme du genre et des tabous sur la sexualité. Les musées, en tant que complexe d'exposition (Bennett, 1988), donnent à voir un ordre du monde genré. Ce sont des lieux de domination, mais également de revendication et d'émancipation. Le regard masculin (Muvley, 2003) et le regard muséal (Levin, 2010, p. 5) déterminent le choix et l'interprétation de ce qui est exposé. Les corps féminins sont omniprésents dans les parcours muséographiques, toutefois ils sont réduits à des visions stéréotypées. Ils sont peu étudiés à travers un regard critique féministe d'un point de vue historique, culturel et social. Une grande partie des expériences féminines n'est pas abordée, comme le désir, le plaisir, les règles ou les violences sexuelles. Or, ces thèmes sont au cœur des rapports de pouvoir. Denis Chevallier observe que « les enjeux de genre demeurent ... la plupart du temps implicites, informulés » dans les musées de société (2013, p. 20). Les musées de femmes, et plus récemment ceux sur le genre, constituent un nouveau type de musée dans le monde, créés afin de rendre visible ce qui était absent. Progressivement, des femmes se sont réapproprié leurs corps exposés dans les musées en développant un autre angle de vue. bell hooks parle du regard critique et oppositionnel des personnes noires comme moyen de résistance (2003, p. 95). Selon Amy K. Levin, le pouvoir peut être contesté en créant d'autres discours :

[L]es « autres » du musée peuvent se rebeller en défiant l'exercice du contrôle, ou, à l'inverse, en refusant de voir ce jeu de pouvoir pour ce qu'il est. ... Ils subvertissent les structures conventionnelles de signification en reconstruisant la présentation ou l'exposition à travers leurs propres interprétations². (Levin, 2010, pp. 5-6).

Dans son ouvrage conceptualisant le musée féministe virtuel, Griselda Pollock commence par deux citations invitant à « relire » et à « revoir » (2007, p. 9). Elle définit ce musée comme un laboratoire de recherche, animé par l'ambition de :

[D]écouvrir d'autres significations en osant tracer des réseaux et des interactions transformatrices entre des images assemblées différemment dans des conversations encadrées par l'analyse et la théorie féministes. (Pollock, 2007, p. 11)

Ainsi, les œuvres, les initiatives militantes et les expositions étudiées dans cet article renouvellent l'interprétation et la vision du corps des femmes dans les musées. Le processus de monstration est modifié : entre l'objet exposé et le sujet qui représente, présente, regarde et interprète.

Inversion du regard entre le nu, le spectateur et le musée

L'artiste Deborah De Robertis a réalisé plusieurs performances en se dénudant dans les musées qui n'étaient pas autorisées par l'institution et qui ont fait scandale. Au musée d'Orsay, elle a dévoilé son sexe devant *L'Origine du monde* de Gustave Courbet en 2014 et elle s'est déshabillée devant *L'Olympia* d'Édouard Manet en 2016. En faisant intrusion dans les musées d'art, ses performances perturbent le dispositif d'exposition et le critiquent d'un point de vue féministe. De Robertis transgresse l'interdit du dénudement en public, elle donne vie au modèle et elle fait de son corps une œuvre. Elle renverse l'ordre des regards en incarnant simultanément le nu féminin et l'artiste.

² Traduction de l'auteur.

L'œuvre exposée dans le musée : Le regard masculin

En se montrant nue, l'artiste attire l'attention sur la représentation des corps féminins dans l'art. Selon elle, cette performance cherche à « interroger la place des femmes dans l'histoire de l'art » (L'artiste Deborah De Robertis, 18 octobre 2017). L'artiste se demande : « Qu'est-ce que dit cette nudité-là ? Qu'est-ce qu'elle montre ? Elle montre l'hypocrisie d'une institution qui accepte le nu tant qu'il est bien encadré au mur » (Baer, 18 octobre 2017). Elle explique également qu'« en performant sous les tableaux que je choisis, symboliquement, je tente une irruption dans l'histoire c'est-à-dire que je prends ma place » (Baer, 18 octobre 2017).

Dès 1989, les Guerrilla Girls interpellèrent sur la différence entre le nombre élevé de nus féminins, réalisés en majeure partie par des hommes, et le faible nombre d'artistes femmes exposées dans les salles du Metropolitan Museum. Leur célèbre affiche se demandant « Les femmes doivent-elles être nues pour entrer au Met. Museum ? Moins de 5 % des artistes des sections d'art moderne sont des femmes, mais 85 % des nus sont féminins » a été réalisée pour la première fois en 1989 et rééditée en 2005 et en 2012. Elle fait ressortir la difficulté pour les femmes d'être reconnues en tant que créatrices, et non pas uniquement en tant que muses.

En reprenant la pose des modèles, devant *L'Origine du monde* et *L'Olympia*, Deborah De Robertis les incarne et leur redonne chair. Elle bouleverse la frontière entre le modèle vivant et sa représentation inanimée, entre l'œuvre du passé et son interprétation dans le présent. Elle met en avant la dichotomie entre la femme qui est représentée et l'homme qui la dépeint. Une caméra Go-Pro accrochée sur son front pendant la performance filme le public et inverse le regard, du modèle vers le visiteur. L'artiste explique « prendre la position de l'objet du regard pour à [son] tour regarder » (Teffahi-Richard, 2014). Selon Geneviève Fraisse :

Non seulement l'objet, le modèle, est redevenu sujet, mais, comme sujet rétabli dans ses droits de regarder, il s'introduit dans l'histoire de l'art. ... Il y a bien eu inversion de perspective, passage d'objet à sujet. (2019, pp. 131132)

La caméra permet d'enregistrer, de faire exister matériellement et de donner une visibilité au point de vue de celle qui est figurée. La performance est un moyen de s'approprier son corps, en étant à la fois le modèle et l'artiste, et en faisant œuvre de ce mouvement corporel éphémère.

John Berger remarque que le nu féminin dans la peinture occidentale est conçu pour être montré : « la nudité est exposée³ ». Il considère le spectateur masculin comme le destinataire de ces peintures et le « principal protagoniste » (Berger, 2003, p. 39), bien qu'il ne soit pas représenté dans l'œuvre. L'auteur explique que les hommes regardent, tandis que les femmes sont regardées :

On pourrait simplifier en disant : les hommes agissent et les femmes apparaissent. Les hommes regardent les femmes. Les femmes se regardent être regardées. Cela détermine non seulement la plupart des relations entre les hommes et les femmes, mais aussi la relation des femmes à elles-mêmes. ... Elle se transforme ainsi en objet – et plus particulièrement en objet de vision : une vue⁴. (Berger, 2003, p. 38).

3 Traduction de l'auteur.

4 Traduction de l'auteur.

Laura Muvley (2003, p. 47) le rejoint dans son analyse sur « la femme en tant qu'image, l'homme en tant que porteur du regard » dans le cinéma en affirmant que « le plaisir de regarder a été divisé entre actif/masculin et passif/féminin⁵ ». De même, Griselda Pollock (2011, p. 264) note que « la politique sexuelle du regard fonctionne autour d'un régime de divisions binaires : activité/passivité, voir/être vu, voyeur/exhibitionniste, sujet/objet ». Les représentations visuelles des femmes sont en majorité conçues en fonction d'un regard masculin hétérosexuel. Les spectateurs de ces images adoptent ce point de vue. Muvley (2003, p. 48) précise que « la femme exposée fonctionne à deux niveaux : en tant qu'objet érotique pour les personnages de l'histoire à l'écran et en tant qu'objet érotique pour le spectateur dans la salle⁶ ».

Le regard des femmes n'est pas celui qui détermine la construction de l'image et du processus de monstration. Pollock, en citant la « théorie de la spectatrice » et « la politique sexuelle du regard » de Mary Ann Doane, souligne la différence entre la représentation d'une femme qui « n'est pas objet de désir » parce qu'elle « regarde activement » et celle qui se contente de « rendre le regard du spectateur masculin » (2011, p. 262). *L'Olympia* de Manet avait provoqué un scandale au Salon de 1865 pour le manque d'idéalisation de son corps et pour la représentation d'une prostituée qui regarde le spectateur dans les yeux, le plaçant dans la position du client qui entre dans la chambre. Néanmoins, elle n'est pas une figure active. Nue et allongée, elle est l'objet du regard du spectateur et elle le lui renvoie. Le regard érotique des femmes et leurs désirs constituent encore un tabou dans les représentations. Linda Nochlin souligne que l'art érotique au XIX^e siècle concerne principalement le plaisir masculin et hétérosexuel (1993, p. 191). Les désirs des femmes ne sont pas pris en compte dans les œuvres d'art, elles en sont seulement les objets :

En contrôlant et la sexualité et l'art, les hommes et les fantasmes masculins conditionnent également la sphère de l'imaginaire érotique. ... Les femmes ne disposent pas d'images – d'un langage officiellement acceptable – pour exprimer leur point de vue particulier. (Nochlin, 1993, pp. 192-193)

Le musée qui expose l'œuvre : Le regard muséal

Cette question du regard dans les œuvres picturales et cinématographiques se pose également dans les musées, en tant que « complexe d'exposition », selon l'expression de Tony Bennett (1988). Les objets exposés perdent leur fonction primaire, acquièrent un statut patrimonial et « deviennent des sujets du regard⁷ » (Levin, 2010, p. 5). Dans les musées, « le genre se déroule dans une interaction complexe entre le planificateur d'exposition (ou commissaire), le spectateur et l'objet » (Levin, 2010, p. 5).

Dans une lettre adressée au président du musée d'Orsay, le 16 janvier 2016, Deborah De Robertis écrit à propos de sa performance devant *L'Olympia* de Manet :

Cette exposition⁸ ne peut pas être clôturée sans donner la parole à son modèle. ... Mon geste n'est pas de me mettre nue, mais il consiste à renverser le point de vue du modèle. ... En réincarnant le tableau, je n'expose pas ma nudité, j'expose la position d'un modèle nu qui s'est mis en mouvement

⁵ Traduction de l'auteur.

⁶ Traduction de l'auteur.

⁷ Traduction de l'auteur.

⁸ Robert, M., Pludermacher, I., Thomson, R., Bakker, N., Carsen, R. *Splendeurs et misères. Images de la prostitution, 1850-1910* [Exposition]. Musée d'Orsay. www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/agenda/expositions/splendeurs-et-miseres-images-de-la-prostitution-1850-1910

pour refléter ce qui aujourd'hui a bougé dans le monde et doit bouger dans le regard et, avant toute chose, dans votre regard, car cette perception nouvelle doit être prise en considération par votre institution. (Lesauvage, 2016)

La question du regard que l'institution porte sur les œuvres se pose également. Dans son commentaire de l'œuvre *L'Origine du monde* de Courbet, le musée d'Orsay parle de son commanditaire, le diplomate turco-égyptien Khalil-Bey, qui avait constitué une collection « dédiée à la célébration du corps féminin ». L'œuvre, qui a appartenu au psychanalyste Jacques Lacan avant d'être acquise par le musée d'Orsay, a été peu montrée jusqu'à son entrée dans les collections publiques. Selon le texte du musée, l'œuvre de Courbet « échappe ... au statut d'image pornographique » grâce aux qualités artistiques de son exécution (Robert et Bakker, 2015). Le musée refuse paradoxalement de reconnaître la dimension érotique de l'œuvre alors qu'elle est présente dès sa commande sans ambiguïté et dans l'histoire de son exposition. L'œuvre est conçue par un artiste pour satisfaire le plaisir des spectateurs en jouant sur le voyeurisme. Par sa performance, l'artiste oblige à voir cette dimension de l'œuvre. Anne Creissels constate que :

Ces corps féminins contraints, soumis aux règles du musée et de l'art, recèlent en effet un pouvoir subversif. Quand la pièce de musée prend vie, quand le féminin s'exprime, c'est un véritable retour du refoulé : le revers de la grâce des images. (2017, p. 30)

Le musée d'Orsay a porté plainte à deux reprises contre Deborah De Robertis pour exhibition sexuelle et conteste de ce fait la dimension artistique de son geste. Elle n'a pas été condamnée et elle a fait l'objet d'un rappel à la loi. Le musée du Louvre a également déposé plainte pour le même motif après une performance de l'artiste devant *La Joconde* de Léonard de Vinci en 2017. Elle a été relaxée par le tribunal correctionnel de Paris qui l'a considéré comme un « acte militant et artistique » (*Le Monde avec AFP*, 18 octobre 2017). Les procès pour exhibition sexuelle intentés par les musées font ressortir le contraste entre l'exposition de la nudité féminine peinte par des hommes et l'interdiction pour une femme de montrer son corps nu dans l'espace public. L'un est une représentation, l'autre un corps réel, mais la performance est également une forme d'interprétation. Le corps de l'artiste devient œuvre en changeant le contexte de monstration, de la réalité quotidienne à la mise en scène performative dans un espace muséal. Deborah De Robertis brouille la frontière entre la réalité et la représentation, entre ce qui est autorisé et ce qui est défendu. La mise en perspective de la nudité représentée et réelle fait ressortir, d'après les mots de Lynda Nead, « une opposition entre la perfection de l'art et la perturbation et l'inachèvement du non-art, ou de l'obscénité⁹ » (1992, p. 2).

La brièveté de la performance, interrompue par les gardiens, n'altère pas son intensité qui est due à la confrontation directe avec les visiteurs qui partagent le même espace que l'artiste, à l'intrusion dans l'institution et à la transgression de l'interdit de montrer son sexe en public. Selon l'historien de l'art Philippe Dagen (2017), « la performance est un moyen radical de s'opposer à la domestication du corps par la désobéissance publique ».

Bibia Pavard et Juliette Rennes (2021) remarquent une « constante dans le caractère genré de ces normes sociales encadrant le dénudement et la pudeur ». Elles distinguent deux types de dénudements en public qui rappellent ceux qui ont lieu dans les musées :

9 Traduction de l'auteur.

les dénudements érotisés et les dénudements contestataires, politiques et artistiques. Le dénudement contestataire est utilisé par des militantes et des artistes féministes pour dénoncer les règles genrées qui encadrent la nudité (Pavard & Rennes, 2021).

Les performances de Deborah De Robertis s'inscrivent dans la continuité de l'art féministe (par exemple, la performance *Genital Panic* de Valie Export en 1969) et des critiques institutionnelles (comme la vidéo *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* d'Andrea Fraser au Philadelphia Museum of Art en 1989). Le fait que Deborah De Robertis pénètre dans l'institution sans y avoir été autorisée est un moyen de contester le pouvoir institutionnel en faisant intrusion dans les salles du musée et en bouleversant l'ordre établi. Par un processus transgressif, simple et efficace, elle conteste l'objectivation du corps féminin, le regard masculin dominant dans l'art et l'interprétation donnée par le musée. Les musées rendent visible et institutionnalisent dans leurs accrochages ce point de vue dominant, masculin et hétérosexuel, et le reproduisent sans le contextualiser et le critiquer. Selon Luc Schicharin (2018), « la performance de De Robertis questionne la construction muséale des stéréotypes de la féminité, et plus particulièrement la sexualisation des femmes et de leurs corps dans les arts plastiques ». Ces performances modifient la perspective et renversent les idées reçues en interrogeant « l'histoire genrée du regard » (Tyburczy, 2016, p. 43), masculin et hétérosexuel, dans le cadre de la création d'œuvres représentant des nus féminins, de leur collection et de leur exposition.

Cette approche militante fait intrusion dans les musées et dans l'histoire de l'art cherche à interpeller et à examiner ce qui est passé sous silence et invisible. Elle suscite une prise de conscience qui délaisse néanmoins l'analyse plus précise de la représentation des nus féminins et masculins, des canons esthétiques et des raisons qui justifient cette nudité du corps en fonction des contextes historiques et culturels. Ainsi, comme le met en évidence Luc Schicharin (2018), les performances de Deborah De Robertis ne remettent pas en question « la féminité hégémonique » des femmes blanches, jeunes, éduquées et hétérosexuelles. Elle ne conteste pas la normalisation des corps qui sont montrés. Les musées, sans interdire l'exposition des nus féminins, pourraient jouer un rôle essentiel dans la contextualisation des images montrées par rapport à la place des femmes et des hommes dans la société.

Changement de regard du musée : Exposer ce qui était caché

Tandis que des interventions artistiques ou militantes interpellent les musées, certaines institutions deviennent féministes. Ainsi, les musées de femmes abordent des sujets tabous sur le corps féminin et la sexualité. Ils donnent à voir ce qui ne pouvait l'être, comme les parties gynécologiques ou les violences sexuelles. Ils diffusent des connaissances et ils s'engagent pour dissiper les préjugés, sur ce qui est considéré comme honteux, déshonorant ou impur.

Un regard féministe sur l'anatomie gynécologique

Les missions du Vagina Museum sont de « diffuser des connaissances », d'« effacer les préjugés », d'être un « forum pour le féminisme, les droits des femmes, la communauté LGBT+ et la communauté intersexe » et de « promouvoir des valeurs intersectionnelles, féministes et transinclusives » (Vagina Museum, *Our story*). Ces objectifs rejoignent plus largement ceux des musées de femmes qui préservent et font connaître leur histoire, mais qui cherchent également à les émanciper et à construire un « avenir meilleur » (Akkent

& Kovar, 2019, p. 290). Selon la Résolution du 1er Congrès international des musées de femmes à Merano en 2008, ces derniers « dissipent les préjugés et contribuent au respect des femmes et des droits humains ». Astrid Schönweger, l'ancienne coordinatrice de l'IAWM (Association internationale des musées de femmes), considère l'égalité, l'inclusion, la diversité et la participation comme fondamentales à leur vision. Elle précise que les musées de femmes et du genre « ne portent pas sur des objets, mais sur des personnes » (Akkent & Kovar, 2019, p. 294). La volonté de ces musées de lutter contre les préjugés et de changer la société les amène à aborder des sujets tabous autour du corps et de la sexualité, afin de sensibiliser et d'éduquer les visiteurs.

Le Vagina Museum, dont le projet a commencé en Grande-Bretagne en 2017, vise à mettre fin à « la honte et la stigmatisation » (Vagina Museum, *Our story*) qui entourent cette partie du corps des femmes. Dès le choix de l'appellation du musée, des questions se sont posées afin qu'il soit compris du plus grand nombre, général et inclusif :

Il n'existe pas de terme approprié pour désigner l'ensemble de l'anatomie qui n'est pas trop médical (système gynécologique), qui ne se concentre pas sur un seul objectif (système reproductif) ou qui n'est pas transexclusif (par exemple, les organes génitaux féminins)¹⁰. (Vagina Museum, *FAQs*)

Le mot « vagin », mis en exergue dans le nom du musée, demeure difficile à prononcer dans la sphère médiatique, ainsi que l'avait remarqué Eve Ensler, l'écrivaine des *Monologues du vagin* en 1998 (Fraisie, 2019). Le Vagina Museum est donc transgressif par sa dénomination et par ce qu'il donne à voir dans ses expositions. Précédemment, plusieurs œuvres d'art féministes avaient placé de manière spectaculaire les organes génitaux féminins au centre du musée. Par exemple, la *Hon* (« Elle ») de Nikki de Saint-Phalle au Moderna Museet en 1966 était une gigantesque sculpture de femme à l'intérieur de laquelle les visiteurs entraient par le vagin. L'installation *The Dinner Party* de Judy Chicago, créée entre 1974 et 1979, dont les assiettes en céramique évoquent une vulve, est exposée de manière permanente dans l'Elizabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art du Brooklyn Museum depuis 2007. Les assiettes de forme vulvaire ont été l'objet de nombreuses critiques, en partie en raison de leur « transgression de l'interdiction de la représentation direct » (Jones, 2011, p. 119). Selon l'analyse d'Amelia Jones :

[E]n représentant ouvertement le sexe féminin, l'artiste met en danger le système de jugement esthétique, puisque le corps féminin clairement « obscène » doit rester en dehors du domaine de l'art d'élite. (2011, p. 120)

La représentation de la vulve dans l'art a longtemps été considérée comme vulgaire. Ce n'est que récemment qu'elle est devenue un motif artistique (Chaperon, 2016).

Comme le Sackler Center du Brooklyn Museum, le Vagina Museum cherche à fonder un espace muséal qui ne montre pas uniquement des œuvres d'art féministe, mais qui porte un regard féministe sur le corps d'un point de vue historique, culturel et social. Le musée est dédié à « l'anatomie gynécologique et à sa place dans notre culture et notre histoire » (Vagina Museum, *Our story*). Le musée explique être conscient du risque de définir les femmes par leur sexe, « en tant que mère ou objet sexuel » (Vagina Museum, *FAQs*). Le Vagina Museum a décidé de se concentrer sur cette partie du corps « puisqu'elle influence directement la vie des femmes (sexualité, santé, règles, maternité) et qu'elle est reliée à des

10 Traduction de l'auteur.

problématiques sociales (mutilations génitales féminines, violences sexuelles)¹¹ » (Vagina Museum, *FAQs*). L'exposition permanente « From A to V (De A à V) » vise à dépasser l'interdit qui empêche d'en parler de ces sujets et à les considérer de manière positive. Les quatre thèmes sont « l'anatomie, la santé, la diversité de la vulve et l'activisme » (Vagina Museum, *Exhibitions*). Deux expositions temporaires similaires ont aussi été organisées par le musée. « Les règles : une courte histoire », en 2021 et en 2022, levait le tabou de la menstruation et se penchait sur l'influence des croyances socioculturelles sur les vies des femmes. « Muff Busters: Vagina Myths and How to Fight Them (“Muff Busters” : Mythes sur le vagin et comment les combattre) », en 2019, déconstruisait les préjugés qui sont dus à un manque de connaissances et à l'interdit d'en parler. L'exposition abordait notamment la question des normes esthétiques auxquelles il faut se conformer et dont témoigne le recours de plus en plus fréquent à la chirurgie génitale. Le musée est donc conçu comme une plateforme de diffusion des connaissances, de prises de conscience des idées reçues et de valorisation.

Briser le silence sur les violences sexuelles

Les violences sexuelles constituent un tabou dans les musées qu'elles soient représentées ou invisibilisées. Ces violences ont longtemps été tues, banalisées ou acceptées. Pourtant, les scènes d'agressions sexuelles sont récurrentes dans l'iconographie occidentale. La valeur artistique et historique n'efface pas la violence de ce qui est figuré. Le terme « viol », par exemple, n'apparaît souvent pas dans le titre des œuvres d'art ancien exposées dans les musées où il est remplacé par celui d'enlèvement. Si les musées n'accompagnent pas les représentations de scènes violentes d'un commentaire spécifique, ils contribuent à les passer sous silence et maintiennent le rapport de domination. De même, l'absence des violences sexuelles dans les institutions publiques génère une autre violence, d'ordre symbolique. Plusieurs initiatives, à l'extérieur ou dans l'institution, tentent d'y mettre fin.

En 2021, les Guerrilla Girls ont créé un site internet, dont l'intitulé *The Male Graze* (« pâturage des mâles ») constitue un jeu de mots autour du *male gaze* (« regard masculin »¹²). Il est organisé en plusieurs sections, abordant chacune des questions taboues dans le domaine de l'art, telles que le point de vue dominant sur le corps féminin nu ; les artistes ayant eu des comportements violents de leur vivant envers les femmes ; les cartels des œuvres dans les salles des musées omettant de mentionner ces violences. Dans la partie dédiée aux représentations violentes de corps féminins nus, les Guerrilla Girls mettent en avant plusieurs thèmes et œuvres : la torture, le meurtre, le viol, le harcèlement, l'esclavage, la mort érotisée et le motif du nu allongé. En accompagnement de ces images, elles écrivent :

L'exploitation sexuelle, la domination, les abus et le voyeurisme sont omniprésents dans notre culture. Lorsque ces thèmes sont esthétisés, pourquoi la discussion s'arrête-t-elle ? *The Male Graze* n'a pas pour but de censurer les œuvres d'art ou de condamner la sexualité comme immorale. Il s'agit de faire face au fait que l'art occidental est et a été obsédé par les corps féminins, le sexe et la violence¹³. (Guerrilla Girls)

Le ton provocateur des Guerrilla Girls cherche à rompre le silence et à forcer le monde de l'art à prendre en considération, dans les commentaires d'œuvre ou les expositions, la

11 Traduction de l'auteur.

12 Traduction de l'auteur.

13 Traduction de l'auteur.

représentation des violences faites aux femmes dans les œuvres d'art et les comportements violents avérés des artistes. Ces deux aspects constituent de véritables tabous. L'art est considéré dans les musées uniquement d'un point de vue esthétique et formel. Les Guerrilla Girls dénoncent l'aura de l'œuvre d'art et de l'artiste qui empêchent de les considérer d'une façon critique.

Leur militantisme pour rompre le silence se situe à l'extérieur de l'espace muséal. Il est repris, sous une autre forme, par plusieurs musées sur les femmes et le genre dans le monde. Outre les représentations artistiques et les comportements des artistes, plusieurs musées d'histoire et de société entreprennent d'évoquer les violences sexuelles passées et actuelles. Selon Merete Ipsen (2017), l'une des cofondatrices et anciennes directrices du Kvindemuseet à Aarhus au Danemark, renommé aujourd'hui Gender Museum, le musée est un lieu de sensibilisation où les préjugés et les sujets sensibles peuvent être analysés et discutés. En 2010, l'exposition « Ce n'est pas de ta faute » a été conçue comme un lieu de débat sur le sentiment de culpabilité et de honte des victimes, ainsi que sur la prévention du viol (Gender Museum). Le public a été impliqué de deux façons : d'une part, des victimes ont confié leurs histoires au musée ; d'autre part, des lycéens ont contribué à mettre en forme les contenus pour que l'exposition soit adaptée aux jeunes de seize à vingt ans. Des personnes ont été réunies par le musée, avec l'aide de centres d'accueil pour les victimes de violence sexuelle, dans un groupe de discussion en vue de préparer l'exposition autour de leurs expériences. Elles ont témoigné de leur culpabilité, de leur souffrance, de leur reconstruction personnelle et de la poursuite de leur existence. Sept histoires ont été sélectionnées par le musée, dont l'une était celle d'un homme. Les noms et les lieux ont été modifiés ; de plus, les entretiens que les visiteurs pouvaient écouter dans l'exposition ont été lus par des étudiants en art dramatique du théâtre d'Aarhus (Diaz, 2016). Les commissaires ont collaboré avec une classe de lycéens dans le cadre d'ateliers. Le musée voulait impliquer autant les filles que les garçons et qu'ils créent ensemble l'exposition (Ipsen, 2017). Les jeunes constituaient le public cible de l'exposition, dont l'objectif était d'avoir un effet préventif. Ainsi, le musée a collecté des histoires personnelles, puis les a mises en forme et transmises en impliquant des adolescents. La réalisation de l'exposition repose sur la participation et cherche à agir sur les individus, en créant un espace de parole et en mettant fin au silence.

Tandis que l'exposition du Gender Museum se situe dans une période contemporaine, le Women's Active Museum on War and Peace (WAM) est un lieu de mémoire et un musée d'histoire qui se consacre à la reconnaissance du système d'esclavage sexuel établi par l'armée impériale japonaise en AsiePacifique entre les années 1930 et 1945. Le musée a été inauguré à Tokyo en 2005, lors du sixantième anniversaire de la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. La parole des victimes est placée au cœur du dispositif muséal. Le WAM préserve et expose leurs témoignages de celles qui ont survécu. Leurs récits constituent des sources primaires qui documentent les faits historiques. Ils sont collectés avant qu'elles n'aient toutes disparu. Les violences sexuelles ont laissé peu de traces matérielles mis à part les archives militaires et les récits de guerre. Les témoignages ont également une forte portée symbolique, puisqu'ils rompent le silence des victimes. Dans la première salle, un panneau invite le public à « écouter les voix de ces femmes ». En entrant dans le musée, les visiteurs se trouvent face à cent soixantedixneuf portraits de femmes qui ont accepté de faire connaître leurs visages, leurs noms et leurs histoires (Akkent & Kovar, 2019). En 2014, le WAM a conçu dans son exposition permanente des « panneaux de témoignages » présentant quarante personnes venant de dix pays. Les panneaux sont écrits

à la première personne du singulier. L'ensemble de leur vie est raconté : ce qu'était leur vie avant de subir les violences de l'armée japonaise, la façon dont elles ont été recrutées par tromperie ou enlevées par la force, le temps de leur emprisonnement, allant de quelques jours à des années, leur libération après la défaite du Japon, leur retour chez elles ou leur installation dans le pays où elles avaient été emmenées. Cette histoire a été longtemps méconnue. Les victimes ont commencé à témoigner dans les années 1990. Elles ont réclamé la condamnation des responsables et une réparation de la part du gouvernement japonais. Cette histoire a été passée sous silence pendant plusieurs décennies, en raison de l'absence de reconnaissance des violences sexuelles comme crime de guerre et du déni de l'état responsable. Les violences sexuelles entraînent souvent une condamnation et une discrimination des victimes par la société et demeurent difficiles à aborder dans l'espace public (Watanabe, 2017). Le musée permet donc de créer un espace de préservation de leurs récits oraux et de prise de parole.

Les expositions du Gender Museum et du Women's Active Museum on War and Peace reposent avant tout sur le témoignage. Les violences sexuelles sont difficilement montrables, étant insoutenables et n'ayant pas laissé de traces visibles ou tangibles. Afin de les prendre en considération dans l'espace muséal, les récits et les portraits sont exposés pour combler un vide et éclairer ce qui a été maintenu dans l'ombre. Ce processus d'exposition contribue à rendre visibles ces violences dans l'espace public, à essayer de les prévenir, ainsi qu'à impliquer les victimes et les publics.

En conclusion, le corps et la sexualité sont au cœur des mouvements féministes qui ont revendiqué des changements dans leur perception et qui ont cherché à ce que les femmes se les réapproprient (Chaperon, 2016). La particularité des cas analysés est la transposition de cette question dans l'espace muséal : en le critiquant de l'extérieur, en s'y introduisant de manière subversive ou en donnant une forme institutionnelle au militantisme féministe. Les pratiques d'activisme muséal reposent sur une approche sociale du musée (Janes & Sandell, 2019). Les tabous, reproduits et maintenus dans les musées, sont principalement relatifs à la sexualité. Ils tracent des frontières entre ce qui est indécent, obscène, honteux, culpabilisant, scandaleux ou érotique. Les exemples étudiés ont en commun de transgresser les normes de genre et les interdits qui enserrant le corps féminin. Les performances, les actions militantes et les expositions considérées dans cet article mettent au jour des impensés, des non-dits et des absences dans les musées. Ils perturbent les règles de ce qui est montré et de ce qui ne l'est pas.

Références

- Akkent, M., & Kovar, S. N. (Éds.). (2019). *Feminist pedagogy: Museums, memory sites, practices of remembrance*. Istos.
- Baer, S. (2017, octobre 18). « C'est de l'art ! Je suis en représentation » : une artiste jugée à Paris pour exhibition sexuelle se défend. Franceinfo. Page consultée le 16 mai 2023, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/justice/c-est-de-l-art-je-suis-en-representation-une-artiste-jugee-a-paris-pour-exhibition-sexuelle-se-defend_2424325.html
- Bennett, T. (1988). The exhibitionary complex. *New Formations*, 4, 73102.
- Berger, J. (2003). From ways of seeing. Dans A. Jones (Éd.), *The feminism and visual culture reader* (pp. 3739). Routledge.

- Chaperon, S. (2016). Organes sexuels. Dans J. Rennes (Éd.). *Encyclopédie critique du genre : Corps, sexualité, rapports sociaux* (pp. 428438). La Découverte.
- Chevallier, D. (2013). Le genre exposé au musée des civilisations. Dans D. Chevallier, M. Bozon, M. Perrot & F. Rochefort (Éds.), *Au bazar du genre : Féminin-masculin en Méditerranée* (pp. 1828). MUCHEM.
- Creissels, A. (2017). Que font les femmes dans le temple des muses ? *Repères, cahier de danse*, 3839 (12), 2730. <https://doi.org/10.3917/reper.038.0027>
- Dagen, P. (2017, janvier 19). Le grand retour de la performance. *Le Monde*. Page consultée le 16 mai 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/arts/article/2017/01/19/le-grand-retour-de-la-performance_5065423_1655012.html
- Diaz Ramos, L. (2016). Feminist curatorial interventions in museums and organizational change : Transforming the museum from a feminist perspective [Thèse de doctorat non publiée]. University of Leicester.
- Fraisse, G. (2019). *La suite de l'histoire : Actrices, créatrices*. Seuil.
- Gender Museum Denmark. (n.d.) Det er ikke din skyld (Ce n'est pas de ta faute). Page consultée le 16 mai 2023, <http://konmuseum.dk/udstilling/det-er-ikke-din-skyld/>
- Guerrilla Girls. (n. d.). Flesh through the ages. The male graze. Page consultée le 16 mai 2023, <https://www.themalegraze.com/gg/flesh-through-the-ages>
- Hein, H. S. (2007). Redressing the museum in feminist theory. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 22(1), 2942.
- hooks, b. (2003). The oppositional gaze. Dans A. Jones (Éd.), *The feminism and visual culture reader* (pp. 94105). Routledge.
- Ipsen, M. (2017). The Women's Museum in Denmark: From women's history to gender culture. Dans J. C. Ashton (Éd.), *Feminism and museums: Intervention, disruption and change* (pp. 318-343). MuseumEtc.
- Janes, R. R., & Sandell, R. (Éds.). (2019). *Museum activism*. Routledge.
- L'artiste Deborah De Robertis, jugée pour exhibition sexuelle au Musée du Louvre, a été relaxée (2017, octobre 18). *Le Monde avec AFP*. Page consultée le 16 mai 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2017/10/18/l-artiste-...e-pour-exhibition-sexuelle-au-musee-du-louvre_5202444_1653578.html
- Lesauvage, M. (2016, janvier 18). L'artiste qui s'est déshabillée au musée d'Orsay explique son geste. *Beaux Arts Magazine*. Page consultée le 22 août 2023, www.beauxarts.com/grand-format/renverser-le-point-de-vue-du-modele-nu-lartiste-qui-sest-deshabillee-au-musee-dorsay-explique-son-geste/
- Levin, A. K. (2010). Introduction. Dans A. K. Levin (Éd.), *Gender, sexuality, and museums: A Routledge reader* (pp. 111). Routledge.
- Muvley, L. (2003). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. Dans A. Jones (Éd.), *The feminism and visual culture reader* (pp. 4453). Routledge.
- Nead, L. (1992). *The female nude: Art, obscenity, and sexuality*. Routledge.
- Nochlin, L. (1993). Érotisme et images du féminin dans l'art du xix^e (1972). Dans L. Nochlin (Éd.), *Femmes, art et pouvoir et autres essais* (pp. 190-200). Jacqueline Chambon.

- Pavard, B. & Rennes, J. (2021). Se dénuder en public : Corps, genre et politique. *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, 54, 7-22. <https://doi.org/10.4000/clio.20287>
- Pollock, G. (2007). *Encounters in a virtual feminist museum : Time, space and the archive*. Routledge.
- Pollock, G. (2011). Modernité et espaces de la féminité (1988-2003). Les femmes et le regard. Dans F. Dumont (Éd.), *La rébellion du deuxième sexe : L'histoire de l'art au crible des théories féministes anglo-américaines, 1970-2000* (pp. 262-266). Les Presses du réel.
- (Robert, M., Bakker, N., (Dir.). (2015). Splendeurs et misères. Images de la prostitution, 1850-1910. Musée d'Orsay.
- Schicharin, L. (2018). La performativité du corps chez Deborah de Robertis. Ambivalences dans les espaces visuels du féminisme contemporain. *Genre, sexualité & société*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.4000/gss.4522>
- Suy, K. J. (2018, novembre 7). « T'étais habillée comment ? » : une exposition contre le viol à Dakar. BBC. Page consultée le 16 mai 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-45941785>
- Teffahi-Richard M. (2014, juin 5). À Orsay, un remake de « L'Origine du monde ». *Le Monde*. Page consultée le 16 mai 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2014/06/05/a-orsay-un-remake-de-l-origine-du-monde_4432340_3246.html
- Tyburczy, J. (2016). *Sex museums: The politics and performance of display*. University of Chicago Press.
- Vagina Museum. Exhibitions. (n. d.). Page consulté le 16 mai 2023, <https://www.vaginamuseum.co.uk/exhibitions>
- Vagina Museum. FAQs. (n. d.). Page consulté le 16 mai 2023, <https://www.vaginamuseum.co.uk/about/faqs>
- Vagina Museum. Our story and mission. (n. d.). Page consulté le 16 mai 2023, <https://www.vaginamuseum.co.uk/about/story>
- Watanabe, M. (2017). Initiatives of a women's museum in the perpetrating state: Remembering japan's military sexual slavery. Dans M. Akkent (Éd.), *Women's museums: Centre of social memory and place of inclusion* (pp. 138-149). Istanbul Kadın Müzesi.

Exhibiting the taboo of museums of ethnography

Clémentine Debrosse¹

Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas
University of East Anglia – Norwich, United Kingdom

Art museums, cultural-history museums, and natural history museums have different justifications for their activities and radically different conceptions of how to use and present their collections.

–Ivan Karp, *Exhibiting Cultures*

Abstract

Since the 1990s, museums of ethnography have been undergoing changes in light of the decolonial movement. While museum collections are far from being exhibited in their entirety, choices are made within museums to know which object should or should not be seen by the visitors. But should this decision be made solely by the members of the museum team? This article will look at the exhibition of secret-sacred material and human remains within museums of ethnography in Europe to understand the new modes of display that can be implemented.

Keywords: taboo, museums of ethnography, exhibition, human remains, consent

Résumé

Exposer le tabou des musées d'ethnographie. Depuis les années 1990, les musées d'ethnographie se sont transformés au regard du mouvement décolonial. Alors que les collections des musées sont loin d'être exposées dans leur intégralité, des choix sont faits au sein des musées pour savoir quel objet sera ou non visible par les visiteurs. Mais cette décision doit-elle être prise uniquement par les membres de l'équipe du musée ? Cet article se penche sur l'exposition d'objets secret-sacré et des restes humains au sein des musées d'ethnographie en Europe pour comprendre les nouveaux modes de présentation qui peuvent être mis en place.

Mots clés : tabou, musées d'ethnographie, exposition, restes humains, consentement

Ivan Karp writes in *Exhibiting Cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display* that all museums are not equal in what they display and how they display it. For museums of ethnography and world cultures, the historical legacy they bare as institutions and the

¹ Email: C.Debrosse@uea.ac.uk

‘objects’² they display or used to display as “trophies of imperial conquest” (Karp, 1991, p. 16) is what prevails to the visitor and one of the taboos of museums of ethnography.

In August 2022 in Prague for the 26th ICOM General Conference, I presented a paper which coined museums of ethnography and world cultures as taboo spaces (Debrosse, 2022). Since then, a year has passed and decolonial work has been undergoing, but the status of museums of ethnography and world culture has not changed so drastically that this statement can be revoked. As Nicholas Thomas put it (2016), “it may be inevitable that museums will continue to be thought of as colonial hangovers” (p. 16). Not only were museums born out of colonisation, but they also displayed the artefacts and human remains collected during the exploration voyages of the 18th and 19th centuries and the later ethnographic missions of the 20th century. Museums also still stand as architectures of power in the city centres of Europe.

As noted by Fabian Van Geert, museums of ethnography have been experiencing a crisis since the 1970s-80s (Mairesse, 2023), which led the colonial taboo to be addressed thanks to the involvement of Indigenous communities within museums of ethnography (Karp et al., 1992). From the 2000s onwards, the processes and methods of museums of ethnography were slowly reinvented to make way for more collaboration between museums and communities. While these practices were at the core of the reinvention of museums of ethnography, France attempted to create a new type of museum of ethnography with the musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, through the art scope “to eclipse the colonial inheritance of the older museums and their unfortunate associations with evolutionary science” (Jolly, 2011, p. 111). However, this new type of museum of ethnography was highly criticised for how the darkly lit environment enhanced the exoticisation of the ‘objects’ (Kimmelman, 2006; Price, 2007).

Alongside these internal and aesthetic changes within museums of ethnography came the claims for restitutions and repatriations of artefacts and human remains, which rapidly made the headlines of newspapers, advertising to the world the colonial past of museums of ethnography (Bodenstein et al., 2022; Tezoto de Lima, 2022). By means of the press, a global awareness of the colonial legacy of museums of ethnography has grown and somewhat relegated these institutions to *being* taboo. But the reason this taboo ‘sticks’ to museums of ethnography is the constitution of their holdings into museum collections.

Indeed, most museums hold taboo collections – and while these collections might not be taboo for all, they will be for one person at least: ‘treasures’ robbed from tombs, objectifying photographs, accumulations of human remains, colonial or Nazi loots, scandalous paintings, sculptures or mannequins representing naked people, and the list could go on.

In the context of museums, something taboo can be an artefact that is considered secret-sacred by the people it originally belonged to and was made by: an artwork that represents something violent or deemed shocking; both the exhibition and the holding of human remains; the unlawful acquisitions of ‘objects’ (i.e. stolen, looted) which make them taboo for the history they depict as tangible proofs of the atrocities committed under oppressive regimes.

² I choose to talk of ‘objects’ because this classification is itself European – they are more than mere objects for their communities of origin.

However, the taboo of artworks and artefacts can be restricted to a certain period. For example, *L'Origine du Monde* made by French painter Gustave Courbet in 1866 and depicting a close-up of a woman's vagina was certainly more of a taboo in the 19th century than it is today, but the opposite is true for artefacts which entered museums as colonial collections. Indeed, museums of ethnography have changed paradigm as time and provenance research, restitutions, collaborations and discussions with Indigenous people have all become priorities. As part of the enterprise to decolonise institutions, the approach to how items are displayed and how they should be displayed, or *not* displayed, has taken centre stage. But according to anthropologist Sharon Macdonald (1998), museums should address and question "who is empowered or disempowered by certain modes of display?" (p. 4).

Taking this statement as a starting point and examining specific examples, I will look at the different methods, processes and practices used by museums of ethnography to display artefacts which are considered taboo and reflect on what impact these choices might have on the communities where these artefacts originate from.

Secret-sacred

In both Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, "taboo" has a more specific meaning than in the West. For instance, in a Māori context, the Polynesian word *tapu* (taboo) is understood as "a non-ordinary, reserved, restricted, even forbidden and dangerous state, that is linked to the ancestral character of entities and places" (Decottignies-Renard, 2020, p. 79). Like the Polynesian word *tapu*, the concept of secret-sacred is used throughout Australia for 'objects' "defined as being ... 'restricted' due to their origin in closed, often male-only, traditional rituals and ceremonies" (Gibson, 2021, p. 103). In Australia, the implementation of numerous protocols and procedures around the lives of these 'objects' within museums allows for protecting "the confidentiality of these objects and ensuring their traditional exclusivity" (Gibson, 2021, p. 111). But while these policies are extensively used within Australian museums – especially considering restitution discussions – they mostly address who can access this material in storage, as their public exhibition cannot be considered. Although these discussions around the *accession* to secret-sacred material in Australia have been ongoing since the early 2000s, it is rather a debate around their *exhibition* which has been ongoing in Europe. According to French anthropologists Monique Jeudy-Ballini and Brigitte Derlon (2001), museums have two options regarding *tjuringa* (secret-sacred 'objects' of religious significance) or similar items: reconstitute them to their rightful owner or exhibit them – as exhibiting is the primary function of museums (p. 214).

Precisely because of their secret-sacred nature, artefacts such as *tjuringa* became must-have and must-see pieces for museums of ethnography. Wooden or stone 'objects' originating from Arrernte people in the Central Desert of Australia, *tjuringa* are making the link between humans and Alchera (the mythological time which is past, present and future at once – known in English as Dreaming) and are not meant to be seen by anyone but initiated men.

While these artefacts were 'casually' exhibited for many years, European museums only started to question their exhibition at the turn of the 21st century, and *tjuringa* have become artefacts with which museums have been experimenting with the various modes of display possible.

In 2001, contemporary French artist Marc Couturier partnered with the Musée national des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie (Paris) for the exhibition titled *Marc Couturier. Secrets*. Housed in the museum which preceded the musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, this exhibition made the news for its exhibition of *tjuringa*. In their display, it was only the shape of the *tjuringa* that could be seen. This choice was made between Couturier and Yves Le Fur, curator of the museum, who thought their ploy would work to be able to display what is not supposed to be seen. For them, what could not truly be seen is not seen and therefore respects the secret-sacred nature of the *tjuringa*. However, scholars John E. Stanton and Ghislaine Van Maanen strongly disagreed. They argued that it is more than just seeing this object that is dangerous for any non-initiated person:

any display of these objects is an offence against the Law of the Desert. Avoiding being in their direct physical proximity is essential to respect these sacred and highly secret items. (Stanton & Van Maanen, 2001, p. 201)

According to Stanton and Van Maanen (2001), it was nothing but “cultural arrogance” (p. 201) for this exhibition to exist at all. For Jeudy-Ballini, Derlon and curator Le Fur, it was a failure – according to their conception of the museum’s role – to not show certain typologies of ‘objects’ (Le Fur et al., 2001, p. 213). But what about the thousands of artefacts which never get shown because they are broken or not considered interesting or beautiful enough?

In the case of *tjuringa* and other secret-sacred ‘objects’, it is the *taboo* around seeing them that makes us want to see them even more. This is exactly what happened with this exhibition, as Couturier and Le Fur played with the idea of exhibiting what should stay hidden because they themselves were too eager to use these *tjuringa* because of the taboo around them. To return to Macdonald’s question, who was empowered by this mode of display other than the artist and the curator themselves? In an interview with Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini (Le Fur et al., 2001), Le Fur explained how, for him, there was no interest in reaching out to Aboriginal leaders to be granted permission for displaying the *tjuringa* because the probability of them truly understanding each other (linguistically speaking) was too low, even with the intervention of translators. Instead, Le Fur turned to museum professionals and academics in Australia who told him, “You’re in Europe so you can try”, giving him the validation he wanted (Le Fur et al., 2001, p. 213). In this case, not only was this exhibition going against Aboriginal principles, but the lack of consultation was a direct way for the museum to carry on with their chosen narrative by dismissing the voices of people who could have interfered.

Taking a very different approach to the exhibition *Marc Couturier. Secrets*, nearly 20 years later the museum der Kulturen in Basel (MKB, Switzerland) ‘presented’ a *tjuringa* in its exhibition, *Thirst for Knowledge Meets Collecting Mania*, between March 2019 and November 2020. At the centre of the MKB exhibition were ethical questions around the practice of collecting for museums and how this past practice of intense collecting must be addressed and questioned by museums. Many different typologies of artefacts were exhibited with several display choices to show the various aspects of museum collections, including the *tjuringa* held in its collection. While at the beginning of the 2000s in Paris the *tjuringa* were physically present and their shapes could be discerned with the play of lights, 20 years later in Basel, the *tjuringa* was absent, only ‘present’ through its label and an orange painted square in the case which marked its existence in the collections and

reinforced its absence in the exhibition space. Aware of the meaning of these ‘objects’ as well as of the changes in the politics of display, the MKB decided to address what was in their collection not by showing it but by telling its story. The label read as follow:

Many *tjurunga* were traded to museums across the world via the mission station in Hermannsburg, including to the MKB. Owing to their secret-sacred status many museums agreed already a while ago to no longer exhibit such objects. In recent years, claims to have the *tjurunga* returned to their home communities have increased markedly. The existence of the Basel *tjurunga* is known to the concerned community and we are in contact with their representatives. (Museum der Kulturen Basel, 2019, p. 9)

Through this display, and especially through the *tjuringa*’s label, the curators decided to put ethics and critical thinking at the centre of their museum, inherently changing the role of the museum from a place of seeing to a place of thinking. Furthermore, not only did the MKB show how stories can be told without the presence of ‘objects’, they also directly told the visitor the reason for the *tjuringa*’s absence from the exhibition and considered the wishes of the concerned community. Through such practice, MKB positioned itself as an institution which not only listens to the communities represented in their collection but also “shares the authority” of the narratives with them (Hullebroeck & Bertin, 2023).

Human remains

The collaboration of museums with communities has been ongoing for 30-40 years now (Karp, 1992; Peers & Brown, 2003; Boast, 2011), but for a long time the communities’ voices were often solely used to collect data on the collections. Fortunately, this has been changing and museums are now reaching out to communities to ask for advice on how to interact with and display collections, following the communities’ rules and protocols rather than those of the museum. In the 1980s, Native American leaders intervened in many museums across the United States and Canada to identify culturally sensitive material and human remains (Ferguson et al., 1996) which led to the adoption of the NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) law in 1990. At a similar time, *moko moko* (Māori tattooed heads) were being progressively returned to Aotearoa/New Zealand from European institutions (Peltier & Melandri, 2012). Both cases really set precedent for museums to work hand-in-hand with communities when dealing with human remains and culturally sensitive material. First initiated by the former settler colonies, the work around the deaccession and restitution of human remains is still very much in progress, especially in Europe where this work truly started in the past 20 years.

For example, acting in conjunction with the movement to decolonise museum practice (Van Broekhoven, 2019), the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) in Oxford, UK, worked on redisplaying the *tsantsa* (shrunken human and animal heads originating from Ecuador) in their permanent gallery, bringing the display more in line with the ICOM Code of Ethics of Museums, article 4.3:

Human remains and materials of sacred significance must be displayed in a manner consistent with professional standards and, where known, taking into account the interests and beliefs of members of the community, ethnic or religious groups from whom the objects originated. They must be presented with great tact and respect for the feelings of human dignity held by all peoples. (2017, p. 25)

Before the redisplay, the PRM was in breach of the ICOM code of ethics and of UK regulations on the exhibition of sensitive material. Furthermore, public studies proved that “visitors often saw the museum’s displays of human remains, and Shuar *tsantsa* and Naga trophy skulls in particular, as a testament to other cultures being ‘savage,’ ‘primitive’ or ‘gruesome’” (Van Broekhoven, 2023, p. 209). All these elements pointed towards the redesign of the case, and consulting the Shuar and Ashuar communities was of utmost importance. Thanks to the collaboration of the PRM with both communities and scholars on “Proyecto *tsantsa*” (2017-ongoing), the case *Treatment of Dead Enemies* was finally transformed in July 2020 by the museum team to not only comply with the wishes of the community but to also act as a teaching tool for visitors (Pitt Rivers Museum). Previously displaying several *tsantsa*, the case has been emptied and covered in a blue printed vinyl which reads “Have you come to see the ‘shrunk heads?’”, directly questioning the past exhibition practice of the museum to the visitor. Like the MKB did with the *tjuringa* in Basel, the PRM decided to make visible through text alone what once was on display and still is part of their collection, but they went further than the MKB and implemented an informative and educational display.

The case now displays several texts and graphs which address the display of human remains within the museum, including a map of the world specifying the quantity of human remains held in the collection and where they originate from. But they also discuss other case studies of human remains in the museum, like that of a group of 18 Aboriginal Australian human remains which were repatriated in 2020. With this explicative display, the museum shows that it is more than a space of “*conServation*” and is rather a space of “*conVervation*” (Snoep, 2020, p. 334) where the research and questioning carried internally is also shared with the public. The implementation of this display in the museum shows how the very process of *altering* museum displays is not an end in itself but a way for museums to interact with their audiences about their decolonial engagements. While some visitors think of object removal and return as nothing but loss and erasure, PRM director Laura N. K. Van Broekhoven (2023) says it is a process that allows for the generation of knowledge of “higher scientific value” because it is initiated by “originating communities” and conducted “collaboratively and jointly” (p. 220).

Collaborating with museums is the core practice of Māori artist George Nuku, whose works are often exhibited in European museums of ethnography. For Nuku, working with museums is a question of mutual trust and respect, which is a tacit pact made between him, “the institution of George Nuku”, and the host institution (Blumauer & Nuku, 2022, p. 103). After more than 30 years of museum interventions, Nuku’s work has more than once shook museums from the inside out for the task force it required from both museum staff and external volunteers. But while working on the exhibition project *Oceans. Collections. Reflections.*, which opened in June 2022 at the Welmuseum Wien (Vienna, Austria), Nuku started to shake things up even before he physically invested in the museum.

Early on, discussions took place between Nuku and the museum team to decide whether it would be possible to show a *moko mokai* in the exhibition. *Moko mokai* are of highly sensitive nature: they are the tattooed heads of Māori men which were both stolen by and sold to Europeans during the 19th and 20th centuries before ending up in the collections of numerous museums of ethnography in Europe. As previously discussed, most of them were repatriated to Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 2000s, including the one that

was in the Weltmuseum Wien's collection, which was returned to Te Papa Tongarewa Museum (Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand) in 2015. For his exhibition in Vienna, Nuku identified the *moko mokai* which were still held in European institutions, but after long discussions with the Weltmuseum Wien, the museum team decided not to carry on with this project. After returning the *moko mokai* they had in their collection to Te Papa, the Weltmuseum Wien felt that showing another *moko mokai* could have interfered with their "inter-institutional relationship" (Blumauer & Nuku, 2022, p. 105). But for Nuku, more than what could seem to be a provocation or even an outrage, exhibiting a *moko mokai* is a way to "explain to both ourselves and others why we [Māori people] sold our grandfathers" (Blumauer & Nuku, 2022, p. 105). He further argues that, for him as a Māori expatriate in Europe, *moko mokai* are his "company, both figuratively and literally" for "they are the only others in this vicinity besides myself [Nuku] with a carved face" (Blumauer & Nuku, 2022, p. 106).

Additionally, *moko mokai* are some of the most *tapu* of Māori heirlooms, for they are human remains, which, as with the *tsantsa*, is a reason in itself to not display them unless accompanied by communities and appropriate protocols. But according to Nuku (personal communication, 28 February 2023), museums are exercising a "selective *tapu*" where only certain types of artefacts or remains are deemed too taboo to be shown based on European principles and fears. While showing *moko mokai* is not an option, the exhibition of items such as *patu* (clubs) is not questioned nearly in the same way by museums even though they too are considered *tapu* in Māori culture. So, would a *moko mokai* reproduction made from sculpted and painted polystyrene be considered too taboo by the museum for its direct referencing of 'real' *moko mokai* and their attached political agenda? It seems like it was not, as this is what was finally displayed in the penultimate all-black room of the exhibition *Oceans. Collections. Reflections*. Here, the visitor encountered this 'decoy' *moko mokai*, which, while not the 'real thing', confronted the visitor as "a representation of the ancestors" (Blumauer & Nuku, 2022, p. 106). Ultimately, the story that Nuku wanted to convey *did* transpire but by devious means.

Consent

So far, I have attempted to consider examples spanning 20 years' time, which not only show different modes of display but also the different methods used by museums that resulted in these very modes of display. Whether it was in Paris, in Basel, in Vienna or in Oxford, museums always consulted people external to the museum to either help them in their reflection or validate their project involving taboo artefacts or remains. To conclude this article, I want to look at a final museum practice which is directly impacting the museum display.

In Berlin, a new museum opened its doors in 2021: the Humboldt Forum. Overtly criticised from the beginning of the project, it has been under constant public scrutiny since its opening. In 2002, the rebuilding of the Berlin Palace (former residence of the House of Hohenzollern, 1143-1918) was approved to house the collections of the museum of ethnology and of the museum for Asian cultures. After this decision, questions arose around how this location could be a suitable place for the exhibition of 'objects' which were obtained during the colonial period. Throughout the permanent exhibition space, several tools have been implemented to help the visitor both understand and question why these artefacts are part of German collections. However, I would like to focus on one of the museum's temporary exhibitions.

Opened in 2022 and running until June 2024, the exhibition *Exhibiting. Omissions. Objects from Tanzania and the Colonial Archive* is presented on the second floor of the museum alongside the African collections from the Ethnologisches museum. Focussing on the Ethnologisches museum's Tanzanian collection, which is comprised of around 10,000 'objects', the exhibition "questions, remembers and reconsiders the museum's objects and their stories" (Humboldt Forum) to unveil the taboo of colonisation. At the core of this exhibition is a motto: "No Consent-No Object?". While the idea of consent is familiar and rather common when discussing people's bodies, especially in relation to sexual assaults, it is far from usual in the museum world when it comes to the exhibition of 'objects'. This motto was used as a leading principle throughout the process of the exhibition. In the same way as 'no means no', anything but 'yes' also means no, and unless the Tanzanian team who works with the Humboldt forum is to say yes, the museum will not be displaying any of the Tanzanian artefacts in the collection.

With this principle in place, we can say that the museum team works 'positively' and not 'negatively': rather than exhibiting things which members of the Tanzanian community might want to *remove*, they work hand-in-hand with the National Museum of Tanzania to *build* the content of the exhibition. Moreover, this exhibition was conceived as a 'work in progress' and is visibly so. When I first visited the exhibition in November 2022, the walls were covered with "under discussion – coming summer 2023" stickers over text placement displayed throughout. A few months later, in July 2023, the exhibition was completed with the artistic intervention *Mingled Living Forces* in collaboration with the students of the Weißensee Academy of Art. However, while the exhibition was evolving through time and further content was being added, none of the 'objects' discussed have been physically exhibited in the exhibition so far. In their place, 'surrogate objects' were made so that the visitor could get a sense of the materiality and size of the originals. For the *Kigiilya* sculpture for example, red was used on a white 3D-printed sculpture to highlight traces of damage, showing to the visitor the violence that the sculpture went through before arriving in the collections of the museum in Berlin.

Several interactive spaces are also available in the exhibition alongside pink-coloured panels and left-blank text surfaces to invite the visitor to think about the place of these archives and 'objects' in the museum today but also to visually highlight the omissions surrounding these colonial and taboo collections. By playing on visual codes such as highlighting certain in-text words in yellow, the exhibition truly posits itself as an 'in progress' project that does not claim to have all the answers at once. With this visual claim, the museum shows that it is not always the end result that is important but rather the process. Furthermore, by not giving an answer or a single defined narrative with this exhibition, the museum is refusing to position themselves as *the* voice on Tanzanian 'objects' in their collections. Rather, they are giving time – often lacking in museums for the true development of projects – for their collaboration with Tanzanian partners to bring answers.

Conclusions

When considering one of the first questions asked in this article, "who is empowered or disempowered by certain modes of display?" (Macdonald, 1998, p. 4), it is also important to consider "who is charged with representing a culture?" (Baxandall, 1991, p. 39), and the answer to this second question is often the museum. Whether the museum institution takes on this journey alone or accompanied by community partners is the museum's

decision. As seen with the examples chosen for this article, museums of ethnography are now tending to systematically involve the communities in deciding how their culture will be displayed in the museum. However, as seen with the exhibition *Marc Couturier. Secrets.* at the beginning of the 2000s, this has not always been the case. Whether it was to satisfy their own curatorial agenda or work towards the decolonisation of the museum, the choices of display in the museum became responsible for the institution's image, rather than the research conducted internally. However, the very processes which led to these choices being made are essential to understanding the changes in museum practice.

This article started with an example where the voice of Aboriginal leaders was not censored but rather non-existent, and while it was not 'present' in Basel either, the label did mention that discussions were ongoing between the MKB and the community where the *tjuringa* originated. This statement, while minimal, publicly showed that what is presented (or not presented) was based on the communities' protocols rather than the museum's. Similarly, the collaboration between PRM and Shuar and Ashuar communities helped the museum to remove the *tsantsa* from display as well as create a new educational and informative display for the visitor. But is there a limit to the authority of communities prevailing over that of the museum? While Nuku's exhibition in Vienna was as much a collaboration between a museum institution and a member of a community as was the case in Oxford, Nuku's desire to reinstate the once-removed *moko mokai* inside the museum walls to be seen by all was turned down by the Weltmuseum Wien. In this case, Nuku's authority was challenged and overturned by the ultimate authority when it comes to *moko mokai*, the Te Papa Tongarewa. Here, the communal and institutional prevailed over the personal, somewhat allowing the Weltmuseum Wien to not take risks in exhibiting *the* taboo of all taboo.

While collaborations and ongoing relationships with communities are certainly essential for museums of ethnography to be institutions of the present rather than of the past, it is interesting to consider the concept of consent as a powerful tool for communities to have the ultimate authority over the storytelling created by the museum through display. The consent tool is certainly effective in Berlin for the Humboldt Forum to address the colonial taboo fearlessly, as it is the national Tanzanian institution that oversees giving *their* consent, granting the decisional power to an institution over an individual. The necessity for the voices of communities to exist within museums of ethnography is undeniable, but they are often univocal and institution led, denying the singularity of positions, opinions and decision-making.

References

- Baxandall, M. (1991). Exhibiting intention: Some preconditions of the visual display of culturally purposeful objects. In I. Karp & S. D. Lavine (Eds.), *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display* (pp. 39-47). Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Boast, R. (2011). Neocolonial collaboration: Museum as contact zone revisited. *Museum Anthropology* 34(1), 56-70.
- Bodenstein, F., Oțoiu, D., & Troelenberg, E.-M. (2022). Contested holdings: Museum collections in political, epistemic and artistic processes of return. Berghahn.
- Blumauer, R., Nuku, G., & Fine, J. (Eds.). (2022). *George Nuku. Oceans. Collections. Reflections.* Weltmuseum Wien.

- Debrosse, C. (2022). Museums of ethnography and world cultures as taboo spaces. In M. E. Weiser, M. Bertin, & A. Leschenko (Eds.), *Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory. Materials for a discussion* (pp. 26-30). ICOFOM. icofom.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2022/08/taboo_in_museology.pdf
- Decottignies-Renard, L. (2020). L'art de tisser des liens chez les Māori de Nouvelle-Zélande Aotearoa : Analyse des relations entre les Māori et leurs ancêtres par l'intermédiaire des manteaux māori (kākahu) en qualité de trésors ancestraux (taonga). [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. École doctorale Sciences humaines et sociales – Perspectives européennes (Strasbourg).
- Derlon, B. & Jeudy-Ballini, M. (2001). Le culte muséal de l'objet sacré. *Gradhiva*, 30-31, 203-212. doi.org/10.3406/gradh.2001.1275
- Ferguson, T. J., Anyon, R., & Ladd, E. J. (1996). Repatriation at the pueblo of Zuni: Diverse solutions to complex problems. *American Indian Quarterly* 20(2), 251-273.
- Gibson, J. M. (2021). Aboriginal secret-sacred objects, their values and future prospects. In H. Morphy & R. McKenzie (Eds.), *Museums, societies and the creation of value* (pp. 103-122). Routledge.
- Hullebroeck, M. & Bertin, M. (2023, upcoming). Musée relationnel. In F. Bodenstein, D. Otoiu, & M. von Oswald (Dirs.), *Traces. Les manifestations du (dé)colonial au musée*. Horizons d'attente.
- Humboldt Forum. (2023). Exhibiting. Omissions. www.humboldtforum.org/en/programm/dauerangebot/exhibition/leerstellen-ausstellen-51532/
- ICOM. (2017). *Code of ethics for museums*. ICOM. icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf
- Jolly, M. (2011). Becoming a “new” museum? Contesting oceanic visions at musée du quai Branly. *The Contemporary Pacific* 23(1), 108-139.
- Karp, I. & Lavine, S. (Eds.). (1991). *Exhibiting cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display*. Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Karp, I., Mullen Kreamer, C., & Lavine, S. D. (Eds.). (1992). *Museums and communities: The politics of public culture*. Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kimmelman, M. (2006, July 2). A heart of darkness in a city of light. *New York Times*. www.nytimes.com/2006/07/02/arts/design/02kimm.html
- Le Fur, Y., Derlon, B., & Jeudy-Ballini, M. (2001). Exposer le secret sans le dévoiler. Un entretien avec Yves le fur commissaire de l'exposition. *Gradhiva*, 30-31, 213-216. doi.org/10.3406/gradh.2001.1276
- Macdonald, S. (Ed.). (1998). *The politics of display: Museums science culture*. Routledge.
- Mairesse, F. & International Council of Museums. (2023). *Dictionary of museology*. Routledge. doi.org/10.4324/9781003206040
- Museum der Kulturen Basel. (2019). *Thirst for knowledge meets collecting mania*. [Exhibiting visitor guide]. Museum der Kulturen, Basel, Switzerland.
- Peers, L. & Brown, A. K. (Eds.). (2003). *Museums and source communities: A Routledge reader*. Routledge.

- Peltier, P. & Mélandri, M. (2012). Chronologie concernant les têtes tatouées et momifiées māori ou toi moko (aussi connues sous le terme de moko mokai). *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 134, 28-30.
- Pitt Rivers Museum. (2023). *Shrunken heads*. www.prm.ox.ac.uk/shrunken-heads
- Price, S. (2007). Paris primitive: Jacques Chirac's museum on the quai Branly. University of Chicago Press.
- Ryan, J., Batty, P., & Musée du quai Branly (Paris). (2012). *Aux sources de la peinture aborigène australie - tjukurrtjanu*. Musée du quai Branly & Somogy éditions d'art.
- Snoep, N. (2020). Suggestions for a Post-Museum. In M. Von Oswald & J. Tinius (Eds.), *Across anthropology: Troubling colonial legacies, museums, and the curatorial* (pp. 324-335). Leuven University Press.
- Stanton, J. E. & Van Maanen, G. (2001). Sur l'exposition marc couturier secrets. *Gradhiva* 30-31, 199-202. doi.org/10.3406/gradh.2001.1274
- Tezoto de Lima, M. (2022). Repatriation: Both a taboo and a trending topic. In M. E. Weiser, M. Bertin, & A. Leschenko (Eds.), *Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory. Materials for a discussion*. (pp. 106-109). ICOFOM. icofom.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2022/08/taboo_in_museology.pdf
- Thomas, N. (2016). No normal – a foreword. In K. von Zinnenburg Carroll (Ed.), *The importance of being anachronistic: Contemporary Aboriginal art and museum reparations*. Discipline.
- Van Broekhoven, L. (2019). On decolonizing the museum in practice. *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 32, 1-8.
- Van Broekhoven, L. (2023). Entangled entitlements and Shuar tsantsa (shrunken heads). In T. Biers & C. K. Stringer (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of museums, heritage and death*. Routledge.

Repatriation: A trending taboo in journalistic media

Mariana Tezoto de Lima¹

Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the University of São Paulo – São Paulo, Brazil

Abstract

One of the most stigmatized subjects in museology is the repatriation of artifacts, a topic historically silenced and ignored. Despite being a taboo, it has recently become a topic that has been in evidence not only in the museological field but also in the public sphere due to an increased media coverage. The present article, based on the research I've conducted, addresses the controversy of a trending taboo by tackling the reasons that create and perpetuate the stigma surrounding repatriation, understanding how the taboo is being maintained, and examining its media presence to understand the relations between the media, museums, and repatriation processes.

Keywords: repatriation, collections, colonialism, media

Résumé

Rapatriement : un tabou tendance dans les médias journalistiques.

L'un des sujets les plus stigmatisés en muséologie est le rapatriement des artefacts, un sujet historiquement passé sous silence et ignoré. En dépit d'être un tabou, il est récemment devenu un sujet qui a été mis en évidence non seulement dans le domaine muséologique sinon aussi dans la sphère publique en raison d'une couverture médiatique accrue. Le présent article, basé sur la recherche que j'ai menée, aborde la controverse d'un tabou en vogue en abordant les raisons qui créent et perpétuent la stigmatisation entourant le rapatriement, en comprenant comment le tabou est maintenu et en examinant sa présence médiatique dans afin de comprendre les relations entre les médias, les musées et les processus de rapatriement.

Mots clé : rapatriement, collections, colonialisme, médias

Despite the stigma around the topic, there has been, more than ever before, substantial discussion surrounding the repatriation of musealized artifacts inside and outside the museological community in the last few years. The increased attention to the topic can be demonstrated by at least 230 online journal articles that were published on the matter just

¹ Email: MarianaTezoto@gmail.com

in 2021. These data show a notable rise in public interest surrounding a debate that used to be restricted to academic studies, with a growing presence in the media.

The discourse about repatriation might be currently in a spotlight, but its origins remount to the 20th century with demands to return war spoils in World War I (Costa, 2018) and especially with the independence of former colonies in Africa and their fight for the repossession of important cultural patrimony that had been taken by colonizers (Muller, 2007). The demands were not only for the return of what is often “the only resource that some groups have in order to know an important part of their cultural history” (Borges & Botelho, 2010, p. 7) but also a way to react to coloniality (Bueno, 2019). By being in possession of their own historical and cultural artifacts, the original communities can access their heritage and rewrite their history from another point of view (Costa, 2018), thus empowering themselves.

These historical claims have risen to the public debate on a worldwide scale after decades of being neglected and ostracized, and they are now one of the most discussed yet controversial topics in museology and the media. Nonetheless, this scenario raises a few important questions: how can the repatriation of musealized artifacts be both a taboo and a trending topic? How is this subject being reported by the media? And what are the possible interests involved in the resurfacing of a discussion that has been ostracized until very recently?

To answer these questions, I conducted a study about the media repercussions of the ongoing repatriation processes. This research investigated the relationship between the processes of repatriation and the journalistic media by analyzing 350 articles on journalistic websites about international repatriations of cultural, archaeological, ethnological, and artistic artifacts published between 2009 and 2021 in Portuguese, English, Spanish and French.

As a starting point for my analysis, I noted that the journalistic media plays an important part within the various processes that constitute the repatriation of museum artifacts. Based on this observation, I then questioned the ways in which these two elements are related to each other as well as the consequences of this association. From my study, I argue that the media plays a double role in repatriation processes: the first as a propaganda tool favorable to the holders of other’s patrimony, here called “returners”; the second as amplifiers of requests for repatriation and the claims of countries whose musealized heritage is outside their territory, the “reclaimers.”

This discussion has its relevance in the field of museums and museology, especially given the rise of the discussions around repatriation outside of the museological community. Museum collections have frequently been wielded as instruments of colonial subjugation, propagating narratives of supremacy and dominance over other cultures – an outlook that has only begun to be critically reevaluated and actively challenged within the past few decades. In this way, it is important to discuss and research the way in which reparative actions, more specifically repatriation, have been mediatized since the media acts as a relevant agent that influences the discussion around repatriation.

In this article, I will begin the discussion by listing and evaluating the factors that contribute to stigmatizing repatriation processes, the ways in which this taboo is maintained as well as how it is being dealt with. Once the stigma itself is understood, I will examine the

ways in which repatriation became a trending subject and how it is being portrayed in the media by discussing the results found in my study. Finally, I will consider the possible interests behind the sudden popularization of the subject.

The taboo of repatriation

The stigmatizing of repatriation and its perpetuation

The act of repatriating a collection or artifact that resides in a museum implies that it has once been taken from another country or community, which oftentimes happened in ways that were unethical, violent, or illegal. One of the main factors that enabled the removal of objects of their original context was colonialism, which is now a difficult and sensitive legacy that both former colonies and colonizers must deal with. In recent years, some institutions began addressing the controversies surrounding the acquisition of their collections, such as the Africa Museum in Belgium, which dedicated a page on its website to articles that discuss the provenance of some of the objects in their collection and another page to articles about Belgium's colonial history.

Following this tendency, the British Museum has included on their website a page dedicated to their "Collecting Histories," in which they mention colonial and missionary activity alongside conflicts as factors which enabled the possession of some artifacts by the institution. It should be noted that, despite the museum's efforts in acknowledging the wrongful and violent ways in which part of their collection has been formed, the institution in other parts of their website also utilizes language that camouflages possible conflicts. On their page "People behind the collections", when commenting on Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the institution opts for broader and lighter terms such as "acquire" and "collect," avoiding the mention of more impactful verbs like "loot," for example.

On a similar note, the Quai Branly Museum presents a webpage dedicated to the history of the museum's collections. Although the website mentions "colonial expansion" as a reason for the possession of other people's artifacts, it fails to deepen the harmful and violent implications of such "expansion" as well as the often-unequal transactions involved in the taking of the artifacts. A more detailed explanation can only be found via downloading their booklet on the research on the history of the museum's collections, in which they utilize words such as "legitimacy," "violence," "war loot," and "restitution" to describe the context involving the acquisition of the collections.

Oftentimes this violent colonial past isn't properly addressed by those who were responsible for it, frequently being brushed over or not even mentioned. One of the examples of this is the Louvre's website that – despite having a tool that allows the user to individually consult the origins of each artifact – has no mention of the ways in which their artifacts from Africa, Asia and America have been brought to the institution besides a brief mention of their previously belonging to the Dauphin Museum. Thus, by avoiding a direct discussion about the historical effects of colonialism, the debate concerning the material heritage that was decontextualized is silenced, making it a taboo topic.

To legitimize this omission, Western museums support themselves on what is called "museum neutrality," which is the idea that museums and their exhibitions are the epitome of civilized culture and are exempt from political, historical, social, or economic issues (Shiraiwa & Zabalueva, 2021), and thus there should be no need to address the way that

collections were formed or acquired. However, the idea of neutrality not only ignores the social and historical factors involving the acquisition of the collections but also the fact that by being in possession of such artifacts these museums are in control of an expressive part of the history, memory, and identity of other groups. By telling the history of the “other,” museums often perpetuate colonialist and paternalist attitudes by centralizing themselves and their narratives in exhibits (Almendra, 2016).

This omission can even more be dangerous because “when presented again in the museum without precise references about the situation of the collection, but based on the new informational dispositions that are conferred on them, the musealized objects are deprived of the political implications of their past” (Brulon, 2020, p. 14). Thus, this process of decontextualizing artifacts from their history of acquisition is yet another way of erasing and minimizing the violent colonial past behind certain collections and of further stigmatizing this sensitive heritage.

The reasons for avoiding discussion of repatriation and acting on repatriating can be understood when noting that returning an artifact is not just the act of giving it back to its rightful owners but involves a big change in a museum’s structure, policy, and philosophy. As Aïsha Azoulay (2019) said, “looted objects did not just happen into cultural institutions but are constitutive of the various scholarly, curatorial, and professional procedures” (p. 64). That is, those collections are a major part of the institutional structure and so, by repatriating them, museums would have to change their whole museological operational chain and how they are related to these artifacts (Borges & Botelho, 2010).

The stigma surrounding repatriation is evidence of an unspoken and undeclared fear of some Western museums that the loss of part of their collection could lead to a loss of their importance and status as an institution. That is the case of the self-designated “Universal Museums,” which define themselves as institutions that possess a vast collection of artifacts and that have a strong international presence and influence, serving “not just the citizens of one nation but the people of every nation” (State Hermitage Museum, 2004).

By defining themselves as “universal,” these museums are implicitly claiming that their collections are somehow more relevant or impactful than others, which, in turn, justifies the possession of others’ objects. In this way, these museums reinforce the power structures that were responsible for the original removal of the artifacts from their homeland, with the justification that an object in a museum located far from its original context is somehow more beneficial than the return of the artifact to its original community. Thus, to protect themselves, universal museums tend to avoid critical discussion on the matter of repatriation and are one of the main contributors to the taboo of repatriation.

Moreover, in an attempt to legitimize the possession of artifacts that were taken in dubious conditions, museums claim that the countries or communities of origin of such artifacts can’t take care of their own patrimony, thus justifying the reason for their guardianship. This was the case of the African Museum in Tervuren, whose director, in an interview to *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, spoke against the return of musealized objects to countries that don’t have appropriate infrastructure.

The media also contributes to spreading this fear, publishing articles that reinforce the idea that Global South museums and communities are not capable of taking care of the artifacts that they themselves created and that they have traditionally been preserving. In

an article published in December 2021, *The Conversation* cited a complaint by a Nigerian author of lack of investment in the cultural sector to feed into the idea that perhaps the artifacts would not be “safe” in their place of origin.

While the conservation infrastructure and necessary conditions of care of the artifacts should be considered when discussing the return to their rightful country or community, what is often not considered in the discussion is that the inadequate conditions in which some museums of former colonies find themselves are the result of colonization itself. Thus, by defending the idea that Western countries should be taking care of objects instead of the original communities that produced them, major Western museums reproduce the paternalist discourse used by colonizers (Bueno, 2019) – that is, the idea that Western civilizations have superior technical capacities and means to handle material heritage than traditional communities.

Handling the repatriation stigma

While the discussion of repatriation has become more prominent in the media, more conservative museums are still either refusing to properly acknowledge the issue or even opposing acting on it. On the other hand, some other museums that have a more dynamic and open-minded approach are opening to the idea of repatriation and of conjoint curating. This recent change in the way some Western museums are handling the pressure for repatriation is not by chance but rather the product of an ongoing and inevitable change in the way collections are being discussed that is progressively pressuring these institutions, who are then faced with the need to position themselves in the debate. As a result, there is not only one response but various divergent initiatives that are being taken.

In this sense, there has been a growing trend of museums in the process of rethinking their conducts and strategies and gradually making changes in relation to the display and ownership of wrongfully acquired artifacts. One way that this can be attested is the fact that, as previously demonstrated, institutions are starting to be more transparent as to how their collections were acquired, often dedicating a section of their websites or exhibitions to explaining the provenance of said collection. Despite the variation in the efficacy of such efforts, what they all have in common is the fact that they are the result of not only the emergence of new studies regarding the topic of repatriation but also of the resurgence of a discussion that has long been silenced and purposely left aside.

Repatriation processes and their media repercussions

Having discussed the agents, factors, and actions that contribute to the stigmatizing of repatriation processes as well as the ways in which it is being maintained or fought against, it is possible to tackle the following question: Why has the discussion of repatriation, once silenced and restricted, become a rising topic of public discourse in the last few years? To understand the popularization of the discussion, I have conducted research on the repatriation processes and their media repercussions in partnership with the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the University of São Paulo, mentored by Marília Xavier Cury.

As aforementioned, I have selected, read and analyzed 350 news articles published on journalistic websites that reported on the processes of repatriation of historical, archaeological, ethnological, artistic and cultural artifacts. I then opted to utilize those

that referred to international cases of repatriation between different countries that were published between 2009 and 2021. For a broader approach, I read articles published in four languages: English (36.5% of the found articles), Portuguese (32.6%), French (25.5%), and Spanish (5.4%). Using predefined keywords in each of these languages within the selected timespan, I gathered the articles and created a spreadsheet with the main information to be extracted from each in order to standardize and systematize the collected data.

I used the Google advanced search tool to maximize the accuracy and efficiency of the search. Using the filters for news articles and for dates, it was possible to carry out a precise filter of articles that were published in each year. It is necessary to point out, however, that despite the use of the advanced search tool, the results found are conditioned by the website's algorithm. In this way, it is possible that more recent articles were more favored in search results and that some results were also biased by the algorithm.

Although the subject of repatriation has been present in online articles since the late 2000s, I registered an exponential and constant growth in the number of published online articles about the repatriation of musealized artifacts starting in 2018. Of the 350 articles I examined, more than half were published in the past five years. From 2018 to 2020, there was an increase of around 36% in the number of online published media articles related to the issue of repatriation. In 2021 alone there were more than 230 journalistic publications on the topic. These numbers are strong indicators that the media acts as an important agent that influences and foments the discussion around repatriation inside and outside museums. Because of the numerous articles, what was once a taboo subject is now an object of discussion even to those outside the museological community.

Regarding the content present in the articles, the research showed some gaps in the information provided regarding the repatriation processes, from data that either weren't mentioned or that were superficially and indirectly cited. As an example, on most occasions (53.2%), the existence of a repatriation request is not mentioned. However, when it is mentioned, most publications make explicit reference to it (35.2%). Although in most articles (41.5%) the reclaimers are explicitly or implicitly cited as the agents who take the initiative for repatriation, there is a significant percentage of articles that do not even mention from which sector the initiative for repatriation arises (38.5%). Only in 15% of cases is the initiative indicated as coming from the returner.

This absence or scarcity of data about requests for repatriation makes the repatriation appear to have occurred in a historical, political and social vacuum, contributing to the decontextualization of the historical processes of the struggles faced by the reclaimers. Not mentioning the existence of a request for repatriation minimizes the agency of the peoples, communities, and countries that have had their heritage usurped and that constantly fight for the return of their assets. In addition, by hiding the origin of the repatriation initiative, these repatriation processes are decontextualized, depoliticized and reconfigured in a manner that the average reader might understand that the returnees took the initiative of returning the artifacts spontaneously, not as a result of historical fights and claims.

What further confirms the colonialist character in the repatriation relations is that the three reclaimers that were the most cited in the articles studied are all countries in Africa: Nigeria, Benin and the Democratic Republic of Congo; while the three most mentioned returners were, in order, France, Germany, and the British Museum. These

data demonstrate how much repatriation processes are closely linked to colonialism, since the processes usually involve former colonies that claim the return of artifacts usurped by their former colonizers.

Journalistic media's double agency

After exposing and discussing the quantitative and qualitative data extracted from the analysis of the articles, I will dwell on the central question of the research: the double agency of the media on the repatriation processes. This will be done based on my research thesis, in which I argue that the media acts both as a propaganda tool favorable to the returners and as a reverberator of the reclaimers' revindications.

To delve into media agency, I examined the perspective that was favored in each article, in addition to the other data previously presented. Several factors went into defining that favored perspective, including among others the omissions or presence of information, the choice of words, and the agents and events mentioned. When analyzed together, these factors characterize an article as favoring the perspective of the claimer, the perspective of the returner, or as having an undefined position.

The verification of this category presented an intriguing result: while a significant portion of articles (42.5%) favor the perspective of the reclaimers, the second most favored perspective is that of the returners (37.6%), marking a mere 5% distinction between them. This minimal difference in percentage allows us to state that, although the tendency is to favor the struggles and demands of the reclaimers, the issue of repatriation continues to be controversial and polarizing. Given this observation, I will discuss the ways in which the media favors each side of the discussion as well as the arguments used to defend each position.

Propaganda for returners

One of the ways in which the media influences the repatriation processes is by producing propaganda benefitting the countries who withhold other's patrimony. To favor the returners, articles often omit the origin of the initiative, that is, what country, museum, or organization first sought to reclaim the artifact(s) in question. Alongside this omission, other data related to the repatriation process is often not reported, such as the existence of a request for repatriation, as seen in 53.2% of the articles that were studied. These neglected data can, and often do, deceive the reader by leading them to believe that the action of repatriating was a mere act of benevolence from the returners.

That was the case with some articles reporting on the repatriation of 26 artifacts from Benin that were then situated in the Quai Branly Museum. While some articles published in the French press, like RFI and *Le Parisien*, had omitted the origin of the repatriation initiative and led the reader to understand that France had been responsible for it, other articles, like one published in Africanews, were clear in mentioning that Benin had requested the return of their artifacts in 2016 and that France was only acting several years after the claim.

Furthermore, the media also tends to avoid the term "repatriation," instead substituting it for other softer and more impartial terms, such as "restitution" or "return," or even utilizing quotes to question or critique the usage of a verb that designates the questionable,

illegal or violent ways in which an object has been taken from its original place. As an example, the British news outlet *The Telegraph* published an article in December 2021 using the verb “steal” in quotes to critique the term used by Greece’s prime minister when referring to the Elgin Marbles. These are tactics used to improve the image of the returners and to avoid mentioning taboo terms and actions.

Grammatically, oftentimes articles are titled with phrases in which the subject is the returner and the indirect object is the reclamer, which again alludes to the false idea that the returners are the protagonists of the repatriation process. As an example, the Brazilian news outlet G1 published an article in 2021 titled “Alemanha começará a devolver ‘Bronzes de Benin’ à Nigéria em 2022” (“Germany will begin to return ‘Benin Bronzes’ to Nigeria in 2022”) that presents a misleading idea that Germany, not Benin, is the country that took the initiative to repatriate.

In a similar fashion, an article published in the French journal *Le Figaro*, titled “L’Allemagne s’engage à rendre une partie de ses bronzes du Bénin” (“Germany pledges to return some of its Benin bronzes”), explicitly mentions the context in which the Benin Bronzes were taken but fails to mention Nigeria’s revindication efforts for the repatriation of the artifacts. This omission, when added to the title choice, leads the reader to the conclusion that Germany is the one who took the initiative to return the artifacts on a whim. The lack of mentions or interviews with Nigerian official representatives also adds up to the exclusion of the reclamer’s narrative and valorization of the returner’s image.

Amplification of reclaimers’ demands

However, besides favoring the returners, the media also acts in support of those whose patrimony is out of their domains. That is done by amplifying the voices of reclaimers and historicizing the discussion by pointing out the past and present colonialist attitudes embedded in museums. For instance, there is an increasing number of articles that mention the violent colonial and war contexts in which most of the artifacts were taken: 75.3% of articles explicitly mention the context of acquisition, compared to 8% of implicit mentions and 16.7% of non-mentions.

By mentioning the often unequal, violent and illegal ways in which the artifacts were taken, the discussion gains historical background and context, thus providing the reader with the real dimensions of a discussion that is the result of centuries of political and historical disputes. Giving the reader deeper knowledge regarding the history behind the claims that are being made, the pro-repatriation argument is strengthened. Additionally, by rightfully appointing the reclaimers as the party that initiates the repatriation process, the media also reaffirms and reinforces their agency and autonomy while reverberating and strengthening their reclaims.

That said, it needs to be noted that while repatriation initiatives on the part of returners are generally praised, the requests of reclaimers are not valued to the same extent by the media. Over half the articles (53.2%) do not mention the existence of a repatriation request, compared to 35.3% of explicit mentions and 11.5% of implicit mentions. The impacts are such that while an image of benevolent countries and museums is built and disseminated, countries, peoples and institutions in need of their artifacts remain having their demands ostracized by the media.

Despite its dual role in supporting both reclaimers and returners, the media often leans towards promoting the interests of prominent Western museums, oftentimes in a very subtle way, as seen with the small percentage margin that separates the favored parties in articles. This perpetuates a paternalistic and Eurocentric perspective, aligning with the viewpoints of those who resist repatriation. Instead of prioritizing the voices of reclaimers or impartially highlighting both facets of the debate, the media often leans toward amplifying the perspectives of returners, even in cases where they seemingly support the claimer's stance. This tendency often leads to the marginalization of those who have been unjustly stripped of their cultural treasures, overshadowing their voices and narratives.

The implications of the repatriation discussion and the interests behind it

Despite the current popularity of the repatriation discussions in the media and in the public eye, this debate has been part of political demands and museological studies for decades, especially in the countries most affected by colonial violences. That is, the discussion about the return of artifacts to their homeland has been present in many countries in the Global South but were often ignored and left aside in Global North institutions. Given that the subject's media relevance on a worldwide scale is so recent, it is pertinent to question the reasons why a discussion that is decades old is only now becoming a trending topic as well as investigate any possible hidden interests surrounding the discussion that could also explain the sudden popularity of such a taboo theme.

The popularizing of the repatriation debate is not easily explained, but by questioning the interests surrounding the rise of the topic it is possible to form some conclusions. With the rise of social media, certain social movements have gained traction and some political issues that once were restricted to a certain community are now accessible to a bigger audience, as it is with the demands of socially and politically marginalized groups that have been using the internet as an amplifier for their demands. Analogously, a debate that was once restricted to scholars and ex-colonies is now part of a global discussion. If on one hand this propagation has benefited the reclaimers' cause, it has also given the returners an opportunity to reinvent their public image.

Regardless of the previously discussed media's double agency, there is an expressive percentage of publications and media outlets that favor museums who are in possession of foreign artifacts. That given, it is possible that some museums are profiting from media coverage to self-promote over the repatriation debate, often centralizing the discussion around themselves and obfuscating the historical fights of reclaimers.

This can be seen in the multitude of articles that interview Western museum directors and that detail the repatriation intentions and process of these institutions, such as an article published on RFI that, while reporting on the repatriation movements to Africa, mentioned Emmanuel Macron's speech in the University of Ouagadougou in 2017 as a starting point for the restitutions of Benin's collections in France, failing to mention that Benin had already reclaimed the repatriation of its artifacts in 2016. Conversely, rare are the publications centered on the opinion of experts, directors, researchers and representatives of the Global South. Thus, the media bias is constructed not only by choosing to cite and omit certain data, but also by choosing to mostly amplify the point

of view of the countries and museums that hold other's artifacts.

Despite this media bias, a positive outcome of the publicizing of a discussion that has been restricted to the museological sphere is that it has resulted in increased pressure on museums. It is extremely positive that countries and institutions are finally responding to requests for repatriation and rethinking their policies and guidelines in accordance with the recommendations of international organizations. It is also positive that the theme of repatriation is circulating in other circles besides academia. However, it remains crucial to remain attentive to how the media reports on and discusses these processes.

As evidenced by my research, media outlets wield both direct and indirect influence as significant agents in influencing repatriation processes. Consequently, it becomes imperative to be vigilant over the content that is disseminated and its impact on the repatriation discourse. Moreover, the media must be pressured to support the historical claims and endeavors of those seeking repatriation and to accurately portray them as the central figures in their own struggles.

Although repatriation is becoming more and more present in the public sphere, its presence by itself in the media is not capable of breaking the stigma, since the controversies surrounding the return of musealized artifacts are still present, especially in the Global North. This stigma is perpetuated by major Western museums that feel like their relevance and integrity as an institution could be threatened by the "loss" of part of their collections. Such was the case with an article published in October 2021 on the Argentinian news website Infobae that reported restlessness in European museums after France announced they would be repatriating some of the artifacts back to Benin, to which the French minister of culture responded by reinforcing that this would not open legal precedents.

While most articles favor the perspective of the reclaimers, the second-most favored perspective is that of the returners, with a percentage difference of approximately 5%. This tiny percentage difference shows that although there is a tendency to favor the struggles and claims of the reclaimers, the issue of repatriation continues to be controversial and polarizing. After all, even if some museums are still resistant to acknowledging their colonialist attitudes, others are contributing positively to the debate by engaging in recognizing and repatriating artifacts that have been wrongfully acquired.

Conclusion

As a big part of this scenario, the media acts as a catalyst to the incoming changes in museology by not only amplifying the voices of those historically oppressed but also by acting as propaganda in favor of the institutions who are meeting the demands of reclaimers. Even so, the role of the media is far from being neutral, as it often operates in favor of the Global North and its institutions by building a favorable image of new and reinvented museums that are now engaged with tackling the colonialism embedded in their collections. Beyond questioning the museums, we should also ask why the media is the major agent that is pushing forward this discussion and why museums are so hesitant to tackle the taboos that they themselves created and continue to foment.

Given that one of the major factors that explains the stigma surrounding repatriation is colonialism and its structural presence in museums, it is imperative to decolonize museum collections, mindsets, attitudes, and its whole operating organism, including its

personnel, in order to break the repatriation taboo. For that, it is critical to understand that repatriation “is not an end, but rather the beginning of a new museum mobilized in new conceptions and roles” (Cury, 2020, p. 26); that is, by redefining the role of museums in consequence of centering repatriation and decolonization as fundamental practices, it is possible to remedy the taboo that was created by these very institutions. In turn, as active agents in the development of repatriation processes, the media can and should take increased action to promote the revindications of reclaimers.

Even though this discussion is not new in the museological field, its recent media repercussion certainly is a factor that should be considered when studying and discussing the agents and variants that impact the processes of repatriation. As critical researchers and professionals, we should question entrenched practices that perpetuate colonial ideologies. Simultaneously, we should also be considering the necessity of communicating to broader audiences the decolonial potential of museums and alternative decolonial practices that are being taken.

In addition, media outlets who reproduce the same colonialist discourses and actions that are being criticized by the museological community should also be critically assessed and refuted, while articles that disseminate the voices of those who have been historically silenced should have their publication encouraged and should be more broadly diffused. Ultimately, the media should not be forgotten in museological studies and practices, as they can be either a perpetuator of colonialist attitudes and ideas or a potentially transformative tool to spread the changes being made in decolonial museology.

References

- Africa Museum. (n.d.) *Before turning the page, you have to read it*. www.africamuseum.be/en/discover/history_articles
- Africa Museum. (n.d.). *Provenance of the collections*. www.africamuseum.be/en/discover/provenance
- Alemanha começará a devolver “Bronzes de Benin” à Nigéria em 2022. (2021, April 30). *G1*. g1.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2021/04/30/alemanha-comecara-a-devolver-bronzes-de-benin-a-nigeria-em-2022.ghtml
- L'Allemagne s'engage à rendre une partie de ses bronzes du Bénin. (2021, May 4). *Le Figaro*. www.lefigaro.fr/culture/l-allemande-s-engage-a-rendre-une-partie-de-ses-bronzes-du-benin-20210504
- Almendra, R. (2016). Museus, modernidade e colonialidade. *Cadernos de Pesquisa do CDHIS*, 29(2). doi.org/10.14393/CPCDHIS-v29n2-2016-9
- Azoulay, A. A. (2019). *Potential history: Unlearning imperialism*. Verso Books.
- Fair Museum Jobs (2021, February 19). *A manifesto for job adverts and recruitment*. fairmuseumjobs.org/manifesto/
- Barrett, J. (n.d.). Imperial loot in a small-town gallery in New Zealand? The curious case of Gore's “Benin bronzes.” *The Conversation*. theconversation.com/imperial-loot-in-a-small-town-gallery-in-new-zealand-the-curious-case-of-gores-benin-bronzes-173424
- Bénin: le retour des objets d'art repoussé à 2022. (2021, September 27). *Africa News*. fr.africanews.com/2021/09/27/benin-le-retour-des-objets-d-art-repousse-a-2022/

- Borges, L. C. & Botelho, M. B. (2010). Museus e restituição patrimonial – entre a coleção e a ética. *XI Encontro Nacional de Pesquisa em Ciência da Informação*. Rio de Janeiro.
- The British Museum. (2019). *Collecting histories*. The British Museum. www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/collecting-histories
- Brulon, B (2020). Descolonizar o pensamento museológico: Reintegrando a matéria para repensar os museus. *Anais do Museu Paulista*, 28(1), 1-30.
- Bueno, M. P. (2019). Museu e colonialidade: A repatriação museológica como instrumento de luta. Neiba - *Cadernos Argentina-Brasil*, 8, 1-20.
- Costa, K. L. (2018). Pensar o patrimônio cultural por meio da repatriação e restituição de bens culturais. *Patrimônio e Memória*, 14(2), 256-271.
- Cury, M. X. (2020). Repatriamento e remanescentes humanos - museália, musealidade e musealização de objetos indígenas. *Em Questão*, 26, 14-42. [dx.doi.org/10.19132/1808-5245260](https://doi.org/10.19132/1808-5245260)
- La France va restituer 26 œuvres d'art pillées au Bénin pendant la colonisation. (2021, October 8). *Le Parisien*. www.leparisien.fr/culture-loisirs/la-france-va-restituer-26-oeuvres-d-art-pillees-au-benin-pendant-la-colonisation-08-10-2021-3XCBHUTLSBDOPJQZJXIWLW3PVM.php
- Francia devolverá los tesoros de Benin robados hace 129 años. (2021, October 25). *Infobae*. www.infobae.com/america/mundo/2021/10/25/francia-devolvera-los-tesoros-de-benin-robados-hace-129-anos/
- Le Louvre. (n.d.). *Artworks from Around the World*. www.louvre.fr/en/explore/the-palace/artworks-from-around-the-world
- Kirchner, T. (2018, November 26). Koloniale Raubkunst: Alles zurück nach Afrika? *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/raubkunst-kolonialgeschichte-afrika-1.4227660
- Muller, Bernard (2007, July 1). Museus, pilhagem colonial e reparações. *Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil*. diplomatique.org.br/museus-pilhagem-colonial-e-reparacoes/
- Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac. (n.d.). *History of the Collections*. www.quaibrantly.fr/en/collections/all-collections/history-of-the-collections
- Restitutions: les œuvres ne retourneront pas au Bénin avant février 2022. (2021, September 25). *RFI*. www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210925-b%C3%A9nin-la-restitution-des-%C5%93uvres-d-art-par-la-france-report%C3%A9-%C3%A0-f%C3%A9vrier-2022
- Shiraiwa, S., & Zabalueva, O. (2021). Museological myths of decolonization and neutrality. In B. Yves, & M. Rivet (Eds.), *Decolonising museology 2. The decolonisation of museology: Museums, mixing, and myths of origin* (pp. 203-207). ICOFOM. icofom.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2022/03/2021_icofom_decoloniser_museologie.pdf
- Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. (n.d.). The British Museum. www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/people-behind-collection/sir-thomas-stamford-raffles
- The State Hermitage Museum. (2004, July 28). *Declaration on the importance and value of universal museums*. www.heritagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/news/news-item/news/1999_2013/hm11_1_93/?lng=pt&lng=
- Stephens, M. (2021, December 4). George Osborne: British Museum will not “shrink in the face of the culture wars”. *The Telegraph*. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/12/04/george-osborne-british-museum-will-not-shrink-face-culture-war

Taboos of coloniality when collaborating on Google Arts and Culture

Leonie Leeder¹

University of St Andrews, St Andrews, Scotland

Abstract

Conversations around museum decolonisation are critically reflecting upon how UK museums can effectively address colonial histories and their subsequent impacts on collections and display. However, such discourse has not yet been applied to the digital platform Google Arts and Culture (GAC) with regard to transnational collaborative projects between museums and Indigenous peoples living in the Americas. I suggest here that there remains a significant taboo in the UK whereby the voice of the coloniser threatens to suppress that of source communities when curating digital international projects. This condensed examination of my MLitt thesis ponders the taboo of museums confronting their own colonialities, regarding two digital exhibitions within the British Museum's GAC 2016-19 'Google Maya Project.' Suggestions here highlight both the limitations and decolonial potential of digital projects such as these, to provide freely determined and meaningful benefit to Indigenous stakeholders.

Keywords: decolonisation, collaboration, coloniality, Google Arts and Culture

Resumen

Tabúes de la colonialidad al colaborar en Google Arts and Culture.

Las conversaciones sobre la descolonización de los museos están reflexionando críticamente sobre cómo los museos del Reino Unido pueden abordar de manera efectiva las historias coloniales y sus impactos posteriores en las colecciones y la exhibición. Sin embargo, dicho discurso aún no se ha aplicado a la plataforma digital Google Artes y Cultura (GAC) con respecto a proyectos de colaboración transnacional entre museos y pueblos indígenas que viven en las Américas. Sugiero aquí que sigue existiendo un tabú importante en el Reino Unido por el cual la voz del colonizador amenaza con suprimir la de las comunidades de origen al curar proyectos digitales internacionales. Este examen condensado de mi tesis de MLitt reflexiona sobre el tabú de los museos que enfrentan sus propias colonialidades, con respecto a dos exhibiciones digitales dentro del «Proyecto Google Maya» GAC 2016-19 del Museo Británico. Las sugerencias aquí resaltan tanto las limitaciones como el potencial decolonial de proyectos digitales como estos, para proporcionar un beneficio significativo y libremente determinado a las partes interesadas indígenas.

Palabras clave: descolonización, colaboración, colonialidad, Google Artes y Cultura

¹ Email: ljl3@st-andrews.ac.uk

From 2016-2019, the British Museum collaborated with Google Arts and Culture (GAC) on the “Google Maya Project” to produce and publish digitisations of their Alfred Maudslay Collection and other content relating to archaeology of the Maya. Within this, two digital exhibitions explore Maya Indigenous cultural heritage, community museums, heritage projects, Indigenous art and activism: *Yucatán Today* by the British Museum and *The Cos-Maya-Politan Future* by guest writer and Maya anthropologist Dr Genner Llanes-Ortiz. This paper, a condensation of my MLitt thesis, aims to question whether GAC can be a digital venue for decolonisation and meaningful collaboration between colonially imbued encyclopaedic museums and Indigenous communities in the Americas. I suggest here that there remains a significant taboo in the UK whereby the voice of the coloniser threatens to suppress that of source communities when curating digital international projects. This stems from both the museum and Google. Museums have an inability to confront Eurocentric outlooks and legacies of coloniality, and Google is a Western, capitalist megacorporation; both have the potential to restrict collaborative agency and impede decolonial endeavours.

For some Latin American Indigenous activists, the British Museum is a site of great injustice and a symbol of oppressive colonial power and climate injustice (Smoke, 2021). A significant number of the Museum’s collections were acquisitioned either directly or indirectly via British imperialism, which significantly influences some viewers’ perceptions (Frost, 2019). The museum’s website page “Contested Objects” gives details on some of the more controversial objects in the collection, emphasising the desire for long-term positive relationship building with source communities and collaboration. However, in some areas the museum’s stance towards repatriation is noncommittal, instead reaffirming the object in question’s significance to wider understanding of human culture and history.

In his 2020 monograph *The Brutish Museums*, whose front cover pointedly imitates the British Museum logo, Dan Hicks asserts that as long as encyclopaedic museums do not actively engage in decolonising endeavours, and to this I would add the need for action and repatriation as well as written statements, they can never be “neutral containers”; rather, they remain monuments to “legacies of ideology of white supremacy, using the museum tool for the production of alterity” (pp. 3-4). A contradiction therefore emerges, as the exhibition *Yucatán Today* discusses how Indigenous cultural heritage in the Yucatán Peninsula is used to combat discrimination and promote self-determination for different communities, yet the producer as an institution is imbricated with colonial matrixes of power. There remain some taboos for UK museums with colonial imbrications to acknowledge and confront inherent colonialities, which increases the potential to disempower by inhibiting discussions around colonialism and its legacies. I contemplate how applications of decolonial methodologies can allow UK museums to continue the restitution process of decolonisation by encouraging meaningful relationships with source communities based on ethical co-curation and respect. I also explore how *The Cos-Maya-politan Future* is an interesting suggestion as to how inclusion and ‘seats at the table’ can be used for the promotion and celebration of Indigenous work and activism from a grassroots perspective.

I suggest here that decolonising methodologies cannot be applied to GAC exhibitions as long as the Western museum producing the exhibitions remain in possession of a dominating amount of curatorial power.² This is influenced by Martínez Villarreal’s (2021)

2 I admit here my own positionality as a British, female, Western academy early-career researcher who continues to learn from conversations of decolonisation. These discussions have been enriched greatly by the insightful contributions of interview participants, conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, they do not mean to assume homogenous perspectives. Any ignorance or mistakes conveyed here remain my own.

view that true decolonisation only occurs when institutions are quiet, allowing previously silenced voices to be heard. Museum collaborators must decentre their institutional authority and facilitate capacity for communities to curate their own narratives, without dominating or defining the methodological exhibition-making process. I would suggest that it is ironic to produce a digital exhibition, which presents Indigenous culture as an empowering tool of self-determination, while presenting interpretation from a Western perspective or methodology. To unintentionally prioritise the museums' perspective and needs remains a significant taboo within UK museums when conducting collaborative projects with source communities. This includes the need to adhere to conditions set by Google Arts and Culture, which restrict certain curatorial freedoms and collaborative potential. There is potential for GAC to act as a digital "contact zone" (Clifford, 1997), with ethical representation of Indigenous culture, if decolonising intentions, mindsets and methodologies are prioritised. I argue below that *Yucatán Today* falls somewhat short in this regard, although curators remained self-reflective of the process and the limitations of the project (Zhert & Somohano, 2021). *The Cos-Maya-politan Future*, however, is an interesting case study of Maya heritage from an Indigenous scholar who embraced values of collaboration and sensitivity into their process.

This study is inspired by Quijano's (2000) conception of the "coloniality of power," which "concentrated all forms of control of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and the production of knowledge" under a Eurocentric hegemony (pp. 539-540). Analysis is also grounded in Mignolo's (2000, 2007) conception of "decoloniality" and "de-linking" to trouble Eurocentric epistemologies and modernity, whereby epistemic shifts can make space for other principles of thinking, understanding and praxis as alternatives to modernity and colonial logic. The advocacy and practise of decoloniality is a multifaceted, evolving process driven by new ways of being, thinking and acting that is "re-existed from Western parameters of knowledge and epistemology" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 6).

With regards to museum spaces, Brulon Soares (2016) states that "the discourse of decolonisation in museology was not divorced from the reproduction of the capitalist structure of power and knowledge based on unequal distribution of resources" (p. 55). Several endeavours adopted by museums, both within and without the Latin American context, have approached decolonising practises in different ways to increase community agency and co-curation. Community museums remain a strong example, with Morales and Camarena (2023) asserting that they contest "the logic on the construction of colonial, Eurocentric knowledge, and [transform] the coloniality of self by creating sites where subaltern communities represent themselves" (p. 1). Such endeavours reflect the discourse of 'new museology,' whereby eco- and community museums shifted focuses from traditional custodianship to prioritising local community needs. Initiatives in Latin America have "arguably led the way in promoting community cohesion through museums," by empowering rural communities through a sense of cultural identity and contesting Western globalisation (Brown, 2017, p. 25).

Yucatán Today

The British Museum's *Yucatán Today* exhibition presents the cultural heritage of Maya peoples in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. It explores radio stations, community museums, music, poetry, epigraphy teaching and sustainable tourism initiatives. These are presented to show how Indigenous communities reaffirm their cultural heritage, strengthen pride in their cultural identity, fight for land rights and interact with 'worlds' in ways "that are

meaningful for them in the present” (British Museum, 2019). However, the exhibition features some colonial rhetoric and curatorial processes that potentially undermine its supposed empowering message.

This exhibition forms part of the BM’s 2016-2019 “Google Maya Project” under the “Exploring the Maya World” portal, focussing on Mexico. The project’s aim was not to decolonise presentations of Maya heritage, but rather to digitise the Alfred Maudsley Collection through 3D scans, virtual tours and online exhibitions. Nevertheless, *Yucatán Today* arose from a desire to showcase Maya initiatives, although the curators experienced some challenges with the process (Zehrt & Somohano, 2021). While a well-intentioned effort, the exhibition’s lack of original desire to decolonise content or processes means that the outcome reflects the BM’s Western perspective rather than being a hub for communities to curate their own narratives.

One of the opening statements highlights the favouring of Western epistemologies: “the Maya living there today are owners of a vibrant culture that is part of our times and is continuous dialogue with the modern world” (British Museum, 2019). “Our times” implies the positioning of the BM as custodians of a Western worldview and contemporary age, while “in continuous dialogue with the modern world” problematically refers to Maya culture primarily in accordance with its relation to the West, which is in direct contrast to Mignolo’s notion of embracing border epistemologies to de-link with colonial worldviews. This rhetoric presents Maya culture as though it were ‘catching up’ to modernity, which contradicts Vasquez’s (2021) argument that Latin American Indigenous peoples do not lack modernity but are under modernity imposed by colonisers.

Despite the empowering and activist work that Yucatec communities advocate, the final exhibition statement is problematically dismissive of inequalities and of the BM’s colonial position in relation to source communities: “The future of Maya communities relies on their own people. Initiatives and activities like these will hopefully contribute to creating a prosperous time ahead” (British Museum, 2019). This rather apathetic statement contrasts the previous exhibition slide on Múuch’ Xíinbal’s fight for Indigenous land and environmental activism, which are currently protesting the construction of the “Maya Train” and are being left out of public consultations (“The assembly”, 2020). This denies any role the BM could play in supporting Indigenous activism, and the colonial power imbalances between the BM and Yucatec communities remain unacknowledged.

Except for an interview with Radio Yúuyum where two members discuss issues that are meaningful for them, the exhibition text is told from the perspective of the museum and there is no acknowledgement of the museum’s imperial positionality or the imbalanced power dynamic with Indigenous communities. The decolonial potential of *Yucatán Today* is undermined by the institution’s colonial positionality and narrative. While the physical content of *Yucatán Today* is alluring and certainly interesting, the significance lies in the underlying colonialities which continue to suppress the voice of Indigenous collaborators. I would suggest that this issue goes beyond that of individual curators of particular projects; it is an ongoing yet necessary journey of acknowledgement, un-learning and restitution that the whole institution must partake in.

Curators of *Yucatán Today* remained very self-reflective and openly discussed the limitations of the project with regard to collaboration, which is always a positive step for museum professionals to learn and improve for future projects. Curators noted the significant

differences in priorities held by GAC and the museum, which led to compromises (Zehrt & Somohano, 2021). Collaborative efforts were initiated during the final few months of the project, which ultimately caused issues due to tight deadlines (Zehrt, personal communication, July 15, 2021). Regarding contradictory objectives, curators noted that:

The collaboration with Radio Yúuyum is a clear example of how the needs of another group can be misinterpreted. ... [We] mistakenly believed, despite our good intentions, that what the members of the community radio needed was visibility, when they first needed the technical means to be able to carry out work to disseminate. (Zehrt & Somohano, 2021, p. 497)³

This highlights the conflicts regarding Western-originated project objectives and inequalities regarding technological access. Also significantly, the museum could not share GAC login access with external collaborators, and the curators admit that this silenced participants' voices as the narrative was told by the curators; they therefore questioned whether the project really achieved a democratisation of knowledge (Zehrt & Somohano, 2021).

Some participants spoke about the confusion over credits, which highlights the lack of in-depth collaborations. Alfredo Hau, a representative from Ch'okwoj Maaya Ts'úib, explained the group's activities in a meeting with curators. However, neither he nor the group were aware of the publication of *Yucatán Today*, nor, in their view, were they sufficiently credited (Hau, personal communication, July 8, 2021). Pedro Uc, an activist from Múuch' Xíinbal, did not recall having participated in this exhibition at all, and suggests that "perhaps it was part of some research work that was done, and I did not know it" (Uc, personal communication, July 10, 2021).⁴ Perhaps had there been more time to develop the project and dedication made toward decolonial methodologies, the space could have become an interesting venue for meaningful Indigenous agency through explorations of cultural heritage on their terms.

Other sources expressed criticism toward the project for the lack of thought given to Maya communities. *Yucatán Magazine* explains that when curators spent time with communities, it was to "explain the significance of the ancient sites as well as the role played by Maudsley's Maya collaborators, captured in the many photographs he took of them" ("British Museum and Google", 2019). Although it may not have been the intent, this viewpoint of explaining the importance of archaeology and its digitisation could be seen as a Western and patronising viewpoint by not first considering what communities themselves were interested in. Activist Uc argued that "there's a lot of interest in dead Maya and not living Maya. They reduce us to folklore ... when we are stuck in poverty today" ("British Museum and Google", 2019).

Despite good intentions, whether due to timeframes, resources, GAC restrictions or a lack of attention toward decolonial thinking and methodology, the BM did not prioritise their Indigenous collaborators in a way that could be considered decolonial collaboration. There was a failure to decentre their Western viewpoint and epistemology, and the narrative was driven by a European standpoint. Museum curators were very self-reflective over these limitations and spoke of difficulties regarding financing, deadlines, contradictory objectives between GAC and the museum, and the temporary contracts of curators which

³ Author's translation.

⁴ Author's translation.

impedes long-term relationships. They nonetheless discussed the lessons which could be learned for future endeavours (Zehrt & Somohano, 2021).

The Cos-Maya-politan Future

The Cos-Maya-politan Future was also produced for the Google Maya Project to include a Maya perspective. For curator Llanes-Ortiz, the page was an opportunity to dialogue with fellow Maya academics, activists and practitioners around the concept of “cos-Maya-politanism” (Llanes-Ortiz, personal communication, July 2, 2021). This relates to the introspective gaze adopted by Maya peoples by embracing diversity through a transnational exchange circuit across different communities and foreign influences. Llanes-Ortiz (personal communication, July 2, 2021) argues that young activists are currently more concerned with being in control of the narrative and their cultural expressions rather than expressing an ‘authentic’ identity according to anthropological or archaeological standards. The page thus proposes a dialogue around the notion that activist-driven cosmopolitanism promotes agency and self-empowerment.

The values of cos-Maya-politanism aligned with the motivations of featured Kaqchikel graphic design artist Walter Paz Joj (personal communication, July 7, 2021) from Guatemala, who stated that:

Culture has always walked and continues to walk, this does not allow its stagnation, but its adaptation to the change of times in which it remains and is renewed. It is in the same way that I allow myself to adapt my artistic proposal inspired by ancient thought to the resources that modernity allows me, mainly through technology.

Paz Joj also commented on his experiences with participation:

Taking part in this process has been a way of continuing to contribute to a cultural growth where contemporary Mayans are the main actors and builders of our own present and not just of the past.

These types of experiences allow the work of the Mayan peoples to be socialized, disseminated and revalued as something that also exists in the modern era, and not only as the admiration of the great cultural past that the Mayans have, but as an important cultural present. (Paz Joj, personal communication, July 7, 2021)

However, there remains food for thought as this exhibition is associated with the wider Google Maya Project, and by extension the British Museum: to what extent can one attempt to decolonise if the exhibition is displayed within a wider project that risks colonial rhetoric? In contrast, to what extent can this be a ‘seat at the table,’ for Llanes-Ortiz to subvert the colonial positionality of the museum by providing an Indigenous perspective?

While Llanes-Ortiz (personal communication, July 2, 2021) admitted he had more experience of decolonisation as an anthropologist and Indigenous scholar, he expressed anxiety over the potential to reproduce an object-subject dynamic. “It’s something that I need to be very careful with, when I write about my own people, my own experience ... in order not to reproduce a scholarly aesthetic that objectifies those experiences.” Collaborations for *Cos-Maya-politan Future* were conducted either based on personal positive working relationships or pre-agreed outcomes, with article drafts being provided

for feedback, edits and approval. The Festival for the Exchange of Native Seeds documentary was a local community project whose participants gave permission for sharing the video and have since used it for their own purposes. Public domain music and dance videos by Patboy, Yazmin Novelo, Vayijel and Sotz'il Jay were published after consultation and mutual understanding that increased publicity was beneficial for exposure. Llanes-Ortiz and hip-hop artist Tz'utu also have an established friendship and have worked together on projects in the past, and Tz'utu gave signed consent for use of their album artwork (Llanes-Ortiz, personal communication, July 2, 2021).

Paz Joj (personal communication, July 7, 2021) stated that his art was presented in ways that were meaningful to him and that his requests were prioritised in the process:

I consider it a friendship to share from their experience as a Mayan person from another territory [Llanes-Ortiz] ... seeking the same objectives in similar ways. Our relationship is based on the contribution to our people and culture that in a certain way was what led us to meet each other.

Alfredo Hau (personal communication, July 8, 2021) stated that their group were happy to participate as it was an opportunity to spread awareness of their work, to say “way yano'one/ we are here.”⁵ On the condition of having corresponding agreements, the group mentioned they were willing to participate in further work and make use of the GAC platform, because it is otherwise difficult to find opportunities to disseminate their work.

Decolonising collaborations on Google Arts and Culture: Problems and potential

The advancement of ‘new museology’ had a profound influence on museum-community collaboration. A need for power sharing fitted with the “radical reassessment of the roles of museums in society,” especially in cases where groups felt their stories were not being told by museums who espoused elite educational authority (Onciul, 2017, p. 4). However, disputes arise when increased democratisation of contribution, decision-making and authority are not achieved in practice (Ouédraogo & Modest, 2018). Collaborative projects become increasingly controversial when unequal power dynamics are at play between stakeholders, especially when parties are implicated with colonial histories and the coloniality of power. In order to democratise the process of digital exhibition making, how should collaborations be sought and developed?

Tuhiwai Smith (2012) argues that “from the vantage point of the colonised ... the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism”, as it is difficult to separate ‘research methodologies’ from the painful reflections of colonisers exploiting Indigenous peoples as objects to study (p.1). Consequently, the ‘researcher’ is incarnated as the figure of colonial authority, as their work is an “artifice to contain participation, maintaining relations based on coloniality of culture ... that do not provide the community actors with the means to manage their own heritage in an autonomous and sustainable way” (Brulon Soares, 2020, p. 61). If decolonial collaboration aims to deconstruct the subject-object power dynamic, then it must attack the coloniality of knowledge where knowledge production is siloed by external researchers or curators.

⁵ Author's translation.

One method of approaching collaboration is for institutions to ‘quietly listen’ during the process of constructing knowledge and facilitate capacity for Indigenous peoples to lead exhibition narratives. Hall (2005) posits “the crisis of authority” regarding who controls the right and power to represent another’s culture. Indigenous peoples have increasingly challenged institutions’ attempts to speak on their behalf (Onciul, 2017). Fundamentally, communities must be active agents in the effort to construct knowledge with the institution not dominating the process. Tamparapa (2021) argues that to develop meaningful relationships between large colonial organisations and Indigenous peoples, there is a need to reverse the power dynamic and focus on what institutions can offer the communities, and place Indigenous concerns at the centre of any conversation, debate or collaboration. Museum professionals are urged to review their authority and facilitate ways communities can manage their own heritage in an autonomous and sustainable way with the focus on heritage and self-determination.

If co-curation does not benefit Indigenous stakeholders in ways they freely determine, then the meaning of decolonised collaboration is lost. Notions of Western institutional authority and power must be deconstructed so that subaltern epistemologies can be prioritised. Effort should be directed to building meaningful relationships between museums and Indigenous communities based on trust, honesty, transparency and respect. In some cases, these views toward collaboration would necessitate the reversal of the theoretical imperial foundation of large encyclopædic museums. A large institution cannot simply ‘add in’ collaboration to its already colonial and traditional practises of exhibition-making since that would defeat the purpose of the decolonial effort.

Yet how, considering the above, should collaborative projects operate digitally when hosted, and therefore constricted, by the conditions set by Western technology corporations such as Google Arts and Culture? While no doubt an impressive platform in a technological sense, Google remains a tech megacorporation imbricated with the Western capitalist economic system. GAC, therefore, remains a significant non-neutral actor in this process of curating online. Taboos of unacknowledged power dynamics are important when considering this platform as a venue for equitable decolonial endeavours. Can GAC ever be a digital ‘contact zone’ that prioritises the benefit of Indigenous peoples? I suggest that GAC as a platform must give more care and attention to accessibility, access and power sharing when collaborating with museums and communities. It appears that the platform currently is restricted by rigid frameworks, copyright legislation and a certain requirement of technological access, which potentially replicates the imbalances of power and control over knowledge production that decoloniality attempts to overcome. However, in this case the imbalances are with regards to large Western capitalist corporations.

In theory, GAC digitises museum collections so that they are made accessible online using advanced technologies such as high-resolution photos, 3D scans and 360° virtual tours. Despite this impressive technological potential, GAC contributes in part to colonial and capitalist consumptions of knowledge. Christen (2009) argues that, in a digital age where information is supposedly free, “corporate greed and straight jacketing have clouded the debate so that any type of access control, sharing protocols or information management looks suspicious” (p. 5). Museums must abide by GAC’s user interface and regulations, which considerably restricts curatorial freedom and nuanced context. The platform prioritises visual outputs and aesthetic media rather than nuanced academic research or community participation, basing their business model on “producers” and “consumers”

of content (Pesce et al., 2019). GAC representatives noted that initial drafts of *Yucatán Today* and *The-Cos-Maya-politan Future* were too academic in nature, and the result was *Yucatan Today* being presented in short snippets of information (Llanes-Ortiz, personal communication). Furthermore, Google Translate translates pages depending on the country where the page is opened but to the author's knowledge at the time writing, there are no translations for Yucatec or other Maya languages. Collaborating museums using this GAC platform must therefore adhere to their policies on visual outputs and aesthetics; especially as they often also fund the projects.

While Pesce et al. (2019) argue that GAC aligns stakeholders' interests to create value, I suggest that GAC harbours coloniality through dominating the ways in which exhibitions are created precisely because they are "a system integrator in the cultural heritage ecosystem" (p. 1885). In the context of exhibiting Indigenous cultural heritage, there must be a process by which curatorial power and logistical access is shared between stakeholders as was noted by the museum curators (Zehrt & Somohano, 2021). Wani et al. (2019) argue that GAC is a "re-contextualization and marketing machine that connects information and materials without caring about academic degrees, institutional status or proper context" (p. 115). The coloniality of this dynamic is attenuated for peoples attempting to share their cultural heritage yet who do not possess full control over how their content is presented.

Applying decolonising methodologies to GAC digital spaces is not wholly different from doing the same for physical museum spaces, although nuanced additions must be considered for technological contexts and the added actors of technology corporations. Similar intentions remain applicable, such as decentring Western epistemologies, honouring Indigenous knowledges and worldviews, co-curating, promoting diversity, community decision making and agency, challenging the Western gaze and remaining self-critical and self-reflective toward one's positionality and relation to coloniality. However, additional considerations must be given to the varying levels of access to technologies, the accessibility of such, and whether the use of technologies truly serves to further the goal of decolonial work and is the appropriate venue for a particular project.

Morales (personal communication, July 22, 2021) argues that digital exhibition projects should prioritise community ownership with conceptions, aims and objectives being community driven. Rather than be subject to imposed initiatives where the interest, focus and purpose is defined by a Western institution, and therefore subject to colonial knowledge production and sharing, the dynamic must be reversed. Lonetree (2012) argues that museums should serve Indigenous communities; follow community protocols when conducting research; rigorously interrogate existing scholarship and call out colonial rhetoric; incorporate Indigenous languages, names and proper nouns; and privilege Indigenous sources. To begin to repair asymmetric museum-community relationships and confront imbalances of power, conscious effort by the larger institution must be made to yield control and listen to the community. Gere (1997) advocates for the potential of global digital communication for the postcolonial age if it is addressed alongside values of new museology for mitigating the effects of power in museums. This thinking reinforces the view that applying decolonising methodologies to digital exhibition spaces requires foundational values of serving communities, new museology and decolonisation.

GAC as a decolonised digital platform also raises the question around technology access. Giving communities access to curation is difficult without sufficient Internet access, training and digital devices capable of hosting the interface. This was a source of contention between the BM and GAC, as the advanced digital resources needed to create exhibitions were not accessible to the communities, for instance the Yaxunah cultural centre. Radio Yúuyum members, however, agreed to be interviewed in return for hardware support (Zehrt, personal communication, July 15, 2021). This lends to Miller's (2021) argument for "building capacity," whereby source communities curate their own digital content and external institutions provide necessary support and training. Llanes-Ortiz (personal communication, July 2, 2021) also argued that the potential of technology can only be realised for empowerment when training and education is available, and part of the intent for *The Cos-Maya-politan Future* was to say, "it can be done ... look at the musicians ... the experimental dance makers ... the epigraphists, they are grabbing the technology without asking permission, and that's great, but we need more of that happening."

Bhowmilk and Díaz (2016) propose that the combination of community participation and digital technology could be an effective method for promoting proper context for intangible cultural heritage. However, Srinivasan et al. (2010) stress the new challenges of information retrieval and representation if digital museum spaces are going to be meeting places for diverse knowledges. Interestingly, in the Latin American context, Martens et al. (2020) explore how digital community projects challenge the interrelation between data infrastructure, capitalism and coloniality, going beyond democratisation by "incorporating the cosmovision into technology and making new technologies, rather than symbolically appropriating them" (p. 9). This reflects *The Cos-Maya-politan Future* by focussing on how Maya artists and activists engage with digital technologies such as graphic design to promote their work.

However, I would express concern over the potential for decolonising knowledge production and building capacity for communities when Google Arts and Culture impose unfavourable conditions such as short deadlines, the inability of museums to share platform access, an emphasis on aesthetics over contextual nuance, funding implications and copyright complications. The legal and contractual implications of using GAC are too complex to be discussed at length in this article. However, it does suggest that imbalances of power and authority in relation to coloniality are now imbricated with technology mega-corporations who host digital curatorial platforms, which potentially impedes decolonial potential.

Conclusion

There are significant implications for the presentation of Indigenous cultural heritage on Google Arts and Culture. The potential for presenting heritage ethically via decolonising methodologies is contingent on and restricted by the nature of the GAC interface as well as the decolonising activist endeavours of museums who collaborate with Indigenous peoples.

To create an authentic space for Indigenous peoples and deliver maximum benefit for those involved, both GAC and collaborating museums must adopt values and practises of decolonisation. Efforts must be made to identify and challenge how institutions contribute to coloniality in order to strive for decoloniality. Theoretical understandings of positionality, sharing authority and colonial matrixes of power must underpin practical

efforts to collaborate and co-curate with Indigenous peoples to create digital exhibitions. If exhibitions are not produced with decolonising mindsets and methodologies, especially when the content explores decolonial cultural initiatives, community museums, art and activism, then the resulting colonial processes and rhetoric impede activist potential. At present, GAC is too insistent on appealing aesthetics, visuals and physical product outputs. If decolonising methodologies are to be espoused, more attention needs to be given to the pedagogies and processes of exhibition making and decolonial collaboration and to building positive relationships between communities and museums and facilitating capacity for communities to interpret and curate their heritage on their own terms.

Maya activists are showing how technology and Western influences can be harnessed to promote Maya epistemologies, cultural expression, art and worldviews when the narrative and agency is controlled from an Indigenous perspective. *The Cos-Maya-politan Future* offers an interesting example of how GAC can be used for Maya scholars, artists and activists to engage in dialogue and promote Indigenous works. By applying decolonial theory and decolonising methodologies to this process, GAC can be used as a tool to facilitate capacity for Indigenous voices and develop meaningful and ethical relationships between museums and communities. While noting some limitations of the British Museum's project, suggestions made here by no means serve to discourage the efforts of UK museums endeavouring to decolonise their practises. Decolonisation is an ongoing conversation and journey whereby coloniser countries must continue to listen and learn, and only by breaking the taboo confronting coloniality can one begin to dismantle and unlearn the legacies of imperialism in museums and instead look to inclusive, respectful and activist futures.

References

- The assembly of defenders of the Mayan Territory “Múuch Xíinbal” is left out of the Maya Train public consultation. (2020, July 21). *Yucatán Times*. www.theyucatanimes.com/2020/07/the-assembly-of-defenders-of-the-mayan-territory-muuch-xiinbal-is-left-out-of-the-maya-train-public-consultation/
- Bhowmilk, S., & Díaz, L. (2016). Hot stones and cool digitals: Sustainable contact zones for intangible cultural heritage in Finland. *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 11(1), 162–171.
- British Museum. (2019, November). *Yucatán today*. Google Arts and Culture. artsandculture.google.com/story/yucatán-today-the-british-museum/TgXBJZubCeQAYA?hl=en
- British Museum and Google open Maya collections to a wider, online audience. (2019, October 17). *Yucatán Magazine*. yucatanmagazine.com/british-museum-and-google-open-maya-collections-to-a-wider-online-audience/
- Brown, K. (2017). Paradigm or predator? Eco and community museums in Scotland and Costa Rica. *ICOFOM Study Series*, 45(1), 23–36.
- Brulon Soares, B. (2020). Decolonising museology: The museum experience retold in the time of the communities. In B. Brulon Soares (Ed.), *Decolonising museology: Museums, community action and decolonisation*, (pp. 51–70). ICOFOM.
- Christen, K. (2009). Access and accountability: The ecology of information sharing in the digital age. *Anthropology News*, 50(4), 4–5.

- Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and transformation in the late twentieth century*. Harvard University Press.
- Fischer, H. (2019, October 15). Explore the Maya world with the British Museum. *The Keyword*. www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/arts-culture/explore-maya-world-british-museum/
- Frost, S. (2019). 'A bastion of colonialism:' Public perceptions of the British Museum and its relationship to empire. *Third Text*, 33(4–5), 487–499.
- Gere, C. (1997). Museums, contact zones and the internet. In D. Bearman & J. Trant (Eds.), *Museum interactive multimedia 1997: Cultural heritage systems design and interfaces*, (pp. 59–66). Archives & Museum Informatics.
- Giblin, J., Ramos, I., & Grout, N. (2019). Dismantling the master's house: Thoughts on representing empire and decolonising museums and public spaces in practise. *Third Text*, 33(4–5), 471–486.
- Hall, S. (2005). Whose heritage? Un-settling 'the heritage', re-imagining the post-nation." In J. Littler & R. Naidoo (Eds.), *The politics of heritage: The legacies of 'race'*, (pp. 23–35). Routledge.
- Hicks, D. (2020). *The brutish museums: The Benin Bronzes, colonial violence and cultural restitution*. Pluto Press.
- Llanes-Ortiz, G. (2019, November). *The Cos-Maya-politan future*. Google Arts and Culture. artsandculture.google.com/story/the-cos-maya-politan-future/6wXRTHQhmdLGmA?hl=en
- Lonetree, A. (2012). *Decolonising museums: Representing Native America in national and tribal museums*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Martens, C., Sharupi Tapuy, E., and Venegas, C. (Eds.). (2020). *Digital activism, community media, and sustainable communication in Latin America*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Martínez Villarreal, R. (2021, May 27). The future of museums: Recover and reimagine. [Webinar]. GCRF. impact.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/global-conversation-the-future-of-museums-recover-and-reimagine-webinar/
- Mignolo, W. (2000). *Local histories/global designs*. Princeton University Press.
- Mignolo, W. (2007). Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 449–514.
- Miller, Allan. (2021, May 27). The future of museums: Recover and reimagine. [Webinar]. GCRF. impact.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/global-conversation-the-future-of-museums-recover-and-reimagine-webinar/
- Modest, W. (2021, April 23). Museums and community action: Decolonising the curriculum. [Webinar]. University of St. Andrews & ICOFOM. events.st-andrews.ac.uk/events/museums-and-community-action-decolonising-the-curriculum-webinar-part-1/
- Morales, T. & Camarena Ocampo, C. (forthcoming 2023). Community museums and decolonisation: Reflections from the network of community museums of America. In K. Brown, A. Cummins, & A. González Rueda (Eds.), *Communities and museums in the twenty-first century: Shared histories and climate action*. ICOM-Routledge.
- Onciul, B. (2017). *Museums, heritage and Indigenous voice: Decolonising engagement*. Routledge.

- Ouédraogo, R. & Modest, W. (2018). Foreword: On collaboration. In R. Lelijveld & N. Rijnks-Kleikamp (Eds.), *CO-LAB: Afterlives of slavery*. National Museum of World Cultures.
- Pesce, D., Neirotti, P., & Paolucci, E. (2019). When culture meets digital platforms: Value creation and stakeholders' alignment in big data use. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22(15), 1883–1903.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Neplantla: Views from South*, 1(3), 533–580.
- Smoke, B. (2021, October 26). Indigenous people demand justice at the British Museum. *Huck*. www.huckmag.com/perspectives/indigenous-people-demand-justice-at-the-british-museum/
- Srinivasan, R., Bevcar, K., Boast, R., and Enoté, J. (2010). Diverse knowledges and contact zones within the digital museum. *Science, Technology and Human Values*, 35(5), 735–768.
- Tamparapa, A. (2021, April 23). Museums and community action: Decolonising the curriculum. [Webinar]. University of St. Andrews & ICOFOM. events.st-andrews.ac.uk/events/museums-and-community-action-decolonising-the-curriculum-webinar-part-1/
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonising methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.
- Vasquez, R. (2021, April 23). Museums and community action: Decolonising the curriculum. [Webinar]. University of St. Andrews & ICOFOM. events.st-andrews.ac.uk/events/museums-and-community-action-decolonising-the-curriculum-webinar-part-1/
- Walsh, C. and Mignolo, W. (2018). *On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis*. Duke University Press.
- Wani, S., Ali, A., and Ganaie, S. (2019). The digitally preserved old-aged art, culture and artists. *PSU Research Review*, 3(2), 111–122.
- Zehrt, C. & Somohano Eres, A. (2021). Curaduría transatlántica: Cómo la digitalización de las colecciones promueve la colaboración. *CIMED*, 487–502.

Co-creating the values of Indigenous museums in Taiwan

Hsiao-Chiang Wang¹

University of Glasgow – Glasgow, United Kingdom

Abstract

While the values of museums and community participation have been extensively discussed, the taboos of participation these raise for Indigenisation of museums remain to be explored. This article examines two empirical cases of the Chi-Mei and Kamcing tribes to identify how biases resulting from conventional museology, nationalism mechanisms, and bureaucratic institutionalisation create multiple hindrances to participation. It also evaluates four forms of participation and proposes three steps to overcome the taboos hindering participation, highlighting how shared values drive participation. I propose the Indigenous Museum Values Framework (IMVF), which articulates the features of community-centric practices, embodied local knowledge, and collecting for the future through four modes: Gathering House, Marketplace, Ceremonial Field, and Lookout Tower. The findings suggest that museums' value-based collaborations can empower communities and preserve traditions while providing space for different voices that support Indigenous people to tackle contemporary challenges.

Keywords: Indigenous museum values, taboos of participation, Indigenous Taiwan, Chi-Mei tribe, Kamcing tribe

Resumen

Co-creación de los valores de los museos indígenas en Taiwán. Aunque se ha debatido ampliamente sobre los valores de los museos y la participación de la comunidad, quedan por explorar los tabúes de participación que éstos plantean para la indigenización de los museos. Este artículo examina dos casos empíricos de las tribus Chi-Mei y Kamcing para identificar cómo los prejuicios derivados de la museología convencional, los mecanismos del nacionalismo y la institucionalización burocrática crean múltiples obstáculos a la participación. También evalúa cuatro formas de participación y propone tres pasos para superar los tabúes que obstaculizan la participación, destacando cómo los valores compartidos impulsan la participación. Propongo el Marco de Valores de los Museos Indígenas (IMVF), que articula las características de las prácticas centradas en la comunidad, el conocimiento local incorporado y el coleccionismo para el futuro a través de cuatro modalidades: Casa de reunión, Mercado, Campo ceremonial y Torre mirador. Las conclusiones sugieren que las colaboraciones de los museos basadas en valores pueden empoderar a las

¹ Email: h.wang.10@research.gla.ac.uk

comunidades y preservar las tradiciones, a la vez que proporcionan un espacio para las diferentes voces que apoyan a los indígenas para afrontar los retos contemporáneos.

Palabras clave: valores museísticos indígenas, tabúes de participación, Taiwán indígena, tribu Chi-Mei, tribu Kamcing

Many civilisations have developed institutions, rules, and methods to preserve memory, knowledge, and material culture over extended periods (Kreps, 2006; McCarthy, 2016; McCarthy et al., 2013; Schultz, 2017). However, the Western perspective that museums evolved from the cabinet of curiosity and the development of taxonomical knowledge in modern society tends to dominate mainstream ideas. This bias reappears in other regions where the dominant group defines the value of the museum, affecting not only museology debates but also museum practices.

Despite the emergence of new museology in the late 20th century, which has gradually influenced museum practices (Karadeniz & Ozdemir, 2018; McCall & Gray, 2014; Vergo, 1997), Western-centrism and elitism continue to dominate and influence museum practice. New museology emphasises the importance of publicity, community participation, and social impact. However, these ideals are often undermined by biases that privilege Western perspectives and elite interests. The term “participation” is overused in manifestos but is often misused.

Taiwan is no exception, as the replicated Western model of museum value shapes but limits museum development. Moreover, the museum system is heavily influenced by politics, as more than 90% of museums are government-funded, and most Indigenous museums have been established and maintained by the government since 1998. This leads to inevitable control by bureaucratic systems and national power. While many museums claim to prioritise people and display Indigenous culture, it remains unclear whether their concern extends beyond the historical collections to the contemporary lives of the communities they represent.

Due to unequal power dynamics and inherent biases, unresolved issues continue to plague museum theory and practice, particularly regarding Indigenous museum values. This article understands the value of museums as an external concept created and defined by society. Values only exist when value recipients (individuals, institutions, and society) are willing to exchange their assets – such as time, resources, or money – for those values. Several pressing questions remain unanswered, such as who holds the right to define the value of museums and whether museum practitioners are genuinely creating a democratic engagement zone that benefits the community or are simply using people as evidence and resources to justify their mission and enrich the museum.

This research aims to identify and respond to these questions regarding Indigenous museum values and participation. Through evaluating two empirical cases in Taiwan, this study sheds light on the complexities of participation and the need to build Indigenous museum values.

The first case involves the Chi-Mei tribe and The Ruisui Chi-Mei Indigenous Museum, where the tribe participated extensively in the museum's activities from 2005 to 2015. However, the partnership was interrupted because the local government wanted to regain control of the museum and expressed concern that the tribe was using it for their benefit. This led to the tribe's withdrawal of all collections from the museum in 2015.

The second case study concerns the co-curation process of the Kamcing tribe and the National Prehistory Museum (NPM) between 2017 and 2019, which contributed to two co-curated exhibitions and helped the community discover the agency of running the museum independently.

Through examining these two cases, this paper highlights the challenges of achieving meaningful participation in Indigenous museums and proposes a preliminary framework for recognising Indigenous museum values. While the framework may not apply to all Indigenous museums, it serves as a starting point for understanding and creating diverse values.

Paradoxes of Taiwan's Indigenous museums

In Taiwan, the high presence but low attendance of Indigenous people in museums have long been recognised, yet there is a dearth of research to explain it. There are 35 Indigenous local museums and five national museums that preserve Indigenous collections and showcase local Indigenous culture, making up more than 12% of the 331 museums in Taiwan (Ministry of Culture, 2022). Despite the Indigenous population in Taiwan being approximately 572,000, or about 2.4% of the total population (Council of Indigenous Peoples, 2023), Indigenous culture has a significant presence in museums. Additionally, in 2019, the Executive Yuan² approved the establishment plan of the National Indigenous Peoples Museum, signifying that Indigenous people's cultural heritage constitutes Taiwan's national identity and cultural diversity.

However, according to 2022 Cultural Statistics (Ministry of Culture, 2022), Indigenous groups have a lower attendance rate (39.5%) in visiting museums than other major ethnic groups, such as Hoklo people, Mainlanders, and Hakka people. This attendance rate is only slightly higher than that of new immigrants (30.9%). Furthermore, among those who have attended museums, Indigenous groups remain the least frequent visitors (1.7 times per year, while the average is 2.7 times per year³).

As reflected in the statistics, the high representation but low attendance rate of Indigenous people in museums raises two concerns. The first is the values of museums. Whether museums are less valuable for Indigenous people, causing them to be unwilling to spend time in museums, or other factors exist that are hindering their attendance remains unclear. The second concern is the political use of their presence. What is the political significance of their high presence?

² Taiwan's executive branch of government.

³ The attendance rate at museums is one of the surveys in the annual Cultural Statistics, indicating whether individuals have visited museums within the past year and their frequency of museum visiting.

Challenges to the development of Indigenous museums

In my previous work on the “National museums lead Indigenous local museums” project, initiated by the Ministry of Culture (MOC) and Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP), four

national museums provided training, guidance, and resources for Indigenous museums. However, I observed that some local museums remained at low capacity. Apart from common issues such as shortages of funds and talent, three gaps hinder the development of Indigenous museums.

First, although national museums introduce the functions and practices of museums, their preservation and management techniques cannot always be applied to the Indigenous context. This is because they inherit and replicate Western-centric museology, which might conflict with the Indigenous community’s ways of seeing and doing.

Second, even though these museums’ existence caters to the narrative of Taiwan’s diversity, many fail to become a hub or part of the Indigenous community because they do not play a role in tribal rituals and residents’ daily lives.

Lastly, local and central authorities prefer applying government management mechanisms to assess and control local museums, such as visitor numbers and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

The paradoxes evident have led me to question whether Indigenous museums serve merely as showcases, reinforcing the political narrative of a pluralistic society but ultimately failing to fulfil their crucial roles in community learning, identity formation, and the reclamation of land and rights.

Therefore, this paper argues that it is necessary to explore the values of Indigenous museums and develop a strategy based on these values that suits the communities’ real needs. Additionally, it is vital to identify taboos of participation and unpack the problematic relations between Indigenous peoples and museums.

Two participation cases in Taiwan

The Chi-Mei Tribe case

The discontinuation of the Chi-Mei tribe’s involvement in the Ruisui Chi-Mei Indigenous Museum highlights Indigenous communities’ challenges in participating in museum projects. The conflict between the tribe and the government, which became a contentious issue in 2015, underscores the gap between Indigenous communities and governing authorities in understanding the respective values of museums.

The Chi-Mei tribe is one of the Indigenous tribes in Taiwan, officially categorized as the Amis group. They primarily reside in eastern Taiwan, specifically in Ruisui town, Hualien County, and have been actively engaged in community building since 2005. Their efforts include reconstructing traditional houses and men’s clubs, organising cultural rafting, revising traditional rituals, and hosting two exhibitions of cultural relics being returned home (Wu M.-C., 2011). These initiatives have successfully integrated tribal values into museum practices, not only at the Ruisui Chi-Mei Indigenous Museum but also at the National Taiwan Museum (NTM) and NPM, with whom the tribe collaborated (Lin, 2013; Wu P.-L., 2011).

While the Chi-Mei tribe utilised the Ruisui Chi-Mei Indigenous Museum as a cultural centre to preserve their heritage and promote tribal tourism, then, the local government, specifically the Ruisui township office, viewed the museum as a government-owned department.

The Ruisui Chi-Mei Indigenous Museum was established as part of the “Revitalization and Development of Indigenous Culture Scheme (1999-2005)” by the CIP. This large-scale construction project aimed to build 29 Indigenous museums in various regions within six years. However, there was no clear vision or management plan for these new museums, built from the top down by the central government and then transferred to local governments for management.

Initially, the participation of the Chi-Mei tribe was seen as supportive power by the Ruisui township office, as they were not prepared to manage a museum. The tribe initiated a series of empowering initiatives, including cultural revitalisation, heritage preservation, and local tourism, and the museum began to show its value to the local community. Consequently, the tribe and the museum became a model of alternative development and Indigenous museum practice. However, the lack of communication and consensus between the tribe and the local government over time led to tensions. The participation of the tribe became a potential threat if they were unwilling to comply with the township’s wishes.

In 2015, this tension escalated, and conflict erupted when the new township head fired the curator the tribe had elected. The township office claimed the museum was part of public property under their governance and questioned the dual status of the former curator, suggesting that the space should belong to the public rather than one specific tribe. In response, the tribe was angered and argued that the museum lacked soul due to the top-down museum policy that prioritised construction over content. They did not want their 10-year participation cut short due to complicated bureaucratic rules and the new township head’s attitude.

As a result of the conflict, the tribal curator was forced to leave, and the tribe withdrew their collections from the museum. The tribe issued a statement saying,

It is time for us to stand up and defend our tribe. Today, we have decided to withdraw the achievements of our ten-year efforts from the Chi-Mei Museum with our own hands. Our goal is to defend the values the government bureaucracy does not care about and believes it can trample on at will. (Chi-Mei tribe, 2015)

On the other side, the township claims,

The Chi-Mei Museum is a shared asset belonging to all town residents. We plan to invite all tribe leaders to collaborate with us on the upcoming exhibition, which will showcase heirlooms and special collections from the 17 tribes. Our goal is to represent the traditional life and history of all tribes and introduce visitors to the Indigenous culture of early times. (Ruisui Township Office, 2015)

The governance of the Chi-Mei Museum was a political battle between the government and tribal autonomy. On the one hand, the Chi-Mei tribe built new spaces to continue their cultural revitalisation and tourism events after withdrawing all their collections from the

museum. On the other hand, the museum gathered heirloom items from other tribes in Ruisui to community-wash and justify its legitimacy in ruling Ruisui by presenting diverse Indigenous culture.

The conflict showed that power and values intertwine in several ways. Firstly, the level of participation: Although Indigenous community participation has become a politically accepted approach in Indigenous museums, the high level of participation and influence that the Chi-Mei community had over the museum's management seemed to threaten the government's authority. Therefore, the government's desire to avoid "citizen control" (Arnstein, 1969) led to tokenism in community participation.

Secondly, the township misused the concept of publicity and the manifesto of "museum belongs to all" to justify interrupting the Chi-Mei tribe's participation.

Thirdly, while the tribe participated in the museum to make it valuable for improving their life and resolving their difficulties, such as young population outflow, employment difficulties, and cultural loss in contemporary society, the township just wanted to use the museum as a showcase, presenting the poetic image of Indigenous people for visitors.

These problematic issues have long existed in museum theory and practices. However, they are like elephants in the room because they are not only museological or cultural issues but a series of complicated power and political debates. Museums should prioritise being a part of the communities they serve, working to cater to the needs and well-being of the people rather than simply using communities as sources of museum material. More importantly, museums should recognise that they need communities to support, engage, and create meaning within museums.

If Indigenous museums fail to evoke a sense of home for Indigenous communities, it becomes difficult to convince individuals that museums are inclusive spaces for all. Such an experience can be likened to entering a room filled with personal photographs and diaries, all interpreted through an unfamiliar style and language. The individual may be reluctant to revisit the room. The unbalanced power relation, political use of museums, and the poetic presence of Indigenous life could explain why Indigenous people do not want to attend museums.

The Kamcing tribe case

The Kamcing community, located in the mountainous region of Taitung, Taiwan, is home to several tribes of the Bunun Indigenous group, known for their music and cultural heritage. Historically, only a few Bunun people have migrated to the region for agricultural purposes since 1917. However, during the 1930s, the Japanese colonial government forced various Indigenous tribes to relocate to Kamcing for governance convenience. This resulted in many families leaving their ancestral lands and losing their cultural identity, leading to diverse but fragmented memories within the community (Kamcing Tribe Curatorial Team, 2017; Qiu et al., 2020).

In 2017, a group of young Indigenous returnees recognized that it had been one hundred years since their tribe settled in Kamcing. Despite their history being documented in ethnography and their Pasubutbut music receiving international recognition, they felt their story had not been accurately represented.

Many Kamcing tribal members reported being interviewed without understanding how their narratives were presented or whether the interviewers comprehended their viewpoints and experiences. One of the elders said, “We were often interviewed before, but we did not know who was interviewing us, and we did not know what he wrote” (Ibu, 2018). This inspired the search for their voices, which served as the impetus for this project.

The National Prehistory Museum (NPM) was commissioned by the MOC with the “Local Context Knowledge and Museum Systems project”, and it subsequently established a collaborative partnership with the Kamcing tribe, founded on the principles of mutual empowerment. On the one hand, the NPM was empowered to participate in tribal affairs and serve as a bridge and supporter by introducing public sector resources. On the other hand, the community was empowered to dominate the narrative and conduct fieldwork, ensuring that their voices were prioritised in the project.

With the idea that museums should come to the community and become part of it, an “engagement zone” (Onciul, 2015) was created in the tribe. This approach differed from other co-curation projects, which typically occur within the museum itself. The strategic decision to create an engagement zone within the tribe effectively eliminated barriers to participation, making the space more accessible to all tribal members.

By engaging with the community in their own space, using their language, and following their decision-making rules, NPM could develop a deeper understanding of the community’s perspectives, experiences, and challenges. This helps to avoid the potential for the museum to tokenise or appropriate the community’s culture, as often happens when museums work in isolation from the community. Instead, the museum could work alongside the community to co-create exhibitions and programs that accurately represent their culture and heritage. This approach also fosters a sense of ownership and pride within the community, as they are directly involved in creating and presenting their own cultural history.

With a shared commitment to community-centric goals, the team strategically decided to hold the exhibition at the community plaza rather than a museum venue. They successfully organised a flash exhibition that lasted just five hours yet effectively captured over a century of the Kamcing tribe’s history and the collective memory of its tribes. While the community plaza was not a permanent collection venue, the exhibition had a long-lasting impact.

The team’s approach to the exhibition focused on the co-curation process rather than a polished result, prioritised feedback from within the community instead of external audiences and ensured that multiple perspectives and voices were included without subsuming them into a single narrative. The contributions of this project can be summarised as follows:

- First, the project empowered the local community to take ownership of their cultural heritage and exercise greater control over how it is represented and preserved, returning cultural governance to the local context.
- Second, through the co-curation process, the tribe was empowered to share their stories in their voices, disrupting traditional power structures that prioritise external perspectives and empowering tribes to speak for themselves.
- Third, this approach recognised the value of the community’s cultural knowledge

and traditions, often passed orally and through lived experiences rather than academic or institutional sources.

- Fourth, taking ownership of cultural heritage fostered a sense of pride and ownership over shared history and cultural traditions, ultimately strengthening social ties and promoting community cohesion, allowing individuals to regain a sense of group identity.

After the project's completion, several unexpected consequences occurred. More tribal members gained an understanding of their family history, leading to the creation of another exhibition titled "Where did my name come from?" Additionally, a tribe member generously donated their old house to be used as a display and storytelling space, which led to the creation of the Kamcing 3062 Old House. This meaningful hub for the community promotes the local economy and helps preserve and promote cultural heritage.

Unpacking the taboos of Indigenous community participation

Participation, particularly of Indigenous communities in museums, can be a problematic process. Museums contain paradoxically dual meanings for Indigenous people because they "embody colonial narratives while having the potential to decolonize the history of former colonial states" (Onciul, 2015, p. 26). The underlying issue, Indigenous rights, must be addressed before taboos can be eradicated. Today, the collaboration between Indigenous communities and museums remains a sensitive, controversial, and challenging process due to the enduring legacy of colonial history.

Identifying the taboos in the Taiwanese context

Collaboration between museums and Indigenous communities in Taiwan is not a new phenomenon. Previous studies have shown that involving Indigenous communities in museum activities can enhance the "multicultural identity" and "Taiwanese culture" narrative. It is often viewed as a necessary process to legitimise museum activities, acknowledge Indigenous contributions, and secure funding. Despite this, the nature of participation is not clearly defined. Many museums in Taiwan collect material culture from Indigenous tribes, use Indigenous names for the museums, or implement Indigenous "participation" in museum practices.

However, there are significant obstacles to achieving mutual respect and empowering participation due to unequal power dynamics, nationalism, and bureaucratic systems (Huang, 2021; Lu, 2018; Wang, 2019). The potential benefits of participation inspire museums and communities to collaborate, but challenges arise due to differing agendas, political factors, power dynamics, and individual positions, making the process unpredictable.

While conventional museums tend to use participation as a means to enrich cultural content and justify the interpretation and ownership of their collections, the Indigenous community actually wants to use the power of museums to enrich their real life and justify their history and ownership of the land. Their participation will be nominal and temporary if the fundamental motivation and goals of museum and community differ. Oppression, ignorance, and silencing will repeatedly happen in these unequal relationships.

Taiwanese Indigenous people face several challenges when participating in museums, including bias in conventional museology, Taiwanese nationalism bias, and bureaucratic institutionalisation bias, and these differences in values create multi-layered difficulties for them.

Bias from conventional museology. Conventional museology bias arises from the authoritative voice of museums, which has inherited the epistemology of the Renaissance era. Even today, museums are still regarded as legitimate knowledge producers, contributing to the encyclopaedic knowledge system. However, museums tend to dehumanise, standardise, and simplify the cultures of “others” in order to construct a comprehensive knowledge system – a process Vawda (2019) calls “epistemic violence”. As a result, museums tend to frame Taiwanese Indigenous tribes into 16 official groups and portray them as frozen in the past, displaying objects and clothing based on official categories while ignoring the nuances between regions and the fact that Indigenous people identify themselves based on their tribes rather than groups.

Bias from nationalism mechanism. Moreover, museums are often monopolized by, or a part of, the nationalism mechanism. Since the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945), Taiwanese museums have collected material culture from Indigenous peoples as a source of knowledge and a symbol of control. This situation remained unchanged after the Kuomintang (KMT) government regained Taiwan in 1945 and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) rotated into office in 2000. However, noticeably, a new nationalistic use of Indigenous peoples emerged in the 1990s: to showcase “the presence of Taiwan’s Indigenous cultures as well as prehistoric culture in museums to highlight the distinctiveness between Taiwan and China” (Wang, 2019, p. 480). Furthermore, some narratives claim that everyone on the island of Taiwan is part of the Indigenous peoples, declaring that “we are family,” despite the unresolved issues of colonial history and social justice. These narratives then blur Indigenous identities and make decolonisation a mere metaphor.⁴ In museums, Indigenous peoples could be depicted as vulnerable humans, tragic victims, or noble heroes to cater to specific views of history and political needs. It appears that museums care more about the poetic past than the current status of Indigenous peoples and cherish material culture more than their memories and worldviews.

Bureaucratic institutionalisation bias. The bureaucratic institutionalisation bias embedded in museums, the desire to maintain control, not only hinders the participation opportunities for most Indigenous people but also forces those willing to participate in communities to follow rules that do not belong to them. Furthermore, this bias deprives museums of independence and agency to act for social justice and change.

Overcoming the taboos of participation

Both the Chi-Mei tribe and Kamcing tribe cases demonstrate the power of participation, with the former indicating taboos around participation and the latter showing the possibilities to overcome them. This article argues that transformative approaches are necessary to overcome the taboo of participation. “Transformative participation” is a term coined by White (1996), who argued that participation is influenced by and contributes to politics and that underlying motivations and power relations must be identified because “sharing through participation does not necessarily mean sharing in power” (White, 1996, p. 6).

⁴ The concept of decolonisation is well explained in Tuck & Yang’s (2012) article “Decolonization is not a metaphor”.

White categorised participation into four forms – Nominal, Instrumental, Representative, and Transformative – depending on the use of participation from the institution and the participants’ motivation.

This paper adopts this framework to evaluate Indigenous people’s participation in museums, arguing that participation can only be long-lasting when the purposes of both sides are aligned (see Table 1).

Four Forms of participation (White, 1996)	Top-down (Institutional use)	Bottom-up (Participants’ motivation)	Function	Examples in the Museums
Nominal	Legitimation: to legalize their actions	Inclusion: to access potential benefits	The showing groups serve as displays	The government invites the tribe to attend the inauguration of the museum, or the museum invites the tribe to attend the opening of the exhibition
Instrumental	Efficiency: to use communities as resources	Cost: to contribute their time to gain external support	The time of participation is a means to achieve cost-effectiveness	The museum invites the tribe to participate in the collection research and provide the interpretation of material culture
Representative	Sustainability: to ensure what they are doing is appropriate	Leverage: to influence and share the project	The voices of participants influence the project	The institution consults tribal representatives about exhibition outlines and development plans
Transformative	Empowerment: to enable people to act for themselves	Empowerment: to act and make decisions for themselves	Participation is a means to empowerment, and the end itself	The museum works with (rather than works on, or works for) the Indigenous community to co-curate the exhibition

Adapted from White, S. C. (1996). Depoliticizing development: The uses and abuses of participation. Development in Practice, 6(1), 6–15.

Table 1. Four forms of participation of Indigenous people in the museum

As Cornwall (2008) has noted, “Being involved in a process is not equivalent to having a voice” (p. 278). Indeed, many historical, conceptual, and physical taboos need to be overcome during the collaboration between museums and Indigenous communities. Cornwall (2008) discusses the theories and practices of participation and notes that the

ambiguity of roles, benefits, and goals can hinder the promise of democratisation. Mutual empowerment, clear definitions of community roles, and common goals are essential for transformative participation. Cornwall's research, therefore, outlines three steps to overcome the taboos hindering participation. First, it is necessary to identify the taboos of participation within the museum methodology of colonial legacies or outside the museum's domain in unequal power positions and politics. Second is to adopt a transformative participation approach by building mutually empowering relationships and creating an environment where communities and individuals can participate in the museum's value-creation process. Third is to put the Indigenous community at the center of the process by working with them rather than on them and co-creating Indigenous Museum values. If Indigenous Museum participation is limited to the confines of Western imagination and colonial governance, it cannot surpass the limitations imposed by colonialism and lead to the suitable development of Indigenous communities.

The Indigenous Museum Values Framework

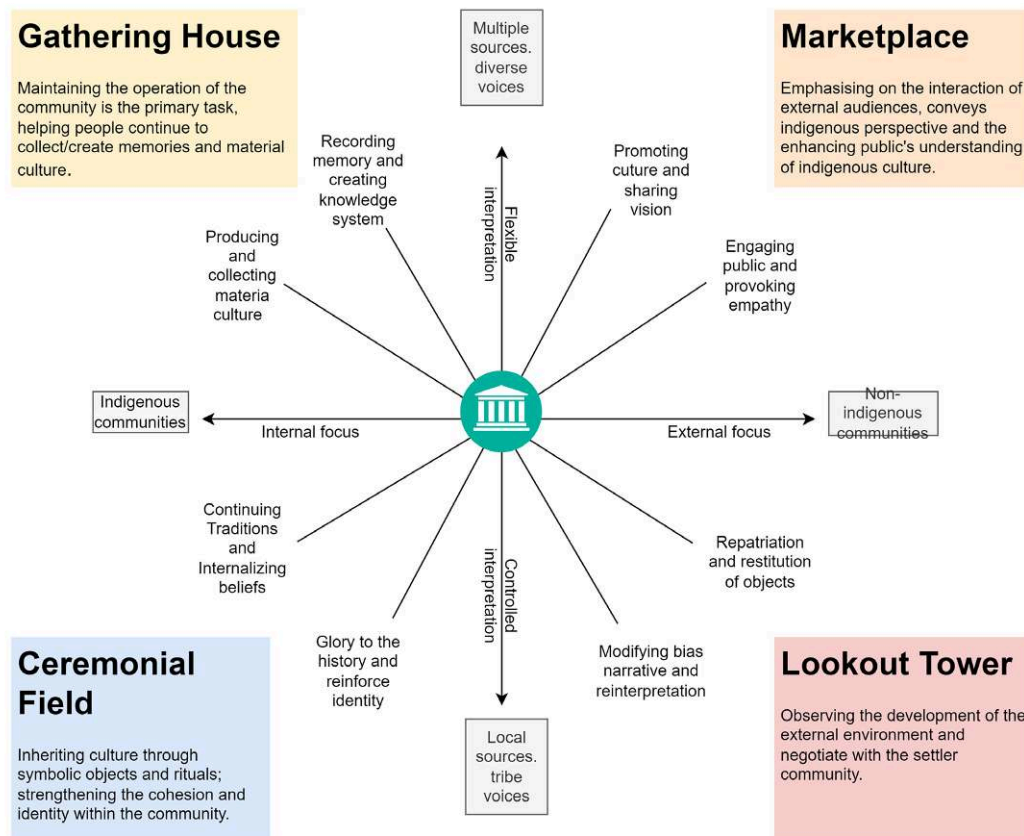
Most participation actions are value driven. Therefore, I add to previous research by arguing that it is essential to comprehend Indigenous museum values to prevent the misuse of museums as tools and the abuse of tribal participation. Some researchers have recognised that Indigenous museums have unique values which differ from those of colonial settler components (Kreps, 2006; McCarthy, 2020; Onciul, 2015; Stanley, 2008). As museums are a product of society, their values reflect the needs of the social context in which they operate. It is therefore imperative to establish the core momentum of Indigenous museums and present a well-defined value framework instead of adopting the Western model as a default.

In the case of the Chi-Mei tribe, the township used the museum building to showcase the "diverse culture" of the 17 tribes under its regime. However, for the Indigenous people, the museum is considered part of the community, a lively hub that supports the tribe in learning about their traditions and developing their tribal identity. The museum is designed to benefit the community rather than serve as a mere display of cultural diversity.

In the case of the Kamcing tribe, the value of an Indigenous museum is demonstrated by preserving space for Indigenous epistemology. This has allowed the community to regain the right to represent and interpret themselves and create a museum concept suitable to their needs and values.

Based on these two cases, it can be concluded that museums that hold real value for these communities establish a close connection with the tribe, assisting them in preserving their cultural traditions while also addressing contemporary challenges.

This study, therefore, proposes a new museum values framework for policymakers and practitioners to reevaluate and critique the conventional understanding of museums. To initiate the conversation, I modify the Museum Values Framework (MVF) theory (Davies et al., 2013), which outlines four modes (the club, the temple, the visitor attraction, and the forum) within a western cultural context. Unlike in the MVF, where the community is portrayed as a value receiver, the Indigenous Museum Value Framework (IMVF, see figure 1) deems the community as a value creator. It replaces the central role of collection and museum building, centring around the community and highlighting that the Indigenous museum is an integral part of it. By retaining the horizontal axis as the internal/external focus and the vertical axis as the flexible/controlled interpretation, the IMVF emphasises



the significance of putting the Indigenous community at its core.

Figure 1 The Indigenous Museum Values Framework (IMVF, created by the author).

The IMVF outlines four modes of Indigenous museums: Ceremonial Field, Gathering House, Marketplace, and Lookout Tower.

In the **Ceremonial Field** mode, the central role of the museum is to inherit culture through symbolic objects and rituals, strengthening the cohesion and identity within the community. The **Gathering House** mode centres on maintaining the operation of the community, helping people continue to collect/create memories and material culture. The **Marketplace** mode emphasises the interaction of external audiences, conveying Indigenous perspectives and enhancing the public’s understanding of Indigenous culture. In the **Lookout Tower** mode, the museum observes the development of the external environment and negotiates with the settler community.

The IMVF provides a holistic and dynamic approach to understanding the role of Indigenous museums in their respective communities. It recognises that Indigenous museums are not just institutions for preserving the past but are also future-oriented and full of agency. Three key traits of the IMVF are worth highlighting. First, interpretation is created in its cultural context, ensuring that Indigenous perspectives and values are accurately portrayed. Second, the primary duty of the Indigenous museum is to preserve the lives of the community rather than simply collecting the dead. The museum should be where traditional knowledge is passed down, and techniques for creating material culture are shared. Third, “for the public” should be used carefully because it is often misused as

“for the majority,” and consequences become an excuse for authority to sacrifice the rights of minority groups. While Indigenous museums are open to all, their priority should be on serving the Indigenous community. The IMVF is an alternative to the traditional Western museum model, offering a more community-centred and culturally sensitive approach.

Conclusion

This study started with the question that has long existed in museum theory and practice, “What are the values of Indigenous museums for the Indigenous community?” Through investigating the cases of the Chi-Mei tribe and the Kamcing tribe, it has critiqued the values taboos limiting Indigenous people’s participation in Taiwan, indicated the ways to evaluate partnerships, and outlined the IMVF while differentiating it from the Western culture form. Overall, this paper challenges political rhetoric and mainstream concepts, overcoming the taboos of participation and broadening the spectrum defining museums. Theoretically, it is hoped that the framework will ignite meaningful conversations in museum sectors. Practically, it will be a valuable tool for setting development strategies and making cultural policies for community-run Indigenous museums.

However, the research contains room for expansion and further modification. Due to practical limitations, only two cases in Taiwan were examined, but more museums in other communities within and outside Taiwan are worth exploring. Therefore, there is room for further research in this area. The IMVF is not a one-size-fits-all framework; instead, it reminds people that the museum should be an open concept allowing different groups to reimagine and discover its contemporary values. While this research has limitations, it paves the way for future research and offers a new perspective for understanding the value of Indigenous museums.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Professor Elizabeth Weiser, Dr. Amy Johnstone, and my colleague Laura Cannon for their valuable suggestions. I am also profoundly grateful for the contribution of all the people in the Chi-Mei and Kamcing tribes. I also want to express my admiration for the curator Qiu Jian-wei, Lin Song-en, and the director Wang Chang-Hua of the NPM for their dedicated work toward Indigenous empowerment projects. Lastly, building an inclusive cultural environment and museum policy relies on the effort and courage to change. I am grateful to my former colleagues who exhibited courage while working at MOC.

References

- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216–224. doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225
- Chi-Mei tribe. (2015, May 11). Chi-Mei tribe tears for withdrawing collection action on Mother’s Day. *Video Recording Database of Civic Action*. www.civilmedia.tw/archives/31124
- Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking participation: Models, meanings, and practices. *Community Development Journal*, 43(3), 269–283. doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010
- Council of Indigenous Peoples. (2023, January 11). *Indigenous population statistics in December*

2022. The Website of Council of Indigenous Peoples (R.O.C). www.cip.gov.tw/zh-tw/news/data-list/812FFAB0BCD92D1A/7F0D9BFE4F791D9CAE9B30328A2228A5-info.html
- Huang, S.-M. (2021). Indigenous heritage in diplomacy: Repositioning Taiwan in the Austronesian network and its cultural implications. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 12(1), 72–86. doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-05-2021-0082
- Kamcing Tribe Curatorial Team. (2017). *The exhibition of the Kamcing tribe's one-hundred years history*. sites.google.com/view/kamcing-taitung/
- Karadeniz, C., & Ozdemir, E. (2018). Which museum? Change in museum studies and the new museology. *Millî folklor*, 120, 158–169. go.exlibris.link/k7KmM5f8
- Kreps, C. (2006). Non-Western models of museums and curation in cross-cultural perspective. In *A Companion to Museum Studies* (pp. 457–472). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. doi.org/10.1002/9780470996836.ch28
- Lin S.-E. (2013). Theory and vision for the promotion of minority group cultural rights by museums. *Museology Quarterly*, 27(3), 29–47. doi.org/10.6686/MuseQ.201307_27(3).0002
- Lu M.-F. (2018). Restrictions on publicizing colonial contact history: Establishment twists and discourses of the national museum of Indigenous peoples and Austronesian culture park. *Museology Quarterly*, 32(2), 5–35. doi.org/10.6686/MuseQ.201804_32(2).0001
- McCall, V., & Gray, C. (2014). Museums and the ‘new museology’: Theory, practice, and organizational change. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 29(1), 19–35. doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2013.869852
- McCarthy, C. (2016). *Museums and Maori: Heritage professionals, Indigenous collections, current practice*. Routledge. doi.org/10.4324/9781315423890
- McCarthy, C. (2020). From histories of museums to museum history: Approaches to historicizing colonial museums in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Museum History Journal*, 13(1), 95–110. doi.org/10.1080/19369816.2020.1759008
- McCarthy, C., Dorfman, E., Hakiwai, A., & Twomey, Ā. (2013). Mana Taonga: Connecting communities with New Zealand museums through ancestral Māori culture. *Museum International*, 65(1–4), pp. 5–15. doi.org/10.1111/muse.12028
- Ministry of Culture. (2022). *2022 Cultural Statistics*. Ministry of Culture. stat.moc.gov.tw/eBook_List_Dtl.aspx?RID=2022
- Onciul, B. (2015). Indigenous peoples and international museology. In *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice*. Routledge.
- Qiu, J., Lin, S., Lin, X., Lin, J., Zeng, Y., Li, H., Huang, C., & Xiong, D. (2020). *Practice together: N possibilities for museums and places*. National Museum of Prehistory.
- Ruisui Township Office. (2015). Ruisui township office’s statement on the Chi-Mei Museum incident.
- Schultz, L. (2017). Interculturality, identity, and self-determination in an Aboriginal cultural center. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 7(3), 261–279. doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2016.1153253

- Stanley, N. (2008). Introduction: Indigeneity and museum practice in the Southwest Pacific. In *The future of Indigenous museums: Perspectives from the Southwest Pacific* (First paperback edition, pp. 1–22). Berghahn Books.
- takiscibanan, ibu istanda. (2018, July 1). Remembering coming home: Muskun Kata Kulumah. *Prehistoric Museum Electronic Newsletter No. 373*. beta.nmp.gov.tw/enews/no374/page_03.html
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1(1), 1–40. doi.org/10.25058/20112742.n38.04
- Vawda, S. (2019). Museums and the epistemology of injustice: From colonialism to decoloniality. *Museum International*, 71(1–2), pp. 72–79. doi.org/10.1080/13500775.2019.1638031
- Vergo, P. (1997). *New museology*. Reaktion Books.
- Wang, S.-L. (2019). Museums, heritage, and the politics of pursuing Indigenous rights in Taiwan. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 8(4), 474–484. doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-06-2018-0104
- White, S. C. (1996). Depoliticizing development: The uses and abuses of participation. *Development in Practice*, 6(1), 6–15. doi.org/10.1080/0961452961000157564
- Wu M.-C. (2011). The symbolic power of objects: From heritages of the Chi-Mei back to the Chi-Mel to restore lost ritual. *Taiwan Natural Science*, 30(2), 14–19. www.airitilibrary.com/Publication/alDetailedMesh?docid=P20150629002-201106-201609090059-201609090059-14-19
- Wu P.-L. (2011). A brief sketch on the preparation of the *When the Chi-Mei Meets the National Taiwan Museum* exhibition, seeing in the anticipation and anxiety of a museum curator. *Taiwan Natural Science*, 30(2), 20–27. www.airitilibrary.com/Publication/alDetailedMesh?DocID=P20150629002-201106-201609090059-201609090059-20-27

From values to strong policy making – implementing collection-focused museology

Nina Robbins¹

Senior Lecturer, Adjunct Professor of Museology,
UAS Metropolia – Helsinki, Finland

Abstract

Actively practicing value-based discourse among various municipal stakeholders is an integral part of museum work. This can function as a bridge between museum professionals and other parties affecting our work. It is also a tool that can be used, especially in collection care duties. I will introduce three separate projects where active value-based discourse helped museum professionals clarify the collection focus of one of the most significant artist's homes in Finland, Suviranta, that of Eero Järnefelt and his family. These projects involved hands-on and on-site museum work by museology students, a theoretical museum plan involving Suviranta for city officials and a two-day home museum conference for museum professionals. Furthermore, the concept of time is used to demonstrate the various mindsets affecting heritage work within a municipal structure. Ultimately, the aim is to find ways to align these mindsets for the benefit of long-term preservation perspectives.

Keywords: Suviranta, home museum, museology, museum collection, value discussion

Résumé

Partant des valeurs vers une élaboration de politiques solides – Mettre en œuvre une muséologie axée sur la collection. Le discours sur les valeurs fait partie intégrante du métier muséal et, si celui-ci est exercé avec succès, il peut servir de passerelle entre les professionnels du musée et diverses autres parties prenantes qui influent sur notre travail. Cet article introduit le concept d'une muséologie axée sur la collection en tant qu'outil permettant d'établir cette passerelle. Cet outil a été utilisé dans trois projets distincts entre 2019 et 2022, ayant pour point focal l'une des maisons d'artistes les plus importantes de Finlande, Suviranta, avec sa collection et son jardin. Ces projets comprenaient des travaux muséaux pratiques effectués par des étudiants en muséologie, un plan muséologique théorique destiné aux responsables municipaux ainsi qu'une conférence de deux jours pour les professionnels des musées. De plus, le texte utilise la notion du temps comme exemple pour montrer les diverses mentalités qui influent sur le travail patrimonial au sein d'une structure municipale. À terme, l'objectif

¹ Email: nina.a.robbsins@jyu.fi

est de trouver les moyens d'aligner ces mentalités au profit de plans de préservation à long terme.

Mots-clés : Suviranta, maison-musée, muséologie, collection muséale, discussion sur les valeurs

In this paper I will use the concepts of value-based discourse and collection-focused museology as one way to tie together the needs of various stakeholders involved within the museum profession. The start of this undertaking was a student project that took place in Suviranta, Järvenpää in the spring semester of 2019. Suviranta is one of the most significant early 20th century artists' homes in Finland and belonged to the artist Eero Järnefelt's (1865–1937) family and their descendants until the year 2018. In 2021, the student project ventured into the writing of a museum plan for this unique homestead as well as a two-day conference for home museum professionals in 2022. The underlying questions in all these projects were as follows: How can one navigate successfully within a municipal city structure when the need for co-operation from various specialists is obvious? Is there a possibility for various stakeholders to work together and benefit from each other's experience despite their differing perspectives and potential expectations regarding this original site? It is my belief that in the museum field, collections can be used as anchors when aligning ideas and thoughts formulated by these various stakeholders, thus bringing forth the concept of collection-focused museology.

In the ICOM Prague 2022 ICOFOM preprints, I contemplated the possibility of finding a way for university-level museology and polytechnic level conservation science to be able to benefit from each other's knowledge base (Robbins, 2022). This issue was further discussed during the ICOM Prague conference in the ICOFOM session in Brno, and it became clear that similar educational imbalances occur in other European countries as well. During the Suviranta projects, it was further ascertained that the question of imbalance is not only an educational issue. A certain level of imbalance seems to often take place when communicating heritage issues in contemporary society. In the case of Suviranta, this potential imbalance lies between the heritage sector and the municipal city structures.

During the three projects, the concept of time popped up continuously. It became obvious that various stakeholders affecting museum work regard this concept differently. For example, the need to prepare and act according to the annual renewed budget plan will give a different time perspective as compared to the long-term preservation requirements that all museum professionals need to uphold. Furthermore, four-year election cycles or even the shorter lifespans of any IT infrastructures will add another shorter-term time layer to the mix. In this paper, I will use the concept of time as a demonstration of how value-based discourse will help all parties involved to start understanding these different perspectives and their resulting imbalances that guide our work.

The discipline of museology offers a bridging element to the question that helps investigate this dilemma. Museology has a somewhat unique status in the Finnish museum sector. Namely, one needs to complete studies in museology to qualify as a candidate for a museum profession (Finlex, 2019). Due to this official status of museology, the discipline also plays an important role in the municipal structure of the city. Understandably, the

contemporary museum field does not only consist of museology or heritage professionals but offers work for a multitude of specialists (Auer, 2000; Vilkuna, 2021; Lonkila & Hanka, 2022). This is why one needs to keep in mind the twofold nature of museology where theory and practice go hand-in-hand (Robbins, 2021a).

By introducing three separate museology projects that were planned to target students, city officials and museum professionals, I will show how the sectors involved could eventually be aligned towards the same goal if they were given the possibility to observe, interact and learn from one another. The focus and departure point of all these projects was the artist Eero Järnefelt's (1863–1937) home Suviranta, its gardens and its collection. My aim is to show one possible path as to how one location and its collection have the ability to emanate century old significance in our contemporary city scene. We museum professionals need to work as mediators in this endeavor.

Finnish artist Eero Järnefelt and his immediate family lived permanently in Suviranta from 1901 to 1917. In addition to the artistic accomplishments of Eero Järnefelt and his family, it is also the historical setting around Lake Tuusula that makes Suviranta so significant. The area is the birthplace of Finnish 19th-century culture and is the location of the homes of the writer Juhani Aho (1861–1921), the composer Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) and the artist Pekka Halonen (1865–1933). This significance has been documented in various publications (Lukkarinen & Waenerberg, 2004; Lindqvist & Ojanen, 2008; Konttinen, 2013; Lindqvist, 2017; Koskinen, 2017).

The building itself was designed by architect Usko Nyström (1861–1925), and its style follows the English Arts & Crafts movement cottages, thus making the house quite unusual among architectural trends in Finland at the time. The daughter of the family, Laura Kolehmainen (1904–1985), moved to Suviranta in 1933 and continued the original function of the home. After Laura's passing, her son Juhani Kolehmainen moved to Suviranta with his wife Anna-Kaisa in 1985. They preserved the homestead with great detail, implementing many collection-care methods known to museum professionals. It was very clear to them that they needed to ensure the transfer of the artist's legacy, even though Suviranta functioned as the family's private residence all these years. All in all, the homestead, its collections and gardens were well preserved when the City of Järvenpää purchased it in 2018. The Suviranta Museum Project by the Järvenpää City and Art Museum was launched soon after the purchase to facilitate the transformation from a private residence to a professional museum location.

With its authentic and undisturbed historical legacy, Suviranta offered a great opportunity for students to learn and practice their museum skills in an original setting.



Figure 1: Suviranta, October 2021. Photo © Nina Robbins.

Three projects, three imbalances: Students, city officials and museum professionals

The first project was not only directed towards Suviranta but consisted of two separate museology courses during spring terms 2019 (Case Suviranta) and 2020 (Case Vehkalahti) that I planned and conducted for both Finnish and international museology students at the University of Helsinki. Both courses consisted of weekly theoretical lectures and intensive hands-on museum work sessions at the Suviranta homestead located in City of Järvenpää and the Vehkalahti Regional Museum located in Hamina. During these courses, the original and authentic museum locations offered the main material for the students. In both cases the main goal was twofold: to offer an original and significant heritage site for the students to work with and to offer the local museum a motivated work force for the entire spring semester. Twenty to twenty-five students worked in groups of three to five to conduct collection care work, inventory tasks, collection photography, and planning both internet visibility and physical audience engagement activities².

The student project involved MA students of museology and UAS students of conservation. They made excursions to Suviranta and carried out collection care duties, analyzed the significance of the area and created future audience programs. From the start, the home and its gardens were seen as one collection unit and all information was filtered through this understanding. Students working in an original surrounding and dealing with issues of practical museum tasks, collection care issues and hands-on conservation had the

² In my paper I will use Suviranta as the main focal point since the Vehkalahti Regional Museum project was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

possibility to learn from one another and to see how classroom theory was transformed into practical museum work.

One year later, during the spring semester 2020, students carried out hands-on museum work in the Vehkalahti Regional Museum located in Hamina to find ways to improve the outdated appearance of the museum. The teaching methods used in Suviranta were further developed, including an audience questionnaire, thus making it relevant to the article at hand as well. During the course, the question of whether the museum really needed an update was raised. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic terminated the hands-on section of the course at an early stage, allowing only one open-house event in the museum to be carried out before the lock-down. During this event, students conducted a short survey to find out audiences' opinions about the old Vehkalahti Museum location and its collections. The survey answers gave us valuable information as to the attitudes toward original and seemingly outdated museum locations. These answers will be briefly discussed in the next section of this article.

Both projects gave the students valuable working experience with original materials and collections and showed them how theoretical knowledge has an opportunity to be transferred into hands-on practices. It was important to create these study projects in authentic settings and show students the start of real-life museumification processes.

The Case Suviranta project helped students address the imbalance between theoretical knowledge and hands-on museum work. They could directly test their ideas and theoretical thoughts during this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It offered a unique and authentic perspective on museum work and gave valuable experience that the students could use in their future professional careers. The project itself also offered a path to employment for them. In helping to rectify the imbalance between theory and practice, it taught students to actively include value-based discourse in their everyday working situations.

After the student project, it became clear that Suviranta would need a proper museum plan. The Järvenpää Art Museum commissioned the writing of the plan in autumn 2021, thus making *Suviranta – Homestead as Art* (Robbins, 2021b) the second project of the collection-focused museology undertaking. In addition to the museum plan, a plan for the garden of Suviranta was simultaneously written by gardener Anne Töllikkö (2021).

The museum plan was aimed toward city officials in order to inform the municipal structure of the city of the significance of Suviranta as well as the mindset with which museum professionals conduct their work. The plan will continue to give guidance to city officials when making investment decisions for the homestead's future. It is essential that stakeholders coming from outside our own sector understand the unique role of this homestead.

The Museum Plan addressed, among other things, the differing perspectives between museum professionals and other municipal stakeholders. The plan was initially written to offer a clear path for Järvenpää Art Museum professionals to start their work in transferring Suviranta from a private home into a public museum location. However, it also offered a heritage window for municipal decision makers by introducing heritage value-forming mechanisms that deal with a wider perspective than just numerical value-forming systems (Raworth, 2017; Mazzucato, 2017; Gelles & Yaffe-Bellany, 2019). The Plan was an opportunity to introduce the value-forming mechanism inherent in museum work to municipal city officials.

The main methods I used to collect information for this Museum Plan were recurrent visits to Suviranta and in-depth interviews with Juhani and Anna-Kaisa Kolehmainen. During autumn 2021, I familiarized myself with the collection and the stories attached to the various original Suviranta objects. Juhani and Anna-Kaisa had fostered the artist's legacy, and their existing inventory lists, photographs and recorded memories gave the museum plan a good start.

In the plan *Suviranta – The Homestead as Art* the buildings, the collection and the garden are seen as one museal unit and as equal parts of the eventual museum collection. This is an important factor and corresponds to the sentiments of the late 19th century Tuusulanjärvi artist community. In the case of Suviranta, the authenticity and direct links to the artist's legacy are important.

This desire for direct links is further emphasized in the article “Home Museums – Biographical Collections of Significant Lives” by researcher Liisa Oikari and former museum director Kristina Ranki from the Mannerheim Museum (2021). They make a separation between the concepts of a house museum and a home museum. For them, the concept of a home museum is more intimate, potentially bearing a heavier authenticity factor as compared to the concept of a house museum. According to them, Suviranta, belonging entirely to the Järnefelt family until 2018, bears a high level of authenticity and is thus regarded as a home museum rather than a more general house museum, the entire site belonging to the same concept of a home. This understanding is important when we need to open the discussion of museal significance to other municipal stakeholders. This is why the Suviranta Museum Plan considers these various museal fields, namely the house, the collection and the garden, as one unit and part of one authentic home museum. Making this understanding clear to all municipal parties involved within a city structure will help align the needs, future resources and hands-on actions of this authentic site.

The third project took place in November 2022 when a two-day conference on house museums in Finland was held in Järvenpää to further advance the understanding of the role of home and house museums in Finland, as well as the differences between them. This conference, *Genius Loci – The Place of House Museums in the Turmoil of Change*, was theoretical in nature, but also had hands-on sessions as a testing ground for the theoretical ideas presented in the presentations. Heritage sector academics, museum professionals and city officials were invited to join the conference, and approximately 70 participants had an opportunity to network, exchange ideas and concerns and make continuum plans for future collaborative steps. The conference was organized by researcher Liisa Oikari, who works in the Mannerheim Museum in Helsinki; museum director Jaana Tamminen and conference assistant Johanna Virtala, who both work in the Järvenpää Art Museum; doctoral candidate Mari Viita-aho, whose thesis is connected to issues related to house museums; and myself. Initially, the working group's intent was to bring together house and home museum professionals to discuss issues that often fall through the cracks when larger conferences are organized. Our aim was to hold the conference presentations as theoretical as possible in nature, dealing with identity, values and future scenarios. Furthermore, we wanted to encourage the audience to take part in discussions and workshops. The main themes during this two-day conference were authenticity, visitor experience and the potential of museum value. One of the issues was to discuss in depth what the factors make house and home museums remain relevant. Another key theme was whether the demand for constant change is a necessity or just a passing phase.

The hands-on section of the conference invited professionals to discuss five themes: the concept of a *Dynamic Museum* (Paaskoski et al., 2022), *Museological Value Discussion* (Robbins, 2016; 2019), *Identity of a House Museum* (Oikari & Ranki, 2021), *How to Prevent from Sitting – Protection of an original environment* (Time travels and Utopias Project, 2018–2022) and the *Climate Skills* creative writing workshop led by artist Henna Laininen (2022). In these hands-on sessions, participants could sift through the theoretical thoughts presented by the keynote and other speakers but maintain the necessity for hands-on practice. After all, the aim was also to offer practical tools for professionals to be able to face future challenges.

The two-day conference in 2022 offered home and house museum professionals an opportunity to communicate value-related issues and learn the importance of professional consensus. One of the mutual outcomes during the discussions was that there is a potential source of an imbalance in understanding the role of smaller museums in the bigger museum context where the voices of larger museums often dominate the discussion. Again, the connection between value-based discourse and the concept of time was evident.

In the next section I will map out these three projects, which ran from 2019 to 2022. My aim is to show the potential of collection-focused museology and how it can function as a bridge between theoretical issues and hands-on museum work. Eventually, collection-focused museology can be used as an anchor and umbrella when working with various stakeholders or discussing the future use of resources.

Discussion: Potential imbalances, joining factors and the concept of time

I started this paper by introducing the element of imbalance in the heritage sector and mentioned that one needs to investigate ways to diminish imbalance rather than just to describe it. This section will try to map the elements of imbalance and find how these could jointly be diminished. Suviranta as a unique homestead, along with its three projects, will offer us tools to achieve this.

All in all, the dilemma seems to be how to learn to speak the same language when conversing with various stakeholders. Recent studies in the heritage sector show that there is a growing interest toward showing impact and value, even intrinsic value, in our field (Holden, 2006; Scott, 2013; Robbins, 2016; SENSOMEMO, 2020–2024). Furthermore, there is a need to point out significances in everyday encounters in order to keep museum collections relevant to contemporary consumers (Russell & Winkworth, 2009; Häyhä et al., 2015) and to select key objects from museum collections based on visitors' strongest memories and collected stories (Lehto-Vahtera, 2018). All these studies show that visitors and audiences consider museums significant. It is visitors' memories involved with visits to original museum sites and seeing authentic museum items, as well as all the emotions that these experiences accumulate that make them relevant.

In earlier contexts I have written about the museological value discussion being a unified feature in our profession (Robbins, 2019; 2021a; 2021b). To use the concept of a museological value discussion takes a comprehensive approach to museum work and such factors as significance and meaningfulness. For example, the value perspective regarding collections becomes wider than just one object and its current value accumulation. When dealing with museum collections, it is not only a question of single objects or

their key value and significance as part of contemporary museum activities. We should include a historical perspective in the equation. Museological value discussion results in a value network, which consists of selected values specific to a given museum or heritage organization. This network is not based only on our current idea of values or identity but also on those that have accumulated century after century. To be able to use this as a tool for everyday museum practices, museum professionals need practice as well as an accumulative value portfolio that documents the value mindset of previous generations of museum professionals.

According to the above-mentioned studies, it is easily understood that we museum professionals and others working in the heritage sector are prone to speak the same language. But the question is, how do we communicate this outside our own box to those stakeholders working closely with us but who might well have completely different aspirations?

Earlier in this text, I mentioned a potential imbalance between the various municipal stakeholders. During the three Suviranta projects, it became clear that, for example, the stakeholders' understanding of the concept of time within the municipal structure can result in a situation of imbalance that eventually causes misunderstandings. Museum professionals and other city officials often seem to be working with different kinds of service goals and time perspectives in mind. Sometimes, the current city service structure does not necessarily consider the long-term care responsibilities of museums as currently relevant. This can create misunderstandings between the museum sector, with its long-term responsibilities, and various other municipal structures that operate more within an election cycle time or other shorter-term budgetary frameworks.

As an example, I will use the stair structure that leads to the sauna and lakeshore area of the Suviranta garden. The technical sector of the city did not quite understand the meaning of the original stone stairs and built a bright-red wooden stair structure that covers the original stones. Understandably, there were also public safety issues involved, but the size and form of this stair structure is too large for the proportion of the garden, thus indicating the level of misunderstanding as to the significance of this authentic site. As small of an example as this might be, it transfers the issue of misunderstanding to a larger context of significance, value and, eventually, of impact.

To avoid these misunderstandings, the museum sector has produced studies that show methods of calculating value in various ways. For example, discussion surrounding the impact value of the everyday museum work has become more and more important (Scott, 2013). This includes, for example, paying attention to elements of society that make an impact beyond monetary value to the current generation. Professor Stephen Weil presented this issue in the museum context already in 2002: "If museums do matter, if they can make a difference, to whom do they matter, and what are the differences that they might make?" And, most importantly, he continues: "Who determines, and when, and how, whether they are, in fact, making those differences?" (Weil, 2002, p. 56).

For example, one way to show an easily calculative impact has been to calculate the accumulative monetary value that each visitor brings to the local area (Piekkola et al., 2013). This is no doubt a very efficient way because of its calculative character. Other value forming mechanisms focus on gathering information about the meaningfulness and how to collect this information in order to align the various material and immaterial value

goals of any given museum (Holden, 2006; Scott, 2013). Museums have also created museum-specific impact indicators to help them in this work (Vaikuttavuusindikaattorit, 2009). To bring these mechanisms out into the open will give the area of humanistic studies a possibility to show impact when discussing the need for resources within the municipal structure of the city (Heikkilä & Niiniluoto, 2016).

Many of these methods focus on the current-day visitor experience and museum work. The concept of collection-focused museology, as well as the building of the accumulative value-based portfolio, will provide a longer-term perspective for museum professionals to use as an impact tool. In the making of a portfolio, one takes the value network of the historical context into account. In this work the concept of time is of the essence.

It is evident that the concept of time is key in our museum context, especially in the field of collection care as well as through the tasks of provenance and material research. The information of a museum object's ownership path throughout its history is essential when determining the authenticity of the object. For this, material research and the marks of wear and tear offer an important companion to the timeline through which the tools used and pigments or working methods can be determined.

But the concept of time will also give us a good example of how various groups outside our own field relate differently toward this concept. Politicians, and to some degree also city officials, work with the timeframe of an election cycle in mind, making plans and decisions accordingly. Whereas museum professionals, especially collection care professionals, operate within a longer timespan, one that might reach back centuries, all the way to the origins of collections and cabinets of curiosities. Furthermore, the museum sector is not an insulated element in the city structure but subject to various technical repairs and renovations. In the city sector, one deals with the timespan of the concrete and accumulating repair debt of the entire infrastructure of the city. No doubt, this concept involves the accumulating care debt of collections as well. Finally, the concept of time is again seen differently within the sector that plans implementation and usage of various technology-based advancements, when a mere two-year cycle might be seen as a lifetime.

All these different concepts of time affect everyday museum work. These simple examples give us an opportunity to understand the origin of standpoints from various perspectives and maybe even understand the motivations of stakeholders. This knowledge is valuable when we need to synchronize our own values with the values of other city sectors.

To demonstrate further the difference in understanding the concept of time, I will use the questionnaire material acquired during the open-house event at Vehkalahti Regional Museum in February 2020. The concept of time was brought up in the visitors' answers during the open-house day. In their answers, they made points concerning long-term values that should not be ignored when conducting collection care work and any future renewal projects. It became clear that a strong renewal would disturb the delicate identity of the museum and that one should advance carefully with any renewal plans. Three main points were raised by the visitors during the open house. The first point was that museums function as a knowledge reserve for their immediate community. Examples of responses include sentences such as "Museums possess knowledge capital," "Museums are banks" and "Museums make historical events concrete." The second point was that museums give perspective to our everyday lives. Some of these opinions were "We are only one link in a long chain," "Museums help to envision the future" and "Museums give us

roots.” The third point was not as concrete as the other two. It reached more towards the emotional part of our consciousness in statements such as “There is something sublime in museums” and “Museums elevate us from the everyday.”¹ All of these points indicate a strong relationship and deep understanding for a long-reaching time frame. In addition, these thoughts are also aligned with recent studies on material and sensory memories conducted by the SENSOMEMO (Sensory and Material Memories) research project in the University of Jyväskylä (2020–2024), which is funded by the Academy of Finland (2020–2024) and “explores the ways in which material objects affect people, and how perceptions, sensory experiences and memories intertwine in human-objects relationships” (SENSOMEMO).²

As shown above, a strong sense of time and how the passing of time is a valuable accumulative element in the context of museum collections was evident in the Case Vehkalahti answers. In addition, the connection of time regarding authentic museum objects became very clear. According to the answers, authentic museum objects convey memories and emotions as well as concrete material and physical marks of their production and usage throughout history. These emotions and signs of lived history are all builders of significance and add to the accumulation of value for museum collections.

A further example of the concept of time and how museums work as links in a long chain are the objects in museum collections. For example, there is one simple clay vase in the collection of Suviranta that Eero Järnefelt used in his paintings and that was still in everyday use by the last permanent residents of Suviranta. The accumulation of history



Figure 2: Eero Järnefelt, *Still-life*, 1937. Photo © Järvenpää Art Museum/Matias Uusikylä (2009).

1 All comments translated by the author.

2 Author’s translation.

and museum value is tremendous in this small everyday object even though the object is no longer in active use. The vase has been selected decade after decade as a significant part of Suviranta, and because of this long-term chain of significance, one could even claim that the object is loaded with object energy (Robbins, 2016).

For us museum professionals these are valuable data that give us an opportunity to create tools to build museum futures based on this information. For example, building a value portfolio is one tool to make the time-object-public relationship visible. Through the making of such a portfolio, museological theory formation will transfer itself into practical tools for museum professionals and make the long-term factors affecting museum work known to other sectors within a city structure.

Museum professionals act as mediators in the process. It is their task to import the significance of long-term preservation values to current-day discourse. For this, professionals need museological value discussion as a tool to clarify their own focus. By an accumulative value portfolio, we can include the

values and thought forming mechanisms of previous generations in our own line of thinking. This certainly will give our own decision making a more profound basis as well as make us understand the greater value context of history.

The following image shows the collection-focused museology at work. It shows the accumulative factor of collection care portfolio transferring long-term values and their significance of these values to future museum professionals and audiences.

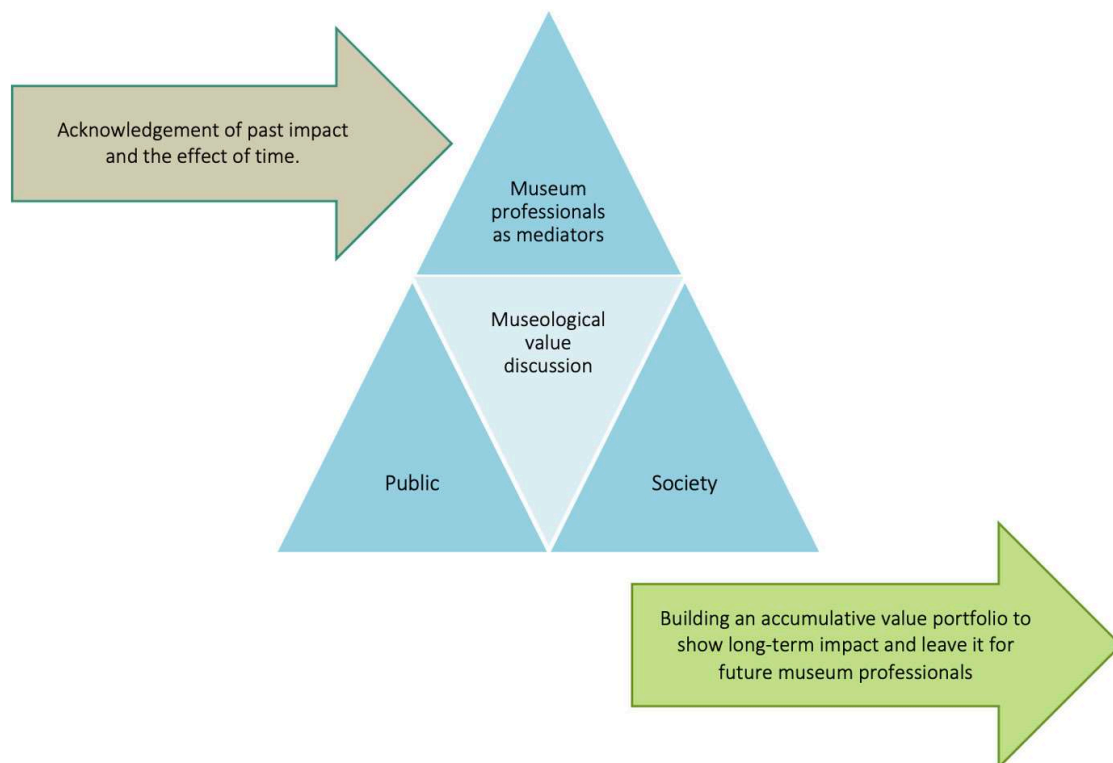


Figure created by Nina Robbins

Discussions among museum professionals about the historical importance of material objects strengthens our professional identity and makes it possible to share the understanding of our somewhat different value structure as compared to other municipal structures and stakeholders. We are the caretakers of originality and authenticity but also of long-term values.

Conclusion

This paper showed one path from imbalance to balance and strong policy making within a city structure. Understanding that various elements of imbalance may lie in the differences of educational traditions, in varying work standards or even in our way of understanding the concept of time might give us an opportunity to see our current dilemma from various perspectives. It is important for us to step outside of our own professional sector and seek collaborative projects in order to make our past remain relevant. This kind of collaboration between heritage professions can have societal impact. It could also work toward continual professional development and secure a wider understanding of our industry.

Suviranta as a museum location has offered us an anchor for this work. It is clear that any project aiming to show long-term value accumulation, and thus strong impact, cannot succeed alone, as all sectors of heritage work need to be on board. Beneficially integrating all forces will become ever more important in a world where financial resources are increasingly scrutinized.

References

- Auer, T. (2000). *Konservointityön professionalisaatio*. University of Tampere.
- Ympäristö ja luonnonvarat. (2022, February 25). Dynaaminen museo ja tulevaisuusperintövertas. University of Eastern Finland.
- Finlex. (2019, March 14). *Museolaki*.
- Gelles, D. & Yaffe-Bellany, D. (2019, August 19). Shareholder value is no longer everything. New York Times. www.nytimes.com/2019/08/19/business/business-roundtable-ceo-corporations.html
- Genius Loci – *The place of house museums in the turmoil of change* (2022). Conference in the Järvenpää Conference Center 17.–18.11.2022. Järvenpää Art Museum. www.jarvenpaantaidemuseo.fi/a/paikan-henki-kotimuseot-muuttuvassa-maailmassa
- Heikkilä, T. & Niiniluoto, I. (2016). Humanistisen tutkimuksen arvo – Kuusi murrettavaa myyttiä ja neljä uutta avainta. *Opuscula Instituti Romani Finlandiae*.
- Holden, J. (2006). Cultural value and the crisis of legitimacy. DEMOS.
- Häyhä, H., Jantunen, S., & Paaskoski, L. (2015). *Analysing significance*. Suomen Museoliitto. www.museoliitto.fi/doc/verkkojulkaisut/AnalysingSignificance.pdf
- Kontinen, R. (2013). Onnellista asua maalla. Siltala.
- Koskinen, I. (2017). Suviranta – Eero Järnefeltin ateljeekoti kotina ja työtilana. Aalto University.
- Laininen, H. (2022). Climate skills for the future – Workshop for creative writing. www.hennalaininen.net.

- Lehto-Vahtera, J. (Ed.). (2018). *Kokoelmien avaimet – Museokokoelmien tunnisteobjekteja*. Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova.
- Lindqvist, L. & Ojanen, N. (2008). *Bringing art to life – Turn of the century Finnish artists' homes*. Otava.
- Lonkila, H. & Hanka, H. (2022). Eräänlaisia supernaisia ja -miehiä. Konservattoreiden jatko-opinnot Jyväskylän yliopistossa. In H. Lonkila, J. Hako & A. Halme (Eds.), *Maassa, puussa ja ilmassa – Janne Vilkkunan juhlakirja*. Suomen Kotiseutuliiton julkaisusarja A:40. Suomen Kotiseutuliitto. pp. 259–266.
- Lukkarinen, V. & Waenerberg, A. (2004). *Suomi-kuvasta mielenmaisemaan – Kansallismaisemat 1800- ja 1900-luvun vaihteen maalaustaiteessa*. SKS.
- Mazzucato, M. (2017). *The value of everything: Making and taking in the global economy*. Allen Lane Penguin Books.
- Oikari, L. & Ranki, K. (2021). Home museums – Biographical collections of significant lives. In N. Robbins, S. Thomas, M. Tuominen & A. Wessman (Eds.), *Museum studies – Bridging theory and practice*. ICOFOM. 208–235.
- Paaskoski, L., Siivonen, K., Vähäkari, N., Latvala-Harvilahti, P., Pelli, P., Granlund, M., & Hujala, T. (2022). *Dynaaminen museo ja tulevaisuusperintöverstas. Käsikirja museoiden ekososiaaliseen sivistystyöhön*. urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-69018-8-6
- Piekkola, H., Suojanen, O., & Vaino, A. (2013). *Museoiden taloudellinen vaikuttavuus*. Vaasan yliopisto Levón-instituutti.
- Raworth, K. (2017). *Doughnut economics – Seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist*. Penguin Random House.
- Robbins, N. (2016). Poisto museokokoelmasta: Museologinen arvokeskustelu kokoelmanhallinnan määrittäjänä. University of Jyväskylä.
- Robbins, N. (2019). Promoting value practice in museums creates impact. *Curator*, 63(1), 55–68. //doi.org/10.1111/cura.12350
- Robbins, N. (2021a). Locating museology outside the box. In N. Robbins, S. Thomas, M. Tuominen & A. Wessman (Eds.), *Museum studies – Bridging theory and practice*. ICOFOM. pp. 40–62.
- Robbins, N. (2021b). *Suviranta – Homestead as art*. Museum plan for the Järvenpää Art Museum. Järvenpää Art Museum.
- Robbins, N. (2022). Should an educational imbalance in the Finnish cultural sector be seen as a taboo? In E. Weiser, M. Bertin, & A. Leshchenko (Eds.), *Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory*. Materials for discussion. ICOFOM. pp. 92–96.
- Russell, R. & Winkworth, K. (2009). *Significance 2.0: A guide to assessing the significance of collections*. Heritage Publications. www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/significance2-0/part-1/index.html
- SENSOMEMO (2020–2024). www.jyu.fi/hytk/fi/laitokset/hela/en/research/research-clusters/sensomemo-material-and-sensory-memories-explorations-on-autobiographical-materiality
- Scott, C. (Ed.). (2013). *Museums and public value*. Ashgate.

Time travels and utopias – Artists’ museums as societal agents. (2018–2022). www.gallen-kallela.fi/aikakoneita-ja-utopioita/

Töllikkö, A. (2021). *Suvirannan puutarhasuunnitelma*. Järvenpää Art Museum.

Vaikuttavuusindikaattorit kulttuuripolitiikan tietopohjan vahvistajina. (2009). Ministry of Education, 2009:57. julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/75631/opm57.pdf

Vilkuna, J. (2021). The genesis of Finnish museology. In N. Robbins, S. Thomas, M. Tuominen & A. Wessman (Eds.), *Museum studies – Bridging theory and practice*. ICOFOM. pp. 86–117.

Weil, S. (2002). *Making museums matter*. Smithsonian Books.

From self-exploration to self-exploitation in digitally innovative museums

Elīna Vikmane¹

The Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies of the Latvian Academy of
Culture, Latvian Museum Association – Riga, Latvia

Abstract

The urge for innovation in digitally advanced museums, which is represented as a norm of everyday life and a fitting way for museums to recode and transform themselves into progressive heritage institutions, is strongly linked to their employees – the so-called *innovation champions*. The importance of *self-exploration* in these champions' professional lives motivates them to become more digitally innovative, which, in turn, is associated with increased productivity and job satisfaction. However, it is rarely discussed that this use of their limited time often leads to *self-exploitation* – harmful practices in the name of a perceived image of Western progress, leading to exhaustion, burnout, and declining quality of life in professional and private settings. The qualitative study described in this article is based on experiences of museum workers in Latvia's most digitally innovative museums. By drawing attention to museums' tendency to overlook (self) exploitation that structures the Western notion of progress and the normalisation of employee sacrifices in its pursuit, the author aims not only to contribute a critical perspective to the discourse on the positive bias towards digital advancement, but also to emphasise that museums themselves might unwittingly assume a new form of colonial practice in the era of postcolonial thought.

Key words: museums, digital innovation, innovation champions, self-exploration, self-exploitation, techno-colonialism, post-socialism, Latvia

Résumé

De l'auto-exploration à l'auto-exploitation dans les musées numériquement innovants. Le besoin d'innovation dans les musées numériques avancés, qui est représenté comme une norme de la vie quotidienne et un moyen approprié pour les musées de se recoder et de se transformer en institutions patrimoniales progressistes, est fortement lié à leurs employés - les soi-disant champions de l'innovation. L'importance de l'auto-exploration dans la vie professionnelle de ces champions les motive à devenir plus innovants sur le plan numérique, ce qui, à son tour, est associé à une augmentation de la productivité et de la satisfaction au travail. Cependant, il est rarement discuté du fait que cette utilisation de leur temps limité

¹ Email: elina.vikmane@lka.edu.lv

conduit souvent à l'auto-exploitation - des pratiques nuisibles au nom d'une image perçue du progrès occidental, conduisant à l'épuisement, au burn-out et à la baisse de la qualité de vie dans les contextes professionnels et privés. L'étude qualitative décrite dans cet article est basée sur les expériences des employés des musées les plus innovants sur le plan numérique en Lettonie. En attirant l'attention sur la tendance des musées à négliger l'(auto-)exploitation qui structure la notion occidentale de progrès et la normalisation des sacrifices des employés dans sa poursuite, l'auteur vise non seulement à apporter une perspective critique au discours sur les préjugés positifs à l'égard du progrès numérique, mais aussi à souligner que les musées eux-mêmes pourraient involontairement assumer une nouvelle forme de pratique coloniale à l'ère de la pensée postcoloniale.

Mots clés : musées, innovation numérique, champions de l'innovation, auto-exploration, auto-exploitation, techno-colonialisme, post-socialisme, Lettonie

Technological optimists have consistently called for appreciating the transformative power of digitalisation. This special category of technological innovation (Jovanovic & Rousseau, 2005) changes the way everyday life and business “connect the disconnected” (Mansell, 2017, p. 148), incrementally improving people’s lives. This rhetoric, promising a great deal for museums, has been present since before the beginning of the internet era (Parry, 2007), and signals a positive bias towards digital innovation (Rogers, 2003) and the Western context of academic studies (Reisdorf & Rhinesmith, 2020), where “everyone should use the internet, that it is expected of them” (Reisdorf et al., 2012, p. 7). Such an attitude represents technology-saturated life as a social desirability and a norm of everyday life. In contrast, I argue that in a post-socialist setting, the implementation of digital innovation in museums often relies heavily on the initiative of self-exploratory personnel – innovation champions – possessing a potential risk for museums to become the platforms of self-exploitation masquerading as romanticised perception of labour for the public good within Western ideas of progress.

The blurred boundaries of self-exploration and self-exploitation

I conceptualise self-exploration as creating variety in experience or exploring new aspects of self and work (Muhr et al., 2012), which is essential for innovation implementation and diffusion (Holmqvist, 2004). The first self-exploration perspective derives from studies arguing the importance of resourceful individuals for innovative practices to spread. Already in the early days of diffusion of innovation research, claims were made about the critical role of innovation champions, stressing that “a new idea either finds a champion or dies” (Schon, 1963, p. 84). Champions are defined as “charismatic individuals who drive innovation by overcoming the resistance or indifference that might arise in an organisation to a new idea” (Rogers, 2003, p. 414). A similar argument has been put forward by Desouza (2011), who refers to “resourceful employees who take the initiative to generate, develop and implement ideas for innovative solutions” (p. 5), sometimes referred to as “intrapreneurs” or “promoters” (Fichter, 2009, p. 359). Klaus Fichter has found that the role of innovation champions, or, as he calls them, promoters, can be highly diverse. They can range from expert to power position holder, process driver to relationship builder,

depending on the power base they possess (specific knowledge, control of resources, and organisational, communication or networking skills) and the barriers they need to overcome (knowledge-, ignorance- or opposition-related, administrative or collaborative) in order to innovate. Many studies associate the success of innovation champions with their higher aspirations and striving for occupational prestige, where recognition and acknowledgement are essential for practice to have social meaning (Rogers, 2003). The importance of self-motivation (Calderón Gómez, 2020) is linked to benefits for front runners from the digital divide, where motivation, resources, and their widespread use are combined to yield gains that serve as resources for further development (Dijk, 2020).

The boundaries between self-exploration and self-exploitation in the digital era are blurred, especially in self-managed work where individuals try to reconcile being “even submissive in order to mobilise their personal resources best possible, while at the same time being experimental, exploratory, and even rebellious” (Muhr et al., 2012, p. 196). The self-exploitation for the sake of progress in the sector’s development to match social desirability is based on the idea that earlier and more massive digital development brings more significant benefits that translate into resources for further development to happen again. Within this Western idea of progress, scholars also speak of different forms of direct and indirect domination by technology (Verdi, 2020). Digital innovation requires working in a way that “work can colonise each and every space” (Gill, 2014, p. 515). Some call it “techno-colonialism” (Mignolo & Wasch, 2018), where the internet is a form of colonialism (Toyama, 2014) that hides behind the premise of public good and progress (Mignolo & Wasch, 2018).

This problem is not exclusive to countries with a colonial past. Purtschert calls this phenomenon “colonialism without colonies” (2016, p. 4), talking about countries whose sense of self is being formed within this European colonial frame of “Europeanness”. This type of colonialism is commonly equated with the global South, although both postcolonialism and post-socialism are similarly focused on legacies of imperial power, dependence, resistance and hybridity (Koobak et al., 2021). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many scholars have studied the similarities and influences of postcolonialism and post-socialism (see Dzenovska, 2018), although it is more challenging to find scholars focused on postcolonialism who would be keen on exploring post-socialist discourses, especially from the feminist perspective (Koobak et al., 2021). For Central and Eastern Europeans, the compensatory behaviour after extended Soviet subjugation was the desire to “return to Westernness that once was theirs” (Moore, 2006, p. 21), but they are still predominantly seen as “not-yet-European” or “not-quite-European” (Dzenovska, 2018, p. 42). As Pupovac (2010) put it, they are not anymore, not yet or between the past and the future and keep struggling to fit in with the West and Rest framework because they are neither one nor the other. Latvia is not an exception, having introduced harsh liberalism and nostalgically or even proudly claiming colonial connection (Dzenovska, 2018; Koobak et al., 2021) because of its 17th century short-term colonial experience. Nevertheless, economically, Eastern European countries were and still are catching up with Europe (Borocz, 2006), and the promise of the liberal-capitalist utopia might lead people to ignore the “entirety of the mechanisms of exclusion, domination and exploitation that structure this existence” (Pupovac, 2010).

The museum sector and, more broadly, the cultural field have been especially vulnerable to these trends. There has always been a “romanticised tradition” in the cultural and creative

industries towards work as “supposedly paying for a hobby” (Gill, 2014, p. 514). This is often called mission work in the museum field, a job which one, supposedly, cannot consider an eight-hour workday job (Vikmane, 2022). In fact, the field involves low pay or uncertainty about the future, often leading to multiple jobs (Gill, 2014). However, with the cultural heritage field becoming more and more interdisciplinary, museums are competing for their role and for visitors with stiff competition, not only from the cultural and creative sectors but now also from the world of information technologies, which has accelerated people’s sense of time and intensified their workload. Expectations of cultural work flexibility or ideas that “you can work anytime” easily shifts to “you should always be working” (Keogh, 2021, p. 33), which leads to different forms of self-exploitation. Some call it a consequence of the can-do and keeping-up discourse (Kotamraju, 2002), in which one must survive and thrive in any situation (Gill, 2014). Social networks make it necessary to be always present for interaction. At the same time, the formerly isolated intense periods of project completion or (crunch time) have become so routine that “all the time is crunch time now” (Gill, 2014, p. 11). With their low access barrier, mobile technologies reach virtually any location at any time, providing a sense of always being available and interacting or always on (Gregg, 2011). Even before COVID-19 we saw the merger of work and life (worklife), where working hours never end and mobile technologies enable working anywhere, doing everything everywhere (Gill, 2014). With the constraints of the global pandemic, these possible self-exploitation practices are even more socially normalised and normatively validated.

Research design

The Latvian context presents a rare case, as the state recognizes 111 museums that fulfil all three core museum functions, distinguishing them from other heritage institutions and maintaining detailed annual records on them. This article constitutes a segment of a comprehensive study employing a mixed research methodology. The primary quantitative data was collected in 2021 through a representative museum survey (87% response rate with a +/-3.5% sampling error at a 95% confidence interval). The data facilitated the identification of the five most digitally advanced museums or leaders in digital innovation based on 53 indicators that encompass preservation, research, communication, and management.

Qualitative data collection of attitudes and experiences regarding implementation of new digital practices concluded in February 2023. This phase involved conducting 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews with leaders and employees of the most digitally advanced museums. The number of informants from each museum varied based on their respective roles, responsibilities, and areas of expertise (Table 1). However, all museums were represented across managerial aspects and all three interrelated core functions of preservation, research and communication.

Description of museum	No.	Role of informant and areas of responsibility	Length of interview
Autonomous mid-sized museum, focused on industrial heritage	1	Director / managerial, preservation, research	1 h 25 min
	2	Communication manager / communication	41 min
Large state museum, focused on arts	3	Director / managerial	2h 45min
	4	Collection keeper / preservation, research	1h 21 min
	5	Head of communications / communication	1h 20 min
Municipal museum of mid-sized city, focused on history and arts	6	Director / managerial	53 min
	7	Collection keeper / preservation, research	43 min
	8	Communication manager / communication	1h 19 min
Small private museum of a poet	9	Director / managerial, preservation, research	1h 26 min
	10	Head of communications / communication	1h 5 min
State consortium of small public literature museums	11	Deputy director / managerial, communication	1h 19 min
	12	Collection keeper / preservation, research	1h 14 min

Table 1. Informants in the study

For the purposes of this article, I focused on identification of self-exploratory and self-exploitation experiences and practices using inductive coding with nVivo qualitative analysis software. The process consisted of several steps, such as re-exploration of the data, creation of codes, identification of themes through code summarisation, naming of the themes to form a coherent narrative, and presentation of the story (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure anonymity of the informants within this niche cohort comprising only 111 accredited museums and discussing such sensitive issues as self-exploitation practices, I will disclose the informants' role within their respective workplaces but deliberately omit other details.

Setting the scene

Quantitative results of this comprehensive study (Vikmane, 2022; Vikmane & Kristala, 2022; Vikmane & Klāsons, 2023) show that digitally innovative museums in Latvia are overwhelmingly perceived as a socially desirable norm for image building and popularity (91.8%) and to meet the needs of the 21st-century public (87.6%). Qualitative results of this study show that the most digitally innovative museums also acknowledge their long-term efforts to be innovation leaders as pro of of being a part of the Western world. All five directors in this study acknowledge their ambition to be among innovation leaders. For example, “this ambition ... to earn the museum prestige, through whatever means possible”, or “and another thing [digital innovation] that, let’s say, other institutions or other places in Latvia did not have”, or “we’ve started to introduce it. Also, our restoration workshop – we tried to make it more Western”.² Also, employees from all core functions

² All quotes from museum workers are translated by the author.

emphasise their pride in being the frontrunners with new practices and services. For instance, a collection keeper and researcher stresses, “I wouldn’t be surprised if we were only the second in Latvia to be doing it [using the museum’s own collection digitalisation systems]. That’s something we’re proud of, oh yes”. The head of communications of another museum tells us that “when we made an Instagram profile for our museum, there was no one else there ... no other Latvian institution at that point in time, no other brand. It’s been interesting; it’s given us a good head start”.

This Western vs Soviet argument, after 30 plus years of independence and 20 years of EU membership, still seems a valid argument to explain the overall need for digital advancement. A do-nothing “action-mindedness” is juxtaposed with a “work-oriented mentality” (Reifova, 2020, pp. 12-13). The latter is espoused as the work ethic of the West and its progressive capitalism in opposition to stagnant, under-productive socialism. As a younger generation museum director explains:

there is a change of epochs ... and generations, ... the new, the driven or the innovative becomes the norm [as opposed to] our recent past, the Soviet period and how people thought about things back then, so unlike the current vibes of independence and Europeanness, and the overall Westernness.

The communication specialist of another museum asserts: “They’re inevitable, I mean the Western impulses. ... Call them American, Western, or European. Because that’s how generations grow. Today, we can’t help being digitally advanced. It is what it is. Without it, you can’t really speak to your visitors”.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained

The most digitally innovative museums strongly rely on self-exploration values as their overall operational goal. As one of museum directors explains: “Why we are even venturing into the innovative stage is because we have a constant inner creed to keep things interesting for ourselves and the public”. The head of communications in other museums stress the essential value of experimentation: “The colleagues are always open to different innovations and digital solutions. They aren’t afraid to try, even though, well, sometimes projects turn out not exactly the way we had thought”. Another museum director agrees that “the spirit of experimentation is definitely among the distinctive features of our museum”, while one other adds that “if I back out and don’t try [digital technologies], maybe I’ll never know how they can make my life easier or add an interesting twist to the exhibition. So, I say, nothing ventured, nothing gained”. Digital development is tied not only to work satisfaction among the staff but also to visitor interests and opportunities to recruit young, self-exploratory employees. To quote from a museum director who is one of the leading digital innovators in the field, “If we want to attract new staff that is forward-thinking and young, we can’t ask them to do carbon copies. They’ll simply laugh in our faces. It won’t make you look cool”.

To become more digitally advanced, Latvian museums often rely on their internal innovation champions (Rogers, 2003), who embrace and encourage these new digital initiatives. All museums of this study can identify such champions. In almost every interview, museum staff explain their pursuit of digital advancement by describing “one’s way of thinking”, personality traits or “one’s particular role and qualities”. For example, a collection keeper

says, “I’m one of the people who want to mend the world, who keep calculating how one can contribute to our common cause”. In her commentary on the reasons for taking on five digital projects at once during the pandemic, the head of a communication department from another digitally innovative museum admits, “[We’re just] crazy, that’s why. This part of one’s personality should perhaps sometimes be put on hold”. Museum people “are all fanatics” says another digital innovation champion – the communication specialist of another museum. They acknowledge their role and the fact that “a huge number of things depends on the people who drive them; the people who care” as a collection keeper and researcher put it. The director of another museum adds that “it should be in one’s nature to want to go the extra mile”, echoing the theoretical writings about innovation champions and corroborating their descriptions of “resourceful employees” or, to use Rogers’s term, innovation champions.

Innovation champions highlight several benefits of self-exploratory practices in digitally innovative museums. However, this should be viewed in conjunction with an extremely high sense of duty and responsibility – something that comes up again and again in museum worker interviews. The interviewees often refer to the need “to keep the quality bar high at all times” and “a continuous inner feeling you have to deliver quality, all the time”.

Trust to explore the unknown

Digitally innovative museum workers often refer to experiencing trust from their directors and colleagues. This is easily imaginable in tech start-ups but seems less evident in “time-honouring institutions” and “guardians of tradition” whose duty is precisely to resist change (Dewdney, 2019, p. 69). Responses from various champions support this idea of autonomy: “I feel their trust and the freedom to act and decide”; “I feel supported, so right now I’m able to do it. The environment is favourable. And I don’t just mean my official duties but also my professional and creative self-realisation”; “for sure, there is no [strict] subordination – we are museum workers, so we try to be more open”. Significantly, this is equally expressed by the collection keepers, researchers and communicators employed in a small private museum and a large public institution but not evident from directors.

Openness is often described as a collaborative environment. For instance, one director explains that “everyone reads something else and then sends it to others. ... Crucially, there’s a lot of talking and conversation ... we can talk about all our ideas, even if they later grow into something completely different”. Museum workers initiate innovative practices or are encouraged to do so or allowed to try things where they have no experience. For example, one collection keeper remembers: “Of course, I said yes, although I didn’t understand what that was, so I just applied – right, I’ll do Project X. Without having the slightest clue what that meant”. This is seen as an opportunity to explore museum work from another angle. Another researcher recalled the tasks she assumed with no experience and said, “not having the experience ... lets you look at the things with more freedom. Yes, having no experience can work in your favour”. Incidentally, this interviewee later became a museum director. Some museum workers admit their directors go so far as to give them a full *carte-blanche*, especially within the communication function. One interviewee said, “I can pretty much do what I want ... I can experiment, and nobody can forbid it; it’s so cool to keep trying new things”. Another staff member said, “to be perfectly frank, one can do anything in this institution. Anyone can. I guess it’s one of our success factors that the director trusts us, even if he is no expert in some of the issues”. Such an approach contradicts the conclusion of Baldwin and Ackerson (2017) that museum directors and

boards might want to maintain the status quo and appear set in the old we've-always-done-it-this-way mindset.

Creativity and personal growth

In this study, digital innovation champions, especially those working with collections, stress the importance of “the creative process, something more creative than routine stuff”, distinguishing new practices from established modes. Those who are responsible for communication more often underscore the role of formal or informal education in personal growth: “the times we live in demand that we quickly adapt to new things and are able to learn and change ourselves as professionals”. With this mindset, self-motivation is considered crucial and found through self-reflection, especially for directors and heads of their functions. For instance, “You feed your own fire when you keep asking why. Why do you like it?” Some even structure their work around it: “We have this unspoken inner agreement that when we start a new project, we're looking for things we could do on the next level; we try to go up a notch. Every time we add something new, even if it's only a little thing. It's a new perspective, something new to learn, something new to do”.

The pandemic had a profound effect on people's lives, including the daily lives of museum workers. Visitor numbers to Latvian museums fell significantly, when they had been rising steadily every year (from 1.54 million in 2001 to 3.72 million in 2017) (LAC, 2018). Museums underwent a major change and had to reorient themselves partly or wholly to the digital environment. This period, simultaneously associated with changes and a massive intensification of professional duties, also served as a form of self-therapy or a source for reflection on personal contribution and capacity. As one of collection keepers formulates:

The moment everything stopped, and we all felt this shock, this sense of pointlessness, the pause enabled me to acknowledge my strength, the many things I can do. When it is my initiative to start something ... I realised I actually have all the resources, knowledge and interest, a job and motivating colleagues. I can do projects and come up with ideas on how to implement them the way I want, how to work with others, the people I want, and that it's all feasible.

Another collection keeper of the digitally advanced museum also notes “the shock” when everything stopped and emphasises the ability to adapt and do it quickly. “Being forced to stop gave me the drive”. “Nobody had any options. There was no other way but to learn very quickly how to work [from a distance]. We just had to learn how to do it, all of us”, remembers another collection keeper. Yet a communication specialist asserts, “The pandemic, I guess, opened up masses of possibilities. ... Solutions we would have come by naturally, maybe in five to ten years”. Thus, the pandemic has been a catalyst for digitally innovative museums to finally respond to the criticism of museums that scholars have argued for years, namely that museums need to open up and reach out (Parry, 2007) or that they must conform to the new expectations and needs (Ruttkey & Benyei, 2018) to respond to the lingering crisis, stay relevant and better serve the public.

Appreciation and feedback

Researchers studying the cultural sector “have drawn attention to how cultural industries exploit romantic ideals of creative and passionate work”, where inadequate hours and inadequate funding “are justified as sacrifices that cultural workers make in order to ‘do what they love’” (Keogh, 2021, p. 29). Museum workers in Latvia are considered one of the most underpaid sectors with on average net monthly income of €871 euros (CSP, 2022). This makes champions search for other benefits. Although the above-described self-exploration is seen as a substitute or compensation for critically inadequate pay for one’s contribution, it cannot be a viable long-term solution. As one of the heads of communication puts it:

As long as you feel satisfied and inspired to be creative, you can work very well for a while. Supportive colleagues and everything else – yes, that is all very well. But the financial side ... We keep hiring, and people keep leaving, ... and that’s directly to do with the pay.

Appreciation of one’s contribution often works as another driver, both internally and externally, particularly for employees operating within the communication function. Internal satisfaction is discussed as “the gratification I feel [when I have done well]”, which is called “the most direct signal that what I do is valued and needed” or a sense of fulfilment from “being able to do one’s mission – educate the society – in much more effective and intensive ways”. Praise from the highest-ranking officials and even small feedback gestures, such as the head of the local government liking a Facebook post, are examples of appreciation that can spark joy for museum workers.

When self-exploration becomes self-exploitation

The quantitative data of the research suggests that only a few museums have appropriate research tools and a development strategy to fully implement digitalisation. Three percent of museums have digital strategies. Sixty-three percent have included digital development in existing policies, while 34% either make no mention of digital development in any of their strategic documents or struggle to answer the question. Professional ambitions prevent museum workers from saying no to projects, which harms their health and well-being. This, however, is often praised as resilience that justifies the sacrifices made by cultural workers to continue to survive and thrive (Scheerder et al., 2017; Gill & Orgad, 2018). In such cases, freedom without control, which the champions value as highly significant, can take one from self-exploration to self-exploitation. In the digitally innovative museums, there are several troubling trends that might come with creativity, commitment and freedom in an environment that favours self-exploration.

Firstly, innovation champions admit that their *official job description rarely reflects their actual workload*. Often this is to do with the trend that, in addition to implementing new practices, innovation champions assume responsibilities in spheres they see as lagging behind or not being up to the standard, especially in communications. One champion noted that “Facebook existed only in name, with no action taken” at their museum. However, the official job description does not get updated. As a result, responsibilities keep piling up, and neither the champion nor the management can tell if the champion is overcommitting.

Secondly, *opportunities to implement new ideas often relate to the worker's ability to attract relevant funding*. “If I have ideas and a clear plan, backed by arguments on how to achieve it, and an opportunity to get the funding, the museum director, all the management and the colleagues are very open. In fact, no idea of mine has been hard to get across or convince the others”, admits the head of communications of a large museum. Nevertheless, the flow of external funding through jury-assessed applications is unpredictable, so champions tend to make multiple project submissions, hoping to get at least one of them funded. To quote one communication manager in a digitally innovative museum, “I guess I never want to return to that period. We had five digital projects in one year, and all had [external funding], all had to be finished and communicated, and all needed paperwork”.

Thirdly, *champions occasionally implement new ideas with their personal funding and tools*, especially those who work in public (state or municipal) museums. Museums are bureaucratic and normative institutions, and new ideas demand going beyond the habitual systems of document flow and accounting, while every case “suggests this disruption has been difficult for the museum to accommodate” (Parry, 2007, p.139). For instance, one champion recounts that “everything was done on a private phone, with a private internet connection, without featuring in anyone’s job description”. Another champion notes, “we paid for the parcel machines ourselves. I paid [shipment costs for items bought in the museum shop with my private means] and then wrote official requests to the accountant to pay me back”. All informants also recruit free assistance from other workers whose job descriptions do not include such activities: “I get pro bono help from my colleagues, even though it’s not in their duties [to do digital collection management],” said one champion. Another said, “We laugh that my husband almost works in our museum” because he has needed equipment or skills. Another worker said, “For instance, I get my employee whose job is to connect the wires and mics for exhibition openings ... our IT support is insufficient, and everything is done in ad hoc, intuitive ways”. Another museum worker says she reverts to informal trade-ins and barter relationships because her team has no capacity to perform all their duties. Her solution to having no quality photos for high-standard visual communication in social media was this: “We have an understanding with photographers. We let them come here and do their photoshoots [free of charge], and I have no problem calling them to come and shoot an event [at the museum] or fly their drone and make a few pictures [for the museum]”.

Fourth, *the study identified problems with setting boundaries*. If valid questions from colleagues, such as “Will we have the capacity to do it?” are not given due and serious attention when new practices get implemented, there may come the point where colleagues will hesitate to help champions or take over some responsibilities. Their reluctance might be expressed in the guise of insufficient knowledge or lack of interest – at least this is how the champions put it. One communication manager even gets frustrated while explaining: “It’s easier to throw around certain phrases and set one’s limits with things like ‘you’ll do it better’ and have others deal with it. It’s a means of getting away [from duties]. However, with time, this isn’t going to cut it. If you want to work, you’ll have to be able to do things. We all need to learn”. Champions value education and personal growth, so arguments like real or imagined lack of skills might seem confusing or even unbelievable.

Finally, self-exploitation becomes obvious even for champions themselves, when they acknowledge that they have ignored too many personal needs, prioritising work over

relationships. This can take different forms – from working long hours for too long to neglecting one’s family. Inadequate working hours are an old classic, again particularly for those operating within the communication function. Speaking about their long work hours, champions said: “If we work five days a week in winter, it becomes seven days in the summer”; “I realised I couldn’t fit all my work in the regular office hours ... so I’d stay behind till seven or eight in the evening [to meet my quality standard]. I’d spend weekends at my computer, sitting through Saturdays and Sundays”. Another has similar experiences, admitting that working on weekends is “on your own conscience”, meaning without extra pay. He explains that “on weekends, of course, [is when] you get to sit maybe more [to answer] those questions” coming in from social media from people who don’t want to wait until Monday for an answer.

Mobile technologies have added to the struggle of innovation champions to balance work and life. The pandemic was especially hard because museums introduced countless innovations with the same or reduced staff and later described the situation as moving from one-person orchestra to a situation where, as museums learn new digital skills and introduce new digital innovations, one person plays all the instruments in two orchestras (Vikmane, 2022). Another issue mobile technologies have created is working anywhere, anytime. “My wristwatch has a stupid feature. I see my work emails. They come all the time. I must learn to disable the sound because I just can’t. They keep coming on weekends, and I keep checking. Maybe that is my problem – I get too excited and jump right in”, says one of the communication managers. Another challenge is working from home while having health issues. For example, one collection keeper from a different museum normalises such practices as comfortable: “For instance, I cough and sneeze like crazy, so I take something I can do from home”. In extreme cases, champions admit to neglecting their families. “For the first few years, I spent long hours at the museum. I took my computer home. If I’m honest, I lost my family. I’m divorced now”, says one champion. “I’ve also talked to other museum people, and they say the same. They also tell me it’s not worth it; they say family comes first”.

Some champions feel overwhelmed when thinking of juggling all their commitments long-term. The unwillingness of other colleagues to get involved or assume some of the duties by setting strict boundaries, as well as such harmful practices as keeping exceedingly long hours might serve as red flags for champions themselves. Regardless of their roles in museums, employees, but not directors, start having internal conversations featuring phrases like “sometimes I wonder how long this will last, and it’s the money aspect that makes me ask the question”, or “I sometimes think if I’ll reach a point when I’m ... maybe it’s just the energy of the first couple of years that comes from switching to something new?” Self-questioning of their views on the exploration vs. exploitation dilemma often gets expressed as finances but never as a reconsideration of broader motivations that lead to self-exploitation.

Thinking long-term

There are at least two scenarios known to innovation champions that are worth discussing regarding their long-term work in museums with digital ambitions. The first one is to accept that people change jobs often. “The pay is very low, so there’s a point when even the energetic ones burn out and give up”, concludes one museum director. So museums keep hiring, and people keep leaving, “especially the young museum workers, and that’s directly to do with the pay”, says another director. The head of the communication

department from another museum tells the same story and adds: “I have [had] to hire five new people, so I got stuck with my own ideas, capacities and projects”. This further slows down digital advancement. Another interviewee, a collection keeper from the same museum, points out an even broader context when discussing the degrading perception of culture among the people museums serve: “Low pay is bad not just for the people who get it but also for the public opinion – I mean how little they expect of cultural heritage institutions”.

Nevertheless, innovation champions also admit the opportunity for another path. Both museum directors and employees acknowledge their ambitions to be among the opinion leaders and trendsetters in the digital field for museums, “in the digital world, once you’ve reached the top, you try to stay there. You do what you can not to fall back”. Communication managers also discuss the importance of learning greater self-control: “Now I’m older and more experienced; I no longer throw my energy all over the place the way I used to”. Directors admit the need to organise processes better. For example, one stresses that “of course, one needs some kind of regulation. One needs some order”, but another admits that “however strong and robust we appear on the outside, there are so many things going on inside that we need to process”.

Conclusion

The study suggests that digitally innovative museums in Latvia strongly rely on self-exploratory perspectives that are put in practice by innovation champions. The champions are supported by institutions, allowing them to dig into unknown ideas and experiments as well as respecting their need for personal growth. In the short term, innovation champions mentally substitute adequate pay, which they fail to receive, with fulfilling their need for creative work beyond the daily routine, internal satisfaction and external appreciation. Nevertheless, encouragement and trust often come with the responsibility to attract external funding, which takes extra effort and is difficult to predict. This leads to overcommitting and clashes between official job descriptions and extra responsibilities. Also, the heavily bureaucratised system, especially in state and local government-funded museums, lags behind the actual administrative and accounting needs associated with new initiatives. As a result, innovation champions use their private resources in project work or rely on *pro bono* help from other people, including family members, sometimes even maintaining unofficial barter relationships. In the worst-case scenario, self-exploitation practices lead to neglect of a family, prioritising never-ending work responsibilities over loved ones.

This study highlights that introduction of digital innovation in Latvia’s most digitally advanced museums serves both as an individual and institutional ambition, where the criticism towards museums and the need to serve society better is answered with the post-social perception of the Western idea of progress. The strong desire to reintegrate into the European family after subjugation further reinforces this aspiration, while the ongoing comparison between Western capitalist and Soviet action-mindedness work ethics remains relevant. This acknowledges the need for enhancing the monitoring of warning signs and adjusting bureaucratic procedures to align with the innovative services introduced by champions to better serve society. However, of greater significance is the call for open and critical discussion within museums regarding the underlying motivations driving their digital ambitions, particularly when these ambitions come at the cost of employees’ well-being and quality of life.

By drawing attention to museums' tendency to overlook (self-)exploitation that structures this notion of progress and the normalisation of employee sacrifices in its pursuit, the author aims not only to contribute a critical perspective to the discourse on the positive bias towards digital advancement, but also to emphasize that museums themselves might unwittingly assume a new form of colonial practice in the era of postcolonial thought.

Acknowledgements

This research is funded by the Latvian Council of Science, project 'Striving Towards Participatory Engagement in Museums: Inquiry into Museum Education Practice in Latvia (MEET)' (No. lzp-2022/1-0379). This article was written during the stay at PAiR – Pāvilosta Artist in Residency.

References

- Borocz, J. (2006). Goodness is elsewhere: The rule of European difference. *Comparative studies in society and history*, 48, 110-138.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Calderón Gómez, D. (2020). Technological socialization and digital inclusion: Understanding digital literacy biographies among young people in Madrid. *Social Inclusion*, 8(2), 222–232.
- Central Statistical Bureau, Republic of Latvia, (2022). Vidējā mēnešalga “uz papīra” Latvijā pērn pieaugusi par 7,5% - līdz 1373 eiro. *LSM.lv*. www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/ekonomika/videja-menesalga-uz-papira-latvija-pern-pieaugusi-par-75-lidz-1373-eiro.a498767/?utm_source=lsm&utm_medium=theme&utm_campaign=theme
- Desouza, K.C. (2011). *Intrapreneurship: Managing ideas within your organization*. University of Toronto Press.
- Dijk, J. (2020). *The digital divide*. Polity.
- Dzenovska, D. (2018). *School of Europeanness: Tolerance and other lessons in political liberalism in Latvia*. Cornell University Press.
- Fichter, K. (2009). Innovaton communities: The role of networks of promoters in open innovation. *R&D Management*, 39(4), 357–371.
- Gill, R. (2014). Unspeakable inequalities: Post feminism, entrepreneurial subjectivity, and the repudiation of sexism among cultural workers. *Social Politics*, 21(4), 509-528. doi: 10.1093/sp/jxu016.
- Gill, R., and Orgad, S. (2018). The amazing bounce-backable woman: Resilience and the psychological turn in neoliberalism. *Sociological Reserach Online*, 23(2), 477–495.
- Gregg, M. (2011). *Work's intimacy*. Polity.
- Holmqvist, M. (2004). Experiential learning processes of exploitation and exploration within and between organizations: An empirical study of product development. *Organization Science*, 15(1), 70–81.
- Jovanovic, B., and Rousseau, P.L. (2005). General purpose technologies. National Bureau of *Economic Research Working Paper Series*, 11093.

- Keogh, B. (2021) *Hobbyist game making between self-exploitation and self-emancipation*. In O. Sotamaa and J. Švelch (Eds.), *Game Production Studies*, 29–45. Amsterdam University Press.
- Koobak, R., Tlostanova, M., and Thapar-Björkert S. (2021). Introduction: Uneasy affinities between the postcolonial and the postsocialist. In R. Koobak, M. Tlostanova, and S. Thapar-Björkert (eds.), *Postcolonial and post socialist dialogues*, 1–10. Routledge.
- Kotamraju, N. (2002). Keeping up: Web design skill and the reinvented worker, *Information, Communication & Society*, 5(1), 1-26.
- Latvian Academy of Culture. (2018). The role of Latvian museums for different target groups: Interaction between museums and society (in Latvian). culturelablv.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/lka-zpc_muzeju-pc493tc4abjums-2018.pdf
- Mignolo, W., and Walsh, K. (2018). *On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis*. Duke University Press.
- Moore, D.C. (2006). Is the post- in postcolonial the post- in post-Soviet? Toward a global postcolonial critique. In V. Kelertas (Ed.), *Baltic postcolonialism. On the boundary of two worlds: Identity, freedom, and moral imagination in the Baltics*, pp. 11-31. Editions Rodopi B.V.
- Muhr, S.L., Pedersen, M., & Alvesson, M. (2012). Workload, aspiration, and fun: Problems of balancing self-exploitation and self-exploration in work life. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 37, 193–220. [doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X\(2013\)0000037011](https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X(2013)0000037011)
- Parry, R. (2007). *Recoding the museum: Digital heritage and the technologies of change*. Routledge.
- Pupovac, O. (2010, May 12). Present perfect, or the time of post-socialism. *Eurozine*. www.eurozine.com/present-perfect-or-the-time-of-post-socialism/.
- Purtschert, P. (2016). Aviation skills, manly adventures and imperial tears: The Dhaulagiri expedition and Switzerland's techno-colonialism. *National Identities*, 18(1), 53-69.
- Reifova, I. (2020). Shaming the working class in post-socialist reality television. *European journal of cultural studies*, 1-18.
- Reisdorf, B.C., Axelsson, A.S., and Söderholm, H. (2012). Living offline: -A qualitative study of internet non-use in Great Britain and Sweden. www.academia.edu/4396118/Living_Offline_A_Qualitative_Study_of_Internet_Non_Use_in_Great_Britain_and_Sweden
- Reisdorf, B., and Rhinesmith, C. (2020). Digital inclusion as a core component of social inclusion. *Social inclusion*, 8(2), 132–137.
- Rogers, E. (2003). *Diffusion of innovation* (5th ed.). Free Press.
- Ruttikay, Z., and Bényei, J. (2018). Renewal of the museum in the digital epoch. In G. Bast, E. G. Carayannis, D. F. J. Campbell (Eds.), *The future of museums*, 101–116. Springer International Publishing. doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93955-1_10
- Scheerder, A., van Deursen, A., and van Dijk, J., (2017). Determinants of internet skills, use and outcomes: A systematic review of the second- and third-level digital divide. *Telematics and Informatics*, dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2017.07.007
- Schon, D. (1963). Champions for new radical inventions. *Harvard Business Review*, 41, 77-86.

- Toyama, K. (2014, December 16). The problem with the plan to give internet access to the whole world. *The Atlantic*. www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/12/the-problem-with-the-plan-to-give-internet-to-the-whole-world/383744/.
- Verdi, G. (2020, November 22). The Road to technocolonialism. *Institute for internet and the just society*, www.internetjustsociety.org/the-road-to-techno-colonialism.
- Vikmane, E., & Kristala, A. (2022). Pandemic-driven digital innovation in Latvian museums: Diversity, diffusion, and role in sustainable development. In R. Furferi, R., L. Governi, L., Y. Volpe, Y., K. Seymour, K., A. Pelagotti, A., and F. Gherardini, F. (Eds.), *The future of heritage science and technologies: ICT and digital heritage*, 287–302. Springer. doi. [org/10.1007/978-3-031-20302-2_22](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20302-2_22)
- Vikmane, E. (2022). Does the desire for digital advancement put museum staff at exploitation risk? In : Weiser, Bertin, and Leschenko (Eds.), *Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory*, ICOFOM, pp. 121-126.
- Vikmane, E., and Klāsons, G. (2023). Diffusion of digital innovation in museum education: Pandemic effects and adopter characteristics. *Baltic J. Modern Computing*, 11(1), 34-50. doi. [org/10.22364/bjmc.2023.11.1.03](https://doi.org/10.22364/bjmc.2023.11.1.03)

About the cover design:

The Tolai people of Papua New Guinea continue to make and use *tabu*, strings of a marine snail shell, as a local currency, particularly for sacred ceremonies, celebrations, and resolutions of disputes. / Le peuple Tolai de Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée continue de fabriquer et d'utiliser le *tabu*, des cordes de coquille d'escargot marin, comme monnaie locale, notamment pour les cérémonies sacrées, les célébrations et la résolution des conflits. / El pueblo Tolai de Papúa Nueva Guinea sigue fabricando y utilizando *tabu*, cuerdas de una concha de caracol marino, como moneda local, sobre todo para ceremonias sagradas, celebraciones y resolución de disputas.