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narrative scope and cultural integration (NaMu)*

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The One, the Many and the Other: Revisiting Cultural Diversity in Museums of Cultural History

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This article is about modes of exhibition in museums of cultural history in western Europe from the second half of the 20th century to today. I begin by considering some of the challenges national museums are facing today and then go briefly back in time to the evolutionary mode and what I call the didactic descriptive museology with its galleries of objects-witnesses and trophies that was prevalent until the end of the 1970s. Next, I discuss the polyphonic narrative turn and the museology of intersecting gazes that developed during the 1980s and which is still applied in European museums today. Thereafter, I probe the aesthetic mode which is a favourite strategy of display when treating themes pertaining to cultural diversity and otherness since the 1990s. To conclude, I present some thoughts about what I describe as the nomadic turn and the aesthetics of transience that have become the trend since the turn of our millennium. Before going on I want to emphasize that these different museological approaches do not follow a strict chronology. Their paths are often juxtaposed and overlapping.

Introduction

In his book *Régimes d'historicité* the French historian François Hartog notes that we are in an era where the heritage wave has taken such proportions that it has reached what he calls 'le tout-patrimoine', meaning that almost everything becomes part of a common heritage worldwide. This inflation of heritage and the museification of daily life signifies that we are no more in the logic of the monument or unique *chef-d'œuvre*. Rather, we are now in the rationale of the multiple, polyvalent, decentralized and globalized heritage where the tangible, intangible and natural heritage of the Other has become part of ours.¹ Museums are privileged places where this heritage is kept and displayed. Sharon McDonald rightly reminds us that museums have always made connections between continents and between times. Their collections have always had the capacity to evade the rigid classifications and the narratives into which they were written because the artefacts can be displayed in different settings.² These institutions, especially national museums of cultural history, have played and still play a key role in the creation of images about 'self and other'³ and in promoting what Carol Duncan has called 'rituals of citizenship' in the sense of establishing evidence of a state's engagement with culture and the good of people and, at the same time, stimulate a sense of belongingness to the nation-state.⁴ Citizenship, however, is acquiring new meanings and in the process of becoming multiple, global, regional and local concurrently. In the age of globalization, transnationalism and renewed cosmopolitanism national museums have to develop new scopes so as not to end up as shrines of nostalgia.⁵

This article is about modes of exhibition in museums of cultural history in western

Europe from the second half of the 20th century to today. I begin by considering some of the challenges national museums are facing today and then go briefly back in time to the evolutionary mode and what I call the didactic descriptive museology with its galleries of objects-witnesses and trophies that was prevalent until the end of the 1970s. Next, I discuss the polyphonic narrative turn and the museology of intersecting gazes that developed during the 1980s and which is still applied in European museums today. Thereafter, I probe the aesthetic mode which is a favourite strategy of display when treating themes pertaining to cultural diversity and otherness since the 1990s. To conclude, I present some thoughts about what I describe as the nomadic turn and the aesthetics of transience that have become the trend since the turn of our millennium. Before going on I want to emphasize that these different museological approaches do not follow a strict chronology. Their paths are often juxtaposed and overlapping.

Challenging the One

Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner have argued that the concept of nation is an imagined realm constructed by various historical conjunctures. It is grounded in the idea of belonging defined by territory, language, ethnicity and religion.⁶ These authors did not, as Manuel Castells points out, take into account the weight of shared experiences or, to use Arjun Appadurai's terminology the significance of the 'shared past', which have developed from 'a shared history and a shared project, and their historical narratives build on an experience, socially, ethnically, territorially and genderly diversified', but common to the people of the

1 Hartog, 2003: 196f.

2 MacDonald, 2003: 11.

3 Karp, 1991a: 15

4 Duncan, 1991: 88.

5 Pieterse, 2005: 164

6 Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983.

same nation-state.⁷ Thus, the shared past is made of manifold ‘collected memories’ rather than one collective memory. There are contradictory interpretations of the past and tensions between competing interest groups. New versions of the ‘shared past’ may for various reasons become official, replace older ones and claim authenticity until, in turn they are replaced by other ‘official’ versions of history. Hence, the Grand Narrative of the nation-state is regularly challenged by different and differing versions. Nevertheless, regardless of fluctuating power relations, collecting and displaying remain crucial to a museum’s existence and the history of collections and their use in exhibitions provide insights into the systems and processes that shape national identity and collected memories.⁸ The ways difference is voiced or silenced may reflect and affect existing perceptions of identities within the national frame. The challenge today is how to reconcile and promote the One and the Many. How to incorporate the plurality and diversity of identities within a common national identity?

Museums have been used by nation-states to represent themselves to themselves, as well as to others. Defining ‘oneself’ and what constitutes national identity is not unchallenged or static and the dichotomy of self and other is undermined by accelerated globalization and in Europe by the expansion of the European Union. According to Jan Pieterse, the conventional view of a monolithic national identity is divided into multiple identities encompassing the local, the regional, the transnational and the global. The ‘other’ becomes ‘others’ which are not only differentiated by citizenship but also by ethnicity, religion, class, gender, age and lifestyle.⁹ Further, the dichotomy of self and other is often juxtaposed with other opposing pairs like centre/periphery, Occident/Orient, North/South, colonizer/ colonized. For Pieterse the idea that representation of others must either be exoticizing or assimilating ignores other options – such as recognizing difference without exoticism, others as counterparts in dialogue, or I would add paraphrasing Ricoeur, oneself as an ‘other’. Just as ‘the self’ is not what it used to be, ‘the other’ is no longer a stable or even meaningful category. But if there is no other, who then is the self? The twin terms of the dichotomy are interdependent and if the one goes, so does the other.¹⁰

Olivier Roy argued that “*European identities are in a process of recasting and new terms such as ‘Englishness’, ‘Dutchness’, ‘Frenchness’ are emerging*”.¹¹ The need to have an ‘Other’ in order to define the self brings about the elaboration of new frontiers and the emergence of regionalism. In a recent article in *Le Monde*, the French professor of philosophy Yves-Charles Zarka (Université Paris 1), advocated the demolition of walls but the upkeep of frontiers by which he means the nation-states.¹² There are, he says, walls without frontiers and frontiers waiting for walls. Historically, walls were built to keep the ‘others’ out and stop invasions while frontiers have been spaces where others are acknowledged. Frontiers are pliable and they do not hinder circulation. For Zarka, a world with clear frontiers that are accepted by all parts involved is a world of coexistent interactive differences, of dialogues. The idea of flexible frontiers has had its repercussions on museums of cultural history and their representations of the nation-state. It brought them to question ideas of uniform national identities and to review the place of their country in the broader European and global perspective. This trend is well illustrated by the German Historical Museum in Berlin which was founded in 1987. Its museological approach offers, in my view, a post-nationalist view of German history as part of the wider regional European history. Thus, the country is represented as one of the many parts that form a bigger entity: Europe.

7 Castells, 1998 [1997]: 29f.; Appadurai, 1981.

8 Davison, 2005: 186.

9 Pieterse, 2005: 165.

10 Pieterse, 2005: 172.

11 Roy, 2005: 7.

12 Zarka, 2007.

Since the 1980s, the discourses on multiculturalism in a number of European countries have prompted museums of cultural history to engage in matters related to inclusion vs. exclusion; assimilation vs. integration. In Europe, views on multiculturalism have usually been based on essentialist and territorial understandings of culture. Accordingly, multiculturalism is considered by many as a series of cohabitating ghettos and communities perceived as self-enclosed, living behind opaque walls and entrenched in their 'own' traditions.¹³ For instance, in a country proud of its multicultural agenda like the Netherlands this has become an acute dilemma which for many Dutch citizens has been epitomized by the election of the politician Pim Fortyn (2002) and the murder of the film-maker, Theo van Gogh (November 2004). The latent scepticism about multiculturalism was blatantly expressed during the referendum to the European Constitution in France (May 29th, 2005) and the Netherlands (June 1st, 2005) and during the debates following the crises of the 'banlieues' in France (November 2005). Hence, we notice that in a number of western European countries there is a change of vocabulary and multicultural is steadily being replaced by the hazier and less controversial expressions cultural diversity and plural societies. Cultural diversity opens up for avenues of exploring and sharing similarities and differences within the framework of the nation-states. The motto is: *same* (as to civil rights and duties) *but not identical*. Further, cultural diversity highlights the benefits of cross-cultural contacts and hybridity, and is more directed towards dialogue. This implies exchange and reciprocity.

We observe today that a number of museums of cultural history are inserting other histories in the Grand Narrative of the nation-state. The voices of the various minorities are being heard, albeit within the same national frame of reference. Accordingly, cultural diversity is presented through a variety of lenses and perspectives that question the boundaries between the different groups. At the same time they underline the ways various types of knowledge are interrelated in producing novel understandings of the different communities. This was shown, for example, by the experiences at the Transcultural Galleries at Cartwright Hall in Bradford (opened in 1997), at the Världskulturmuseet (Museum of World Culture) in Gothenburg (opened in 2003), and, more recently, at the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration in Paris (CNHI) that was inaugurated on October 10th, 2007.¹⁴ In following this path museums of cultural history are establishing themselves as 'authorities of recognition' and arenas for experimentations, debates and for treating actual controversial social and political issues. Thus, they play an active role in trying to promote social cohesion in plural societies.¹⁵ As shown by the traumatic events tied to the exhibition *Pour que la vie continue ... D'Isère au Magreb: Mémoires d'immigrés* held at the Musée dauphinois in Grenoble, this is not an easy task. The exhibition opened in 1999 and concerned the history of Grenoble's population of North African origin. It stayed open for over a year despite the fact that some of the persons involved in the project were attacked by members of the extreme right-wing and one was even tortured and raped.¹⁶

As Fiona McLean puts it: "narrating the nation in the museum increasingly becomes a task of narrating the diversity of the nation and for engaging in a politics of recognition. In an era of multiculturalism, women's movements, movements for recognition of homosexual men and lesbian women, respect for the environment as well as nationalist movements coupled with large scale movements of populations across the globe for travel, commerce or migration, the identity of the nation becomes increasingly fluid and contingent."¹⁷

13 Pieterse, 2005: 167.

14 Naguib, 2008.

15 Feuchtwang 2003: 78; Stevens, 2007: 32f.

16 Stevens, 2007; Exhibition held from 1st October 1999 -31st December 2000.

17 McLean, 2005: 1.

The Evolutionary Mode and Didactic Descriptive Museology

A common feature for museums housing cultural historical artefacts whether these are archaeological, ethnographic or art collections has been to ‘freeze time’ and to impart on the visitor a sense of wonder, of being in a time out of time. With the help of carefully selected samples, exhibitions endeavour to recreate complete pictures of different cultures and periods through representation, interpretation and explanation. Ancient civilizations and living cultures have been exhibited according to typologies inspired from the natural sciences, Linné’s classification in groups and sub-groups and paradigms derived from Darwin’s theories on evolution. The taxonomic methods of ordering cultures have corroborated to hierarchical stratifications of mankind, which have frequently been used to validate eugenics and racist explanations. Museums took pride in showing off most of their riches in permanent exhibitions. Galleries were lined up with showcases overcrowded with objects that were considered as documents about and witnesses of people from different epochs and places.¹⁸ Usually, artefacts were categorized according to different criteria taking into account material, type, shape, size and age, and were often set up clustered around a prototype. During the 1930s, new methods of exhibition less congested with objects were introduced. Permanent exhibitions were arranged thematically. Didactics and authenticity were the main pillars on which they rested. The showcases applied either a diachronic or synchronic approach or, most often, a mixture of both. Museums of ethnology, ethnography and metropolitan museums adopted what became known as the nylon thread museology combined with the technique of diorama, situational exhibition methods and period rooms. This type of exhibitions is, in my opinion, better suited to represent historical themes than living cultures. They show a relation to otherness that is influenced by the theories of cultural relativism introduced by Franz Boas, especially when it comes to so-called ‘primitive’ cultures. Otherness is illustrated by using what Ivan Karp calls the perspectives of difference and similarity. By underlining difference exhibitions exoticize the Other. In the case of ‘primitive’ living cultures, considerations of content such as iconography, questions about intention such as religious purposes for which the objects were made or examination of contexts of production and use are most often omitted from the presentation. By applying this kind of approach, museums endeavour to reconstruct, interpret and explicate different cultures and civilizations and to recreate reality. However, Émmanuel Désveaux rightly points out that this kind of exhibition produces a world of pure fiction.¹⁹ In fact, elements that do not belong together are often put together and one sees models dressed up in their finest clothes or even ritual costumes going about with their daily chores as planting, cutting wood, cooking or weaving.²⁰ The results are that such exhibitions convey images of idealised, a-historical societies. They produce representations of motionless cultures and endorse stereotypes about cultures untouched by modern times. It is my contention that these representations are shaped by the gaze and the experience of the foreign researcher at a certain moment of her or his life and work.²¹

The Polyphonic Narrative Turn and a Museology of Intersecting Gazes

From a didactic descriptive museology the shift has during the 1980s gone over to what we may call the polyphonic narrative turn and a museology of intersecting gazes. This approach is popular because it juxtaposes different perspectives and connects research with education and entertainment. It finds its inspiration in the methods and techniques of film-making and motion pictures with montage, cutting, zooming, flashbacks, and those of the Internet with

18 Naguib, 2004b, 2007a.

19 Désveaux, 2002: 222.

20 Karp, 1991b: 379.

21 Naguib, 2007.

hypertexts, links and sites. When applied to material culture the inert artefacts are transformed into animated beings which lead us into the description of socio-political structures and worldviews. Historical and cultural complexities become more comprehensible through the polyphonic narrative where texts, objects, pictures complement each other. Each artefact relates a number of stories (sometimes contradictory) within a larger one. Events are brought to light, not for their own sake, but for what they reveal about the political, economical, social and religious conditions of a certain period in history. The history of the nation-state is made of all the different interwoven histories and interpretations that together create the pattern of the larger tapestry. For example, let us take the embroidered Palestinian dresses that were used in an exhibition arranged by the Museum of Cultural History of the University of Oslo in 1995 (photo 1). By piecing together the different parts of their individual stories one may address the question of Palestine and create a broader picture of the country. This may be done by examining the kind of cloth the dresses are made of, weaving techniques and craftsmanship, who made them, who embroidered, what do the different patterns and colours represent, which part of Palestine and/or families do they originate from, who wore the dresses, when, what happened to these women and their families, who brought them to Norway and so forth. Polyphonic narrative exhibitions acknowledge the constructed nature of the knowledge presented. Thereby, the analytical and interpretative frameworks and the methods applied are made accessible to the public who learns that scientific knowledge is situated in time and that interpretations are not absolute but subject to continuous reconsiderations.²²

Photo 1.



The Aesthetic Turn

Aesthetics combined with the polyphonic narrative approach is today one of the favoured methods of display resorted to by museums of cultural history when dealing with the representations of cultural diversity and otherness, especially when treating non-western living cultures (photo 2). Supporters of aesthetics as a method of cognition argue that it leads

22 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1991, Naguib, 2004b.

the beholders to resort to their accumulated knowledge, both learned and tacit. Art is seen as part of a network of social relations, as having agency.²³ Accordingly, cultural artefacts exist in dialectical relationships with their historical and cultural contexts. Highlighting the beauty of objects, their properties, their forms and the technical precision of craftsmanship is a way of undermining prejudices and degrading stereotypes. Thus, the use of aesthetics in museums of cultural history goes beyond a Kantian meditation on the transcendental universality of beauty and the non-utilitarian pleasure objects give by the mere contemplation of their forms and materiality. Aesthetics applied in museums of cultural history is of a more pragmatic and phenomenological kind. It relies on experience and memory and the individual's relation to the world and pertains to an epistemological movement that puts on stage questions that are common for all societies together with their specific ways of resolving them. Critics of the aesthetic approach contest the validity of knowledge imparted by art. They argue that art cannot be scientifically tested and question what it tells us about a society, its history and cultural contexts. To them the individualisation of an object used in daily life and its transformation into an art object is part of a process of decontextualization and defunctionalization. But, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer so aptly remarks, this happened already at the moment the objects were taken out of the society that produced and used them. He reminds us that the common share of all artefacts is to eventually become outdated and old, namely, decontextualized and defunctionalized in their original society. In Western European museums of cultural history, especially those of former colonial powers, the problem resides in the fact that in the case of former colonies these processes happened rather abruptly and were usually imposed by foreign powers.²⁴

The Sainsbury African galleries at the British Museum have opted for an aesthetic approach in order to dissolve the usual boundaries between the different African states by grouping the displayed artefacts according to material. Thus, it is through material, technology and functionality that the visitor perceives different aspects of African history, societies, cultures and worldviews.²⁵ Africa is presented in novel ways by including the works of known contemporary African artists into the exhibition and making them the pivot around which the exhibition evolves. Thus, Africa is no more viewed as a coarse bloc. Instead, it appears as a dynamic continent where traditions are “constantly invented and reinvented”; a continent with a diversified nature and geography, a plurality of histories, manifold cultures, worldviews and art forms.

A salient example of the aesthetic turn in museums of cultural history is the new Musée du Quai Branly in Paris which opened its doors to the public in June 2006. Germain Viatte and Emmanuel Desvaux who were responsible for organising the scientific framework of the project and the director of research at Quai Branly, Marie-Christine Taylor explained that a neat break from the museology of the Musée de l'Homme was necessary. Therefore, the stress is put on the aesthetics of the objects and their individuality. At the same time some showcases re-contextualize the objects thanks to texts and pictures and short audio-visual devices.²⁶ The Musée du Quai Branly has, in my view, to establish itself in the French and international museumscapes. Until now it is first and foremost a spectacular statement expressing an architectural vision and political power.

23 Gell, 1998.

24 Schaeffer, 2004: 33.

25 Spring, 2001.

26 Personal communications. I am grateful to Germain Viatte, Emmanuel Desvaux and Marie-Christine Taylor for receiving me and taking time to discuss various issues tied to the Musée du Quai Branly.

Photo 2.



The Occulted Other

Museums have, as Pieterse notes, often been described as places of collective memory. But selective memory may be a more accurate description. Through their exhibitions they, especially national museums, give concrete forms to authorized versions of the past. In time, these become institutionalized and part of a country's official memory. The process involves memory and amnesia, inclusion and exclusion. According to Dominique Poulot, the traditional history museum has been replaced by a museum of 'living memory' which is

exalted in accordance to the degree of recognition it offers a community and their engagement with re-shaping memory.²⁷ In line with the museum's culture of conventionality it is the decorous, edifying side of nation-state that is normally displayed rather than the shadier sides of its history and bloodstained records. Generally speaking, *controversial* exhibitions that provoke debates about a chosen theme, a museological approach and the objects on display are easier to set up than those known as *difficult* exhibitions. That is open-ended exhibitions that take up painful themes, provoke negative emotions, reminders of sufferings and grief and where the story remains unfinished and ambiguous.²⁸ Efforts have been made towards autochthonous minorities like Native Americans, the Inuit, the Maori and the Sami, or towards other minorities like the Blacks, the Armenians and the Romani people or Tatere, as well as religious groups like the Jews. To go into the details regarding the inclusion and/or exclusion of these groups in exhibitions, questions related to apartheid and slavery or discuss representations of the enemy, wars and genocides will largely exceed the limits of the present article. For this I refer to the special number of *Gradhiva* and to the studies of Sophie Wahnich where she discusses the contrasting strategies adopted by different European museums.²⁹ Instead, I will briefly mention representations of colonialism and civil wars.

Colonialism as a theme is more often than not avoided in countries with a colonial past. It is sometimes referred to metaphorically. It is easier to treat the topic in countries with no colonial past such as Switzerland and Norway and the exhibitions *Le musée cannibal* (2002) set up by Jacques Hainard at the Ethnographic museum in Neuchâtel, and the exhibition *Kongospor. Norden i Kongo – Kongo i Norden* (2007) arranged by the Museum of Cultural History of the University of Oslo.³⁰ However, the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale in Tervuren in Belgium took up the challenge in 2005 and chose to combine the polyphonic narrative with the contextual approach in its exhibition "*La Mémoire du Congo. Le temps colonial*."³¹ The exhibition was conceived as a space of confrontation where conflicting and intersecting narratives about a same story were set against each other. The aim of the exhibition was to show different aspects of the colonial history of Belgium in the Congo until the independence of the latter in 1960. Through artefacts, documents, photographs, films, audio-visual devices and interviews the exhibition gave voice to protagonists from both sides. As for former colonies, they usually avoid the subject altogether or treat it in the context of the struggle for independence. Colonial times are always represented as the Dark Ages of a nation-state (photo 3).

Civil wars are occulted. In Spain, for example, the era of the *Convivencia* has been 'revisited' since the 1980s and the Arab-Islamic heritage is glorified and represented as the golden age of cultural diversity and the epitome of tolerance.³² The Spanish civil war of 1936-1939 is, however, hushed down and is still not addressed in museums although newer Spanish literature as, for instance, Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *The Shadow of the Wind* (2001) and Javier Cercas' *Soldiers of Salamis* (2001), has begun treating this painful subject with precaution.

27 Poulot, 2005: 75f.

28 Bonnell & Simon, 2007.

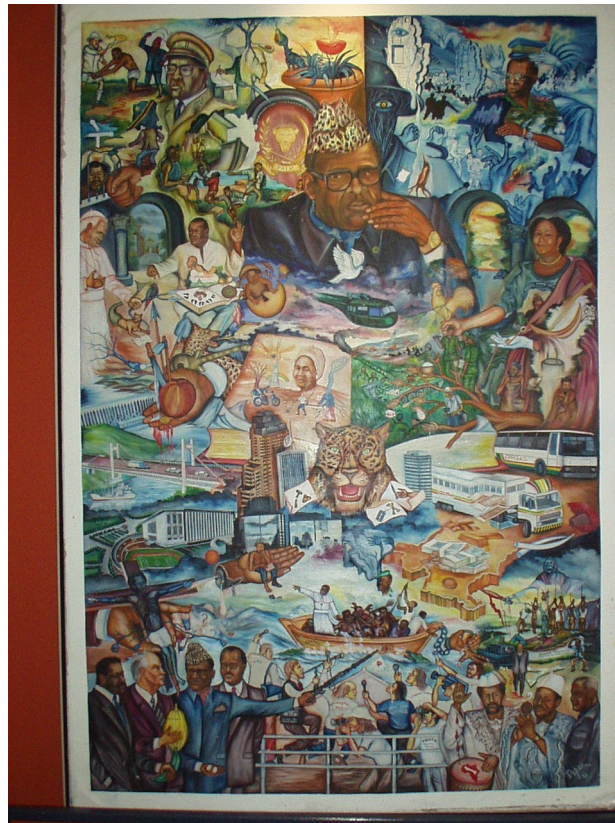
29 *Gradhiva* 2007/5; Wahnich, 2002.

30 *Kongospor. Norden i Kongo – Kongo i Norden*; KHM- 27. april - 18.november 2007

31 <http://www.africamuseum.be>. Exhibition held from February – October, 2005.

32 One of the reasons is due to the significant revenues gained from the cultural tourism targeting Arab visitors. The importance of Arab tourism and investments in Spain was clearly stated when King Fahd of Saudi Arabia died on August 1st, 2005. Spain declared then one day of national mourning, while the south of Anadalucia (the region of Malaga) where the king used to spend his summers had 3 days of mourning. The Spanish papers reported that king Fahd used to spend 42 000,- US\$ per day.

Photo 3.



There have been debates and expressions of mixed feelings about the pope's decision to beatify 498 clerics who were tortured and killed by the franquists during that period.³³ At the same time the Spanish parliament discussed the law on historic memory endorsing that atrocities were perpetrated by both sides.³⁴ In Libanon, the National Museum of Beirut has chosen not to follow the strategy of amnesia but instead that of healing.. This is symbolized by placing a statue of the ancient goddess of healing, Hygea, at the entrance of the museum.³⁵ We may ask ourselves which policies museums in Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia will adopt to address their civil wars in the future. Many years will pass before the wounds are healed. I think that the subject being too painful to acknowledge will remain 'forgotten' from exhibition projects for generations to come.

The Nomadic Turn

Times are changing. The nomadic turn seems to be taking over. The wanderer swinging between freedom, displacement and exclusion is stepping in. Inspired by the perspectives elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on deterritoriality, museums of cultural history opt to put mobility and nomads on the agenda. For Deleuze and Guattari the concept of deterritorialization denotes a process through which individuals and institutions are progressively freed from their territorial constraints. Deterritorialization has become one of the central forces of today's world. It entails movement, mobility of persons and goods and

33 The beatification took place on October 28th, 2007.

34 *L'Express*, nr. 2938, 25 octobre-1 nov. 2007, pp. 46-47.

35 Lina G. Tahan (Université de Cambridge-GB, CHSIM-EHESS), *Musées et guerre au Liban : l'indispensable oubli pour la réunification ?*, paper presented at the conference *Musées et Patrimoine*, Paris June 16th-17 th, 2005.

the creation of new markets. The concept challenges the idea of fixed roots and inherent stable identities because nomadism, according to Deleuze and Guattari, negates the sedentary and enduring nation-state. Nomadism is more attuned to the elaboration of networks and the connection between meaning and its different ways of expression.³⁶

Among the repercussions to the nomadic turn in museums we find the production of ephemeral experiences and shaping values by using entertainment, or rather edutainment.³⁷ In line with the aesthetic turn, intersecting gazes and the polyphonic narrative approach exhibitions are more and more idea-oriented and centred towards the public. Design and spectacle are central to display. Exhibitions are temporary and they often travel. They are not so much demonstrations of scientific knowledge, but rather representations of processes and addressing actual problems of public concern. Moreover, the virtual world is a significant aspect of deterritorialization in museums. I argued elsewhere that the World Wide Web gives access to collections and museums' archives through digital representations of artefacts and their documentation, exhibitions, buildings and their surroundings. Virtual realities reproduce and reconstruct three-dimensional artefacts and monuments that are physically transformed as they alter from tangible material to digital pictures. Objects can be turned, moved, given different hues and lit from various angles without ever being touched. They are manipulated so that they can be studied in minute details. Fragments that are kept miles apart can be connected to each other in order to recreate the whole object. Documents can be retrieved, read, downloaded and stored elsewhere. This simplifies both research and dissemination procedures. Further, most museums have problems with overfilled storage rooms and the fact that the greater part of their collections are not on display. The new media provides the means of creating virtual museums and exhibitions, and making the hidden artefacts accessible not only to specialists but also to the wider public. Collections and archives are not fixed in one place but travel in cyberspace. This ubiquity and reciprocity not only facilitates the creation of networks of specialists but also the rapid retrieval and exchange of information. Scholarship is promoted in stimulating ways. It is accessible and reaches a large and varied audience. Linked together over networks, museums' databases are becoming both valuable cultural resources and information centres.³⁸

The nomadic mode is also used to visualize fluctuating situations and the changing relations people have with their environments. It is today one of the strategies adopted to treat the question of immigration.

All immigration, whether voluntary or forced, is tied to narratives of journeys, departures, arrivals and processes of settling down. Although, in most cases, the documents exhibited are modest things that are easy to move and to carry along while travelling from one place to another, they have an archival value that is strongly laden with emotions. They consist mainly of personal belongings, mementoes and souvenirs of all sorts that could be transported in trunks and suitcases. These may be textiles, clothes and pieces of jewellery, carpets, religious books, pictures, letters, birth or marriage certificates, diplomas and travel documents. Because of the character and heterogeneity of the objects, exhibitions dealing with immigration are prone to rely on the aesthetics of polyphonic narratives and life history perspectives supplemented with interactive media and audio-visual devices. It is the beauty of the stories they tell that gives the artefacts displayed an added significance and conveys many layered meanings to the notion of belongingness, as well as they disclose various strategies of integration and exclusion. Rather than emphasizing the sense of otherness by playing the nostalgic tunes about remembered homelands museums have, since the 1990s explored

36 Deleuze & Guattari, 2006 [1980]: 457.

37 Hein, 2000: 65-67.

38 Naguib, 2004a: 57f.

patterns of immigration and the motivations for settling abroad, whether these were caused by economical factors, employment and job opportunities, wars, persecutions, discriminations, the quest for adventure and the unknown or ‘simply’ for love and marriage. Immigrants and their descendants are portrayed as assets to the receiving country. The stress is put on the innovative contributions brought by immigrants to their new countries and how their presence played a decisive role in building up a dynamic plural society. These were the lines followed by the project ‘*The Peopling of London*’ held at the London Museum (1993), the exhibition “*Jeg er her.*” *Innvandringshistorie fra 1945 til i dag* (2005) at the Intercultural Museum in Oslo, and the permanent exhibition at the new Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration (CNHI; 2007) in Paris.³⁹

The CNHI did not have a pre-existent collection and is in the process of constituting one. So far the bulk of this collection consists of a mixture of tangible, intangible and e-tangible heritage such as photographs, letters, objects and instruments used in daily life as well as oral testimonials, personal videos and digital self-presentations. These things are mostly acquired from private donations.

Photo 4.



In addition, the collection of the CNHI comprises installations by contemporary artists (photos 5). So far, there are few paintings or sculptures by renowned artists of foreign origin. The permanent exhibition at the CNHI is articulated around three major themes and nine sub-themes. The main themes are:

- a. Departure and arrival with symbolic objects and narratives.
- b. The French melting-pot (*le creuset français*) which takes up topics such as France land of opportunities, citizenship and naturalization, and also rejection.
- c. France as a mirror of diversity which deals with sports, languages and religions.

39 Naguib, 2004b, 2008, and forthcoming.

Photo 5.



Concluding remarks

It is too early to evaluate the cultural implications of deterritoriality for museums and how they affect ideas of nationhood and citizenship. It is also too early to assess the kind of experiences and knowledge the nomadic turn may provide in the future. The wave seems to have spread to a number of renowned museums as shown by a movement that is challenging the notion of museums as icons of the nation-state and on which I have not delved upon here. The trend involves the branding and franchising of museums. For example, the Louvre has opened a branch in Lens, Atlanta and will soon inaugurate one in Abu Dhabi. The Centre Pompidou is in Shanghai, the Musée Rodin in Sao Paulo, the British Museum in Shanghai and Qatar. After Bilbao, Las Vegas, Venice and Berlin the Guggenheim museum is also opening a new branch in Abu Dhabi.

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‘We need something of our own’: Representing Ethnicity, Diversity and ‘ National Heritage’ in Singapore

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Everywhere in Southeast Asia, the evidence of cultural diversity is overwhelming. Like many postcolonial states, Singapore encompasses a large number of disparate groups with different languages, religions and lifestyles. Over the past few decades, government policies have attempted to portray Singapore as a ‘community of communities’ – a nation of discrete heritages, united by their co-existence in the same geographical location, but made unique by the presence of an ‘indigenous’ Peranakan culture.

The focal point for this paper is the national museum of Singapore which, interestingly, comprises a network of new museums representing the various cultural minorities that make up the Singaporean population (the recently refurbished Singapore History Museum and the two new wings of the Asian Civilizations Museum). In particular, I wish to explore the reasons why, and the processes through which a cultural phenomenon (in this case the culture of the Peranakans) becomes defined as ‘national heritage’ by the state. Relatedly, I will also consider how different definitions of heritage are interpreted by Singaporeans and how constructions of a multi-ethnic heritage may co-exist in harmony with the state’s hegemonic aims. To do so, I will focus first on the Singaporean museums’ attempt to invent a Peranakan heritage and appropriate a sense of ‘indigenoussness’ in the project of nation building, and secondly on a recent exhibition on marriage which, I believe, attempts to put forward a Singaporean identity based on the portrayal of the nation as a multi-ethnic ‘community of communities’.

This paper has developed out of doctoral research which uses case studies of new Asian national history museums¹ - their objects, displays, and professional dynamics - to explore the construction of postcolonial national identities. It is based upon material from the final chapter of my dissertation, which addresses two modern museological 'problems' – multiculturalism and the commodification of indigenous heritage. The rise of the postcolonial nation state accentuates particular conditions within which there is a need to develop and assert a sense of national identity in order to reinforce belief in the existence and legitimacy of the nation. The recovery (or perhaps 'fabrication'?) of 'national heritage' and the revival of 'ethnic' traditions are, I believe, key to promoting a sense of the nation within the populace as well as 'selling' it to international visitors.

This paper examines Singapore's new network of national history museums, and analyses the means by which they interpret and articulate particular ideas about 'nationhood', ethnicity and memory in a shifting global political and economic theatre. Like many postcolonial states, Singapore encompasses a large number of disparate groups with different languages, religions and lifestyles. Over the past few decades, government policies (and therefore their expression in public museums) have attempted to portray Singapore as a 'community of communities', a nation of discrete heritages, united by their co-existence in the same geographical location, and made unique by the presence of an 'indigenous' Peranakan culture.² It is the construction of this sense of 'homogenization through difference' that I wish to explore.

In this way, I hope to shed light on the various ways the national museum contributes to the construction of 'the nation' and its citizenry by simultaneously reminding people of their multi-cultural heritages and the shared experiences and histories that bind otherwise disparate groups together, while drawing people together through the construction of a unique indigenous heritage, providing a focal point for national identity and symbols of unity. I would argue that the case of Singapore represents just one example of a larger (perhaps world-wide?) movement to forge connections among diverse populations through heritage practices, creating both new publics, and strengthening existing ones.

The Peranakans: One Heritage for All?

Rather than having to fight for national independence, the 'nation' as a political entity was somewhat reluctantly thrust upon Singapore (Kwok 1998: 25). This had some crucial ramifications for the construction of a national culture, particularly with regard to the role of ethnicity. Simply put, not having a coherent national culture upon which it could fall back necessitated the construction (or 'invention') of a national heritage that transcended the accepted colonial definitions of Singapore's ethnic groups.³ As Kuo Pao Kun, founder of The Substation gallery, comments:

As a former colony...[we] have no nation, or culture, to go back to. We started as a people made up of immigrants coming from different places - big cultures, great cultures - but they brought to Singapore only bits and pieces of the great cultures and we have always been preoccupied with making money, making a better living. I think we have

1 Specifically, the new history museums of Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau.

2 The Peranakans are an ethnic group that is characterised by a unique synthesis of Chinese and Malay influences, and their descent can be traced to Chinese traders who settled in Southeast Asia during the seventeenth century and married local women. As a group, the Peranakans believe they have retained a unique identity that is different from that of other Chinese immigrants to the region

3 Instituted under Stamford Raffles, Singapore's population has traditionally been divided along ethnic lines into 'Chinese, Malay, Indian and Other' (CMIO).

been marginalised, and we keep on marginalising ourselves... We call ourselves 'multicultural', but actually none of the cultures we have inherited are whole (Kuo 1994: 26).

While political independence prompted public discussion about the need for some form of national identity, little thought was given to the importance of heritage in such a construction (Yeoh and Huang 1996: 412). It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that official discourse turned to the need to understand and appreciate Singapore's cultural heritage as part of the larger nation building project. The clearest indication of a willingness to engage with the question of heritage first came in 1988 when a 'National Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts' was established, tasked with making recommendations to 'encourage Singaporeans to be more widely informed, creative, refined in taste, gracious in lifestyle and appreciative of our collective heritage in the context of modern Singapore' (Committee on Heritage 1988: 2). The concern with national heritage is evident in extracts taken from the 1988 report below:

Though Singapore's modern history is short, it contains a unique heritage which can play a vital part in nation building (6);

With wider and deeper appreciation of our heritage, Singaporeans will face the future with a deeper sense of confidence and purpose in building a nation of excellence on solid foundations (6);

Properly treated, our heritage can contribute towards the building of a rich cultural identity. It is the substance of social and psychological defence (26).

(excerpts taken from *Committee on Heritage* 1988).

Today, still, concerns with promoting Singapore's heritage remain on the agenda. As the 2002 Annual Report of the National Heritage Board reflects:

Self-government, which was instituted in 1959, did not result in a united society. There was still conflict among the different communities in multiracial Singapore. The government was faced with the challenge of instilling a sense of unity and national identity and belonging in Singapore (NHB 2002b: 5).

In response to these calls for heritage, the Singaporean government, in co-operation with its national museums, has begun to fashion a 'national heritage' out of its ethnically diverse population by putting forward its *mestizo*⁴ 'Peranakan' population as the nation's 'indigenous' culture.

The Peranakans are an ethnic group that is characterised by a unique synthesis of Chinese and Malay influences, and their descent can be traced to Chinese traders who settled in Southeast Asia during the seventeenth century and married local women. The term 'Peranakan' is believed to be derived from the Malay word *anak* (child), referring to the ancestors of these intermarriages (Henderson 2003: 30-31). As a group, the Peranakans believe they have retained a unique identity that is different from that of other Chinese immigrants to the region, and also highlights their adaptation to aspects of Malay life such as

4 *Mestizo* is a term of Spanish origin used to designate the people of mixed European and indigenous non-European ancestry. See Juan De Castro (2002) for example, who focuses on *mestizaje* discourse in Latin American literature, which proposes the existence of a homogenous Latin American culture out of American Indian, black, and Iberian elements. Usner et al (2000) similarly stress creolization as 'mutual cultural interchange'.

dress and food (Henderson 2003: 31; also see Tan 1993). A separate language of their own also evolved, 'known as "Baba Malay", a synthesis of Malay and Hokkien Chinese' (Henderson 2003: 31). Peranakan culture thus involves a fusion of Chinese and Malay cultures, as well as European and Indonesian influences.

During the colonial period, Peranakans for the most part enjoyed a relatively high socio-economic standing. Many occupied prominent positions in public life, and prosperity was apparent in their elaborate domestic furnishings, fine porcelain, embroidery and ornaments, as well as an active social life (Wee 2000: L4). The end of British rule marked a turning point in Peranakan history, however, as they were no longer needed to support the colonial administration. The ethnic and political justification for their separate existence diminished, leaving Peranakan identity to be expressed mainly through material cultural forms (furniture, dress etc.) that proved difficult to sustain without a wider sense of group solidarity (Rudolph 1998: 280).

An older gentleman was quoted in a recent newspaper article about the demise of Peranakan culture in Singapore:

It is quite impossible to live the Peranakan lifestyle in this day and age. The language is dying, and the knowledge of complex customs has been lost (Tan Boon Hui quoted in Wee 2000: L4).

Indeed, many Singaporeans say that with independence, Peranakan identity became subsumed under the more dominant Chinese identity. Some of the reasons for this might be the recent governmental push for all Singaporeans to learn Mandarin, despite Peranakan families being more likely to speak Malay at home, and intermarriages with non-Peranakans becoming more common, further diluting their identity (Wee 2000: L4). Moreover, within the governmentally imposed racial framework of 'Chinese, Malay, Indian and Other', in place since the colonial era, Peranakans are classified as Chinese for the purposes of identity cards (Benjamin 1976). In many ways, therefore, the unique characteristics of the Peranakans have been systematically devalued and their sense of identity weakened (Rudolph 1998: 282).

However, during a conversation with a Peranakan woman who has spent her entire life in Singapore, she made the following observation:

Suddenly younger Peranakans want to learn how to cook authentic *Nonya* food, and they are asking their mothers and grandmothers for the recipes. I don't know why there has been this revival (Oon, conversation, ACM, July 2002).

Mrs. Matsumura, a tour guide at the Asian Civilizations Museum, made a similar comment regarding this apparent 'local' cultural revival:

It's strange to show schoolchildren the Peranakan clothes, and then to see them wearing them later in the day. The *sarong* and the *kebaya* are there in the museum, but today, young people don't wear them together. So maybe I'll see girls on Orchard Road wearing the *sarong* with a T-shirt, or the *kebaya* with jeans. But they're the same clothes they were in the nineteenth century (Matsumura, conversation, ACM, July 2002).

From my observations in Singapore, moreover, it was immediately apparent that it is the promotion of Peranakan distinctiveness that has become a major source of their attraction for locals and tourists alike. Through the construction of various Peranakan sites around the city, such as the 'Peranakan Place' shopping complex, numerous 'authentic Peranakan' restaurants, and two new museum galleries, it is clear that the prominence given to the invention of heritage on Singapore's national agenda in recent years is deemed necessary as part of an attempt to build and support national identity.

Unlike the Singapore History Museum's undeniably nationalistic origins, it was largely the complexities of the ethnic situation in Singapore that brought about the establishment of the Asian Civilisations Museum. In the years after British departure, mounting racial tension, and even some instances of violence, prompted the government to devise ways of promoting 'pan-ethnic' values as the basis for a more unified cultural identity (Chua and Kuo 1990: np). As part of this drive, the ACM was created with an explicit focus on 'shared values' and as an attempt to formulate a set of 'pan-Asian' social principles with which people could identify and upon which one could construct a genuinely national identity (Kwok 1999: 164).

The Armenian Street wing of the ACM, for instance, is in the process of evolving into a gallery wholly devoted to the display of Peranakan culture, entitled, 'The Peranakan Legacy'.⁵ The exhibits introduce these 'indigenous Singaporeans' as inhabitants from 'the early days' who gathered in the Katong District, and describes the objects on display as providing insight into the 'complex hybrid origins' of a culture 'forged between the Chinese, Malay and European worlds during the period of 1850 and 1950' (Museum Text, 'The Peranakan Legacy', ACM, 2002). The displays are organised around themes and materials, in which visitors view displays of social customs such as betel chewing and weddings, the *nonyas*' production of elaborately beaded textiles, stylistic developments in dress and jewellery fashions at the turn of the century, and the 'important legacies of silver and porcelain that were handed down as family heirlooms' (Museum text, 'The Peranakan Legacy', ACM, 2002).

Throughout the exhibit, the material and textual focus is on the creation of a *distinct* Peranakan aesthetic, which, as the museums text reads: 'can be seen in their taste for elaborate designs executed with exquisite skill' (Museum text, 'The Peranakan Legacy', ACM, 2002, see **Fig.1**). This is illustrated materially by nineteenth century examples of Malay-style brooches (*kerosang*) with rose-cut diamonds (*intan*) produced exclusively by Peranakan jewellers. Further on, examples of metalwork demonstrate the blending of Malay techniques and Chinese designs. Heidi Tan, one of the curators involved in producing this exhibit, commented to me about the challenge of exhibiting cultural blending while promoting the unique culture of the Peranakans in Singapore:

One of the curatorial challenges of the exhibition was to address the need for greater contextualisation, despite limited collections. People experience 'Peranakan-ness' differently, especially the Peranakans themselves. Different Peranakans have different ways of living. Some families live their culture within the Buddhist-Taoist belief system, some in Catholicism, some in Protestant Christianity, for example. And so for them it is essential that we don't portray 'Peranakan' as a rigid stereotype. This is hard, though, because at the same time, Peranakan culture holds great nostalgia and significance for Singaporeans and is an attraction for overseas visitors who want to discover a unique Singaporean culture. This is the challenge for the museum – not to perpetuate the Peranakan stereotype, while maintaining their uniqueness (Heidi Tan, interview, ACM, July 2002).

In the resulting displays, however, the Peranakans are represented as a homogenous entity, represented by distinct, easily recognisable objects that set them apart from *sinkeh*, or Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia. In other words, the displays emphasise the relatively superficial, external and therefore non-threatening manifestations of ethnicity that are most accessible to visitors - costumes, arts and crafts, food and furnishings, represented as if the ethnic group is living in an ahistorical 'ethnographic present' (Ooi 2001: 116).

Figure 1.

5 I note here the ACM Armenian Street branch's closing in December of 2005 for refurbishment into an exclusively Peranakan museum (see <http://www.acm.org.sg/home/home.asp>).



It is also the more eye-catching aspects of Peranakan culture that are promoted – those artefacts most appealing to tourists who tend to be most attracted to colourful displays of local uniqueness (Henderson 2002: 42). Groupings of red and gold bridal furniture, for example, and a namwood house altar set with offerings are among the most visually impressive, and a clear success with tourists. According to Ashworth (1994: 25), museums will almost always offer a homogenised and aestheticised view of national heritage: ‘In order to be useful in museums and be easily understood by the widest group of people, a “rich and complex past” has to be reduced to a set of easily recognizable characteristics.’ In displaying the more traditional and beautiful Peranakan objects, then, the museum makes that unique heritage more familiar and accessible to everyone.

In a similar vein, a newly developed gallery in the Singapore History Museum, the ‘Rumah Baba’, recreates the interior of a Straits Chinese⁶ or Peranakan bungalow in the early years of the twentieth century. Text panels describe how the community draws inspiration from Malay-Indonesian and colonial English customs as well as Chinese tradition, and the highly syncretic character of the society is illustrated by many examples of Peranakan furnishings. The material culture of a unique ethnic group – framed photographs, clothing, spittoons, furniture and other related objects – are used to create a ‘lived-in’ ambience. Peranakan food is also extolled as ‘the closest Singapore has to an indigenous cuisine’ (Museum Text, ‘Rumah Baba’, SHM, 2002). At the SHM, not only can one learn about the 350 Peranakan objects on display, the museum also features activities and workshops related

6 Peranakans are also commonly referred to as ‘Straits Chinese’, which refers to those Chinese who settled in the three port cities - or ‘Straits Settlements’ - of Melaka, Penang and Singapore. The terms Straits Chinese and Peranakan are used interchangeably, although the Straits Settlements no longer exist.

to Peranakan culture: cooking demonstrations, beading workshops, dance classes, and even an annual Peranakan fashion show.⁷

Both the museums' exhibits thus reflect the hybrid yet unique nature of Peranakan culture. Although these people have retained some of their Chinese roots, they have also absorbed Malay, Indian and European influences. Yet in many ways, as suggested in the above descriptions of the Peranakan's unique material culture and traditions, the exhibits simultaneously celebrate an ethnically distinct heritage. As Ms. Tan commented: 'The hybrid style of the Peranakans is one that is unique to Southeast Asia and one which we can truly claim is ours' (Heidi Tan, interview, ACM, July 2002). In this case, I would argue, Singaporean identity is bound up in the discursive strategy of essentialising Asian traditions, which are then transformed them into 'national heritage' through their display in the museum.

In talking to a variety of people in both the ACM and the SHM, it was clear that museum visitors believe Peranakans to be Singapore's true 'forefathers':

This is unique to Singapore. It is not borrowed. It belongs to Singapore (Female visitor, age 20-25, conversation, SHM, July 2002).

Peranakans represent the whole of Singapore, as they are a blend of different cultures, just as Singapore is a blend of different cultures (Mr. Lee, conversation, SHM, July 2002).

It is so uplifting to see the sparkle of interest in Singaporeans' eyes as they learn about their roots (Mrs. Khoo, conversation, ACM, July 2002).

Knowing how our forefathers lived, endured and achieved over many generations helps us appreciate better how we came to be Singaporeans. This will give Singaporeans pride in what and who we are (Male visitor, conversation ACM, July 2002).

This 'rediscovery' of Peranakan culture within the museum context thus lays the ground for the construction of a heritage that puts forward Peranakan culture as encompassing the heritage of *all* Singaporeans.

In a 1993 article, Singaporean postcolonial theorist W-L Wee described Singaporean identity as being a 'messy hybrid, where parts of each culture leak[...] into the other parts' (Wee 1993: 716). Through simplifying (or perhaps 'cleaning up') Singaporean identity by focusing attention exclusively on Peranakan culture, these new displays show that while it is indeed a multi-ethnic nation, postcolonial Singapore is also seeking to be a culturally distinct entity, unique and separate from other nations. As Chang *et al* write (1996: 288): 'Specialization, therefore, entails that destination areas capitalize on local resources and accentuate unique identities within the context of a globalized economic system.' To have a unique culture is sophisticated, and will act as a lure for contemporary travellers, while also providing a cultural focal point for local visitors. The construction of a distinct 'national heritage' therefore centres on presenting distinguishing images to both citizens and international tourists.

It is important to note here that the marketing of heritage is a field that involves national image-management, and as a result a hegemonic agenda may be involved. As MacCannell (1992: 1) notes, heritage tourism 'is an ideological framing of history, nature and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs.' In the case of Singapore, Hall and Oehlers claim, the People's Action Party's actions can be interpreted as an example of 'tourism as politics', the intention being to display the party's 'centrality to the

7 <http://www.nationalmuseum.sg/>

successful development of Singapore and thus secure its pre-eminent position in Singaporean politics' (Hall and Oehlers 2000: 86). The state, in other words, is concerned with projecting unique and 'politically correct' images, as is demonstrated in the promotion of Peranakan culture to represent the *real* heritage of Singapore.

Multi-Ethnicity: Problem or Strength?

As discussed earlier, one of the greatest concerns in defining national identity in Singapore has been the constant need to address social issues in terms of the multi-ethnic composition of its population (Clammer 1985: 162).⁸ Throughout Singapore's history, its mixture of ethnic affiliations has been one of its defining characteristics and a significant political issue. In spite of the numerical and social/economic superiority of ethnic Chinese (70 per cent) in proportion to Malays (15 per cent) and Indians (8 per cent), it has been necessary to 'openly recognise ethnic equality as a means of neutralizing ethnic nepotism in matters pertaining to national interest' (Chun 1996: 60). Along with promoting Singapore's unique Peranakan heritage, then, the government simultaneously goes to great lengths to encourage the existing ethnic balance in an attempt to regulate (and maintain) the colonial era's state-imposed ethnic divisions, and also to prevent a future recurrence of past racial tensions (such as the race riots of the 1960s) (Siddique 1989: 36). The state authorities exercise considerable power, reinforcing political ideologies through the communication of messages about preferred versions of identities. However, the representations discussed below also convey something of the complex realities of identity in Singapore, and the government's recognition of the significance of its multicultural make-up.

Since its refurbishment and re-opening in 1997, the Singapore History Museum has launched a number of temporary exhibitions which focus on the unique traditions of Singapore's different ethnic groups. The 2002 exhibition, 'I Do, I Do: An Exhibition on Weddings and Marriages in Singapore' is a case in point here. A large cross-cultural display on the marriage traditions of Singapore's different cultural groups, its interplay of images and words, memories and things, builds a rich and moving display that acknowledges the pluralities and complexity of modern Singaporean society.⁹ The opening text panel reads:

No matter who you are, or where you live, getting married is one of the most important steps you will ever take. Different cultures' marriages differ in detail, but the major steps are always the same. This exhibition looks at how Singapore's diverse cultures follow the steps of life's most beautiful and important dance (Museum Text, 'I Do, I Do...', SHM, 2002).

Television monitors placed throughout the exhibition space played footage of modern Singaporeans from many cultural backgrounds talking about their weddings and marriages. There were also audio recordings of different wedding-associated music playing in the background at different points in the exhibition. This allowed for a variety of voices to be heard, as the exhibition moved dramatically between the various media and across a range of narrators. The multicultural nature of Singaporean society was truly apparent in this exhibition.

Alongside the TVs, cases of Malay wedding objects, Hindu and Tamil trousseau items, and European wedding decorations were among the many objects displayed. Wedding clothes from each of Singapore's main cultures were also displayed side-by-side, which was clearly a favourite part for visitors, judging by the great crowds of people I observed examining the

8 See also Chiew 1983; Benjamin 1976 and Siddique 1989 for more on Singapore's ethnic makeup.

9 <http://www.nationalmuseum.sg/>

objects and pointing out differences between the various dresses and jewellery associated with the different cultures (see **Figs. 2 and 3**). While highlighting the nation's different cultures, however, I noted that efforts had clearly been made to ensure that the idea of race was 'politically non-threatening, being subsumed under national identity and defined largely in cultural terms and politically controlled' (Lai 1995: 195). The government's strategy here, in other words, has effectively relegated identity matters to the realm of culture, disguising its role in national politics.

Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Thinking about this exhibit during my fieldwork, I came to the conclusion that the underlying political objective must be the need to maintain harmony between Singapore's ethnic divisions. Multiculturalism in Singapore, the displays said to me, does not necessarily *replace* a sense of national homogeneity; the concepts of sameness and difference are presented in 'I Do, I Do...' as compatible rather than opposed. In other words, this vision of the nation does not require cultural homogeneity, rather constructs a form of homogenisation through difference.

The display also addressed the issue of inter-marriage, an increasingly common phenomenon in Singapore, and ‘always a tense issue’ (Mrs. Chew, conversation, Singapore, July 2002). A text panel read:

Fusions of the traditions of different ethnic groups have resulted from mixed marriages...For some, these changes may signal a loss of tradition...but for all the prejudices against them, marriages between Singapore’s diverse communities have always been part of Singapore’s heritage as an Asian melting pot...they characterise how the diverse cultures of Singapore influence and shape each other (Museum text, ‘I Do, I Do...’SHM, 2002).

ACM curator Heidi Tan reflected on the exhibition in an interview:

The cross-cultural aspect is very important to play up. It goes down very well with people higher up and also the tourists, who want to see something uniquely Singaporean...not just more Chinese material culture (Heidi Tan, interview, ACM, July 2002).

Iskander Mydin, a curator at the SHM, also commented on ‘I Do, I Do’:

We’ve tried to include exhibits which look at cross-cultural mixes rather than just a monolithic view. I don’t know if we do enough, though. The museum is still very monolithic! (Mydin, interview, SHM, July 2002).

There is thus also a cosmopolitan aspect to Singaporean identity being promoted in addition to ‘Peranakan’ national heritage: ‘the people have gradually acquired a distinct identity as Singaporeans while retaining their traditional cultures and lifestyles’ (Ministry of Culture 1984: 4, SHM museum clippings). Political scientist David Brown explains:

The ethnic cultures of Singaporeans have now been largely ‘sanitized’ by the state so as to remove their politically destabilizing connotations... Therefore the ethnic cultures can be employed as the distinct but compatible building blocks for the articulation of the new ‘umbrella’ national culture of ‘Asian values’ (Brown 1994: 92).

This view was echoed to me by a SHM staff member, who, reflecting on the treatment of ethnic divisions in Singapore, said: ‘We make ethnicity amenable to our politics and purposes. The taming process succeeds best when ethnicity finally becomes freeze-dried’ (Staff member, conversation, SHM, July 2002).

Moreover, considering the ACM’s new Empress Place wing, we can also observe the incorporation of representations of all the cultures of Singapore, giving every group’s traditions its own special recognition while allowing each to contribute with equal importance to shaping the nation’s identity. Lowenthal (1994: 43) claims that ‘heritage distils the past into icons of identity, bonding us with precursors and progenitors, with our own earlier selves, and with our promised successors.’ In tracing Singaporeans’ ancestral roots to China, India and the Middle East, the museum celebrates Singaporeans’ ethnic identities, illuminating how the ACM positions the postcolonial nation as a ‘cosmopolitan society (read: harmonious, tolerant, diverse, but not divided)’ (Yeoh 2001: 460).

The nation state of Namibia offers an interesting comparative example of how museums play a role in portraying postcolonial national heritage, with a particular focus on cultural unity. Modern Namibia is a multicultural society that includes a wide variety of cultural groups. An official government campaign of ‘state-induced racial harmony’ is promoted through museums and tourism literature, seen by some to be an effort to avoid addressing the multicultural makeup of the population (Zedde 1998: np). The state has even gone to the extent of adopting the Benetton advertising campaign of ‘United Colours’ to illustrate

Namibian national identity. Moreover, English has been declared Namibia's national language despite the fact that it is spoken by only 2% of the population - part of an effort to portray itself to the international community as a modern, cosmopolitan nation (Schidlkrou 1995: 70.), depicting the nation not as it really is, but as it wishes to be seen by others.

Namibia's capital has two main state museums, one which deals with 'history' and the other with 'natural history and ethnography'. The 'history' museum employs a type of postcolonial nostalgia for the former dominant German and Afrikaans cultures, and portrays national identity using terms and stories infused by European culture for foreign tourists, who usually visit that museum exclusively (Zedde 1998: np). On the other hand, the state museum of natural history and ethnography shows a different side of the nation, and is frequented primarily by locals - mainly non-white Namibians (Schidlkrou 1995: 70). Each type of visitor is offered a Namibian heritage they recognise, and expect to see.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization also provides an interesting comparative case here. Like many postcolonial states, Canada encompasses a large number of disparate groups with different languages, lifestyles, and political interests. In a similar fashion to Singapore's museums, the CMC (opened in 1989) reflects the government's commitment to the country's multicultural policies. The 1971 Multiculturalism Act, for example, divided citizens into 'cultural groups', and acknowledged 'the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage' (Burgess 1996: 52). Canada was reconfigured as a 'cultural mosaic', with each group theoretically preserving their differences while living in harmony. In a similar fashion to Singapore, then, the Canadian government has concentrated on promoting ethnic harmony in an effort to counteract the forces of cultural fragmentation that were thought to be threatening to break apart the Canadian collective. As Canadian historian, J.L. Granatstein, wrote in his book *Who Killed Canadian History?* (1998: 5): 'It is a nation of regions, languages, religions, and disparate cultures; there is much to dis-unify Canadians, and, all too often, very little to join them together.' Debates about national and cultural heritage, and relationships between groups of people, are thus of particular salience in Canada.

Within this context, the CMC has been developed to play an essential role in preserving and promoting the heritage of Canada and all its peoples. It attempts to be a unifying institution in a very different way from traditional museums such as the Smithsonian or the British Museum, its purpose being to bring together representations of all the cultures of Canada, giving every group's traditions its own special recognition while allowing each to contribute with equal importance to shaping the nation's identity. For example, the central symbolic motif of the Canada Hall, where the CMC's main narrative unfolds, is that of the nation as a 'cultural crossroads', a place where people of different cultural backgrounds have come together to produce a diverse national community and a unique national identity (MacDonald and Alford 1989: 99). The Hall includes representations of a number of different cultural groups that have contributed to the 'Canadian mosaic' - Basques, Acadians, Métis, Germans and British. Like the SHM, however, multiculturalism is displayed not as displacing a sense of national homogeneity, but reinforcing it. Founding Director George MacDonald's intention, in other words, was to showcase the diverse contributions of Canada's various ethnic groups, and in promoting a strong sense 'intercultural understanding,' he believed the museum would become a 'symbol of our nation' that would prepare visitors to become contributing members of the global village (MacDonald 1989: 38, 31).

Displays such as those found in Singapore's museums, as well as Namibia's and Canada's, can thus be seen in many ways as instruments of social control, incorporated into nation building strategies to aid in reinforcing 'one central culture and its values', while also accommodating 'peripheral cultures within a dominant core' (Graburn 1997: 199). In

moulding the nation, in other words, the People's Action Party has endeavoured to construct an overarching national identity based on multiculturalism, but within which ethnic loyalties take a back seat to being Singaporean, 'fostering ethnic consciousness as a resource for nation building and political development, while at the same time guarding against the emergence of competitive ethnocentrism' (Henderson 2003: 29, citing Brown 1994: 110).

In a similar fashion to the colonial regime in Singapore, the government practices a strategy of 'divide and rule' by placing all groups on a theoretically equal footing. Cultural diversity in Singapore has thus been symbolically embraced within the wider construction of a homogeneous nation. And indeed, it is important to note that funding is a powerful agent of change, and the Singaporean government has made it clear that financial support will be awarded to those heritage projects that contribute most to transforming national consciousness (Committee on Heritage 1988: 30). Another dimension to add, moreover, is that although the objective of 'dual ethnic and national identification' has been pursued (Hill and Lian 1995: 104), the continued dominance of the Chinese majority is a source of considerable resentment, and there are significant differences across the groups in terms of the distribution of wealth, educational qualifications and career prospects (Benjamin 1976: 116). The reality is, therefore, that ethnicity remains a highly charged, politically-driven issue in Singapore.

In another, significant way, the SHM focuses on Singapore's multi-ethnic character so as to portray an exotic and culturally rich image for tourists. Coupled with its other displays of Singapore's modern history, multi-ethnic exhibitions like 'I Do, I Do...' provide an effective counterpart to images of Singapore as a 'modern metropolis', creating a perfect mix of 'exotic cultures' with a Western standard of service for modern travellers. This is reflected in the Singapore Tourism Board's slogan of 'Singapore New Asia', which it has employed as a brand since 1996, hoping to convey the exciting mix that exists in Singapore, 'a city with its head in the future and its soul in the past' (STB 1998: np). Thus, the latest in modern technology co-exists with traditional values and customs in 'a young nation which looks ahead but does not forget its heritage' (STB 1998: np).

It is, of course, crucial to remember that heritage development serves many objectives beyond the obvious economic goals of attracting tourists, generating employment, and creating revenue (Chang *et al* 1996: 299). The strengthening cultural identity and promoting cultural healing might be another pursuit, as might the development of national unity. Displays like those discussed above, in other words, are created to meet local demands for cultural enrichment, as well as to fulfil political agendas. To reiterate, in Singapore politics plays a key role in heritage conservation, serving as a vehicle for the state to assert its agenda on matters relating to ethnicity. In addition to the museum, for example, the equal representation of Singapore's four main ethnic groups is depicted throughout the city (heritage districts, religious buildings and restaurants, for instance). The aim is clearly to affirm in the minds of both tourists and residents the harmonious co-existence of races in Singapore. Thus, '[w]hat is successfully presented for consumption by outsiders also redefines the parameters of legitimacy and authenticity for indigenous audiences...[t]his is what tourists are looking at and, therefore, that must be what we are and what we do' (Simpson 1993: 170-171).

Working to complement each other, the various displays in the ACM and SHM can thus be seen as an attempt to strike a meaningful symbiosis between indigenous values and racial harmony. In other words, represented by Peranakan culture, the 'Rumah Baba' and 'Peranakan Legacy' exhibitions promote Singaporean national identity as founded upon a unique heritage. In contrast, the SHM's incorporation of displays like 'I Do, I Do...' draws attention to Singapore's multi-racial composition, and attempts to mould identity in a way that neutralises the potential divisiveness of its ethnic composition, focusing instead on promoting

‘unity in diversity’. Of course, these images are not only intended for tourists. Local residents, by visiting the museum, are none-too-subtly encouraged to act out this interpretation.

Conclusions

As citizens and tourists alike grapple with issues of identity politics within the context of increasing industrialisation and globalisation, it seems that economic success on its own has proven to be inadequate ground for inspiring feelings of national identity. Postcolonial nations, in particular, have experienced intense pressure, from within as well as without, to define themselves in particularistic or culturally-unique terms, engaging as a result in various ‘culture building’ projects. As the World Tourism Organization notes: ‘consumers are demanding new, more imaginative and varied tourism products and services’ (WTO 1990: 10, cited in Chang *et al* 1996: 289). James Clifford also refers to the growing appeal of exoticism: ‘Tourism thrives on such startling juxtapositions, on what might be called the tourist surreal – the foreignness of what is presented to its context of presentation’ (Clifford 1981: 563, cited in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 371). These cultural projects are also ideologically driven on a more local level, however, with tourism development adding legitimacy to political regimes, and heritage sites supporting state-imposed images of ethnicity and national identity. In much the same way that Clifford describes, Singapore has tapped in to a Peranakan identity that is simultaneously unique and ‘foreign’, providing contrasting images to the ultra-modern, highly Westernised skylines, and are therefore seen to provide a more meaningful experience for both tourists *and* locals.

Singapore is thus an excellent example of new a nation trying to ‘specialise’ in order to market itself to tourists, and also to provide a unifying sense of identity within an extremely diverse population. Through the above discussion of recent museum developments, I have shown that museums can be very much a part of this movement. In a multicultural society, the problem facing national museums such as the SHM and ACM is to reflect an identity that has national validity, yet is relevant to individual ethnic groups. By marketing Peranakan culture as distinctive, Singapore differentiates itself from other destinations in the region, and creates a unique selling point both at home and abroad. As Robins argues, even in ‘the most disadvantaged places, heritage...can be mobilized to gain competitive advantage in the race between places’ (Robins 1991: 38).

This case is also significant because it goes against current beliefs about globalisation, particularly the notion that unique places and identities have become homogenised as a result of the emergence of ‘global culture’ (Peet 1989; Massey 1993). The interaction between global forces like international tourism and local processes of cultural preservation are clearly depicted in Singapore’s museums, where the celebration of a unique indigenous culture places an emphasis on local identity, while highlighting the global trend in cultural tourism.

As M. Estellie Smith notes, forms of heritage development, including tourism, can serve the interests of a national elite by:

Stabilizing their dominant position through the creation or expansion of the popular affiliation to an historically ‘real’ national identity and [by] encouraging socioeconomically ‘divergent’ groups to adopt [certain] lifestyles (Smith 1997: 200).

My point here is not to evaluate the positive or negative consequences of these particular constructions of heritage, but to point to their productive power in stimulating the development or revival of ‘unique’ heritages for promotion internally and externally. By its nature, tourism both illuminates and questions processes of cultural construction – How are specific elements selected for tourism promotion, and how are these reconciled with the need to assert national identity? This discussion has shown that the museums and identities

promoted in Singapore are partly based on how those in control would like tourists to imagine Singapore – as a destination that is both unique and modern in character – and how they would like Singaporeans to view themselves – as a unified nation where ethnic divisions are seen as compatible, highlighted by the existence of an indigenous and exotic culture which encompasses the national heritage of all.

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Internet

Asian Civilisations Museum, <http://www.acm.org.sg/home/home.asp>
 National Museum of Singapore, <http://www.nationalmuseum.sg/>

List of Interviews and Documented Conversations Cited

Note that in the case of formal interviews, a specific date is given, whereas 'conversations' are cited more generally, as they do not necessarily refer to a particular moment of dialogue, but to comments, chats, walks, lunches, and general museum life. In the case of the interviews, also note that many of my contacts were interviewed more than once, however I have only listed those that are cited in the body of this paper.

Table 1. Museum Staff and Other Professionals

Name	Position	Museum/Institution	Date
Lee Mui Ngah	Docent, Peranakan origin	ACM	25 July 2002
Ms Heidi Tan	Curator, Southeast Asian Collections	ACM	26 July 2002
Mrs. Matsumura	Tour Guide	ACM	18 July 2002
Iskander Mydin	Chief Curator	Singapore History Museum	31 July 2002 5 August 2002

Table 2. Visitor Conversations Cited

Name (if given) and sex	Other Identity Information	Location/Museum	Date
Mrs. Chew	Local Chinese, age 61 (host family in Singapore)	Singapore	July 2002
Mrs. Oon	Peranakan woman, age 45–50	ACM	23 July 2002
Anon, female	Age 20–25	SHM	July 2002
Mr. Lee	Local-born, male, age 30–35	SHM	July 2002
Mrs. Khoo	Chinese	ACM	22 July 2002
Anon, male	No other info recorded	ACM	22 July 2002

Museum Global Marketing: a case study of the National Palace Museum (Taiwan)

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This research is a part of my PhD research that focuses on museum marketing strategy in Taiwanese national museums. This paper aims to examine the growth and development of museum marketing, understand the national museums in Taiwan, identify the global marketing strategy by using the National Palace Museum in Taiwan as an example and, finally, provide suggestions for the National Palace Museum. This paper adopts the qualitative method to collect data. Interviews and the literature review were used to generate the data.

Keywords: Museum marketing, museum global marketing, National Palace Museum

Introduction

The museum is a non-profit organisation and it aims to provide knowledge related to collections and encourage the audience's interest in them. Marketing professional, Philip Kotler, applied marketing to non-profit organisations in the late 1960s. Museums have experienced a tremendous challenge due to the economic recession and decrease in government support. For this reason, museums have started to use marketing as a tool to operate their museums and it has been applied in museums for over twenty-five years. It helps museums not only to generate revenue and resources but also to fulfil their mission. Marketing is a process whereby individuals and groups obtain what they need and desire through creating and exchanging products, services, experiences, satisfaction, and, ultimately, value with others. In recent years, the museums around the world have started to use global marketing not only to attract more visitors but also to achieve their mission.

It is a phenomenon in Taiwan that more museums now understand how to use marketing as a tool not only to attract people's attention to engage in museum activities, but also to achieve the museum's mission. The national museums in Taiwan are now facing changes in their management system. The government has announced that all national museums must transfer to the Administrative Corporation management system by 2008. After this, the role of marketing will become more important, since the national museums have to undertake fund-raising and provide the better service quality in order to attract new and repeat audiences. Whatever the management system that the national museums will adopt in the future, the role of marketing in national museums will become more significant and important.

After the party transformation in 2000, the national museums in Taiwan have been experiencing huge changes. The national museums have begun to use 'branding' as a tool to shape museums' images and establish their identity system. They have also begun to learn to create new museum products and work with the private sector. The National Palace Museum is the leading national museum in Taiwan, with a collection representing the 7000-year cultural legacy of China. It was established by the central government in 1957 and has become one of the biggest museums in the world. It is the only museum directly accountable to the Executive Yuan (the highest executive body). It established a 'Functional Division of Public Affairs' (not an official department) in 2005 under the 'Secretariat Office' to deal with marketing affairs and public relations. It also committed a Build-Operate-Transfer project for restaurants, which is similar to the public-private partnership, in the private sector, the Howard Plaza Hotel, in 2006.

The statistics show that seventy percent of the visitors at National Palace Museum are tourists. The statistics also shows that the National Palace Museum is the favourite attraction among the tourists in a survey. The National Palace Museum has paid great attention to attracting foreign visitors and has used a global marketing strategy to extend its audience segments and promote its brand.

Museum and museum marketing

Marketing is formally defined as "a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering and exchanging products of value with others" (Kotler et al. 2005, p.6). Marketing, in this definition, is a process of exchanging things of value between producers and consumers and those who trade in things. Kotler and Kotler (1998, p.30, 59) explained that each organisation, whether it is a business organisation or a non-profit organisation, is engaged in exchange; furthermore, marketing deals as much with the intangible satisfaction and experiences that people enjoy as with tangible products and services. The Chartered Institute of Marketing (2005) explains that marketing "is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying

customer requirements profitably". According to these definitions, marketing is a process that involves 'exchange' between at least two parties; the purpose of marketing is to satisfy individual or organisational needs. 'Exchange' is thus the core concept of marketing.

The first publication which discussed non-profit organisation marketing was "Broadening the Concept of Marketing", written by Kotler and Levy (1969). They broadened the meaning of marketing from its usual interpretation of being a process used only in reference to for-profit organisations. They applied the concept of marketing to non-profit organisations as a survival technique for these organisations; for-profit organisations aim to gain benefits and make a profit, but the goals of non-profit organisations are to provide a variety of services and to accomplish their missions.

In recent decades, especially since the 1980s, non-profit organisations have been confronted by several management problems, such as limited budgets and staff shortages, in what have become competitive and changeable environments. In order to enhance their administrative efficiency and service quality, non-profit organisations have decided to adopt marketing strategies in their operations. Marketing in non-profit organisations can help them to accomplish their mission and achieve the goals they have set themselves. However, marketing is a tool for management and not a method of resolving all of the problems within the organisation itself. When non-profit organisations adopt marketing as a tool, they need to consider their mission and goals, and plan marketing activities accordingly. All marketing activities are designed to enable the organisation to accomplish its mission and achieve its goals. For profit-making organisations, marketing is emphasized as being 'market-driven'. Organisations provide products according to the needs of their customers in order to make a final profit and create an income. For non-profit organisations, however, marketing is designed to enhance administrative efficiency and service quality, to gain support and recognition from the public and to accomplish their mission.

In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan decided "to balance the budget through cutbacks in government spending and creating private sector initiatives to take up the slack"; the museum and cultural institution community was particularly hard hit by this retrenchment, and it responded by lobbying against the proposed cuts (Bigley 1987, p.14; Kotler & Armstrong 1994, p.6). For this reason, museums and other non-profit organisations began to use marketing as a tool in their operations. Bryant explains museum marketing in terms of the changeable environment, including such factors as social economic recession, increased competition, decrease in government support and grants (Bryant 1988, p.2, 16).

Museums, whether public or private, are influenced by governmental budget cutbacks, and face difficulties due to deficient resources (Bigley 1987, p.14). Some researchers claim that museums and other non-profit organisations started to use marketing as an operating tool as a result of the increasingly competitive environment and depleted resources (Kawashima 1998, p.21; Huang 1997, p.81; Vaughan 2001, p.253). Weil (1998, p.263) identifies three factors that have contributed to this phenomenon: money, the loss of public confidence and the lack of public recognition. Kotler (1998, p.27-29) points out three reasons for museums to adopt marketing: revenue building and fiscal self-sufficiency; competition; and accountability. The essential reason why museums and other non-profit organisations should become interested in formal marketing principles is that these will enable these organisations to become more effective in accomplishing their missions and in earning income. Kawashima (1998, p.21) also indicates that government policies have been encouraging museums to use marketing and income generation skills in museum management since the mid-1980s, particularly in recent years. Good management enables museums to face the challenge of managing change and developments within their organisation (Fleming & Hushion 2006, p.3).

McLean, in 'Marketing the museum' (1997, p. 1), mentions that "marketing is a process that brings together an organisation and people, whether it be for profit, to satisfy their needs

or wants, to increase visitor figures, etc.” Museum marketing is ‘a process of management’, involving ‘the confirmation of museum mission’ and ‘consistent effort’ (Kotler 1998, p.59); the subjects of museum marketing are the public or users; the purpose of the museum marketing process is to understand and educate the public and to determine, confirm and satisfy the users’ wants and indicate their needs. Thus, the target of museum marketing is the public; consequently, there is a dependent relationship between museums and the public.

A museum is a particular type of non-profit organisation with a particular mission. The mission of a museum, regardless of its particular characteristics, is to collect and interpret its objects, to display these objects to the public, to educate its audiences and to encourage the public to support it (Kotler 1997, p.29). Marketing is a process which always includes exchange. Museums provide ‘something’ (for example, exhibition, display, collection, objects) and receive ‘something’ (for example, admission fees), thus creating a process of exchange. This exchange process includes tangible things (such as money, information) and intangible things (such as satisfying needs) or both tangible and intangible things (Kelly 1993, p. 18). Kotler (1998, p.28) states that “a growing number of museums depend on earned income, in the form of admission and special exhibit fees, earnings from sales in the gift shop and the restaurant, revenue generated by membership dues, and earnings derived from rental of museum facilities for private functions”. Museums are under pressure to attract larger, more diverse audiences, to perform more roles, and to raise additional earned income, all of which have led to the use of marketing strategies.

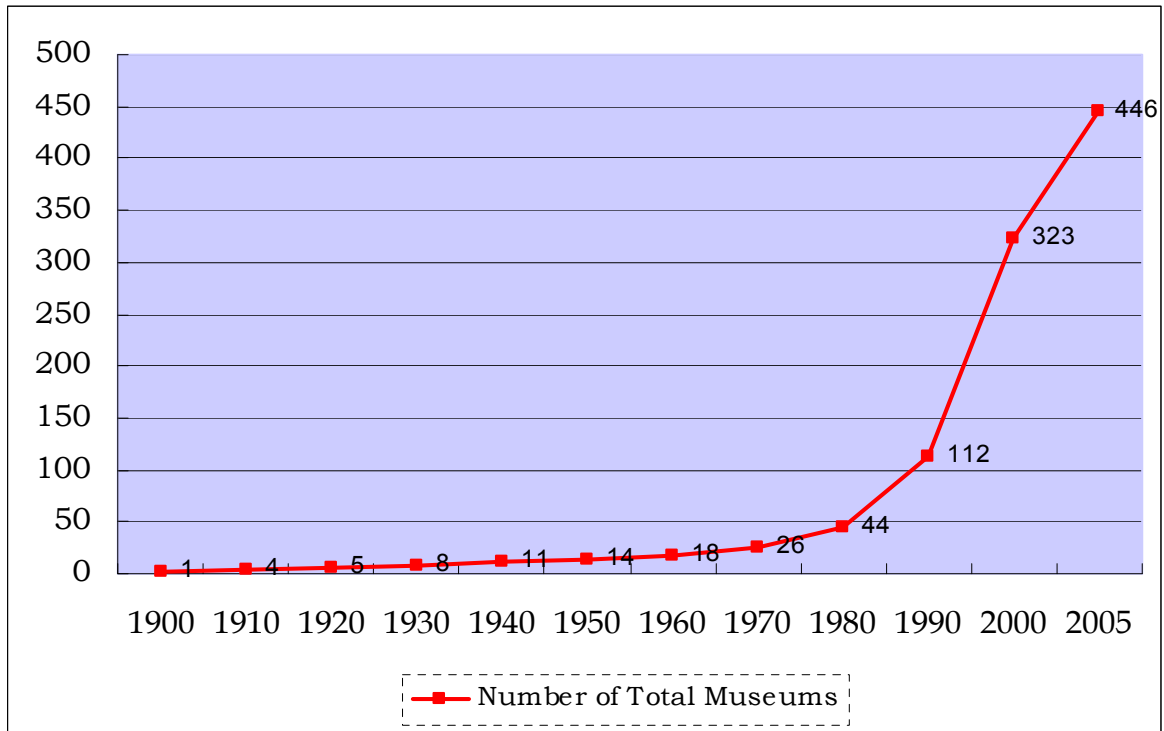
Marketing in museums is designed to help them to provide and display products that match the needs of the current markets. Marketing requires a careful diagnosis and analysis of the current environmental issues, eliminating any possible impact on the public, museum products, museum services and museum resources. More specifically, Lewis (2002, p.220) states that: “marketing is the management process which confirms the mission of a museum or gallery and is then responsible for the efficient identification, anticipation and satisfaction of the needs of its users”.

Museum professionals are becoming more sophisticated in their understanding of marketing and its value to their museums and audiences. Fundamentally, marketing is a process that helps people to exchange something of value for something they need or want. Both museums and audiences are the beneficiaries of the marketing process, which one marketing professional describes as a process “in which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and exchanging products, services, experiences, and ultimately values with others” (Genoways 2003, p. 247). However, Šola (2001, p. 57) mentioned that museums today have realised that the goods they provide may not meet the visitors’ needs. She emphasized that museums are unlike businesses, which invent the needs; museums should look for the aspirations of human nature and devise the actions to serve them.

Museums in Taiwan

Since the first museum, the National Taiwan Museum, was established in 1908, more than 450 museums have been funded (see figure 1) by the private sector and the government. Around 50% of the museums are funded by the public and sixteen of them are national museums. Every national museum in Taiwan charges the admission fee and receives an annual budget from the central government.

Figure1. The development of museums in Taiwan



Source: Chinese Association of Museums

National museums in Taiwan are traditionally governed directly by the central government: the Executive Yuan, the Ministry of Education and the Council for Cultural Affairs. Therefore, the national museums are directly influenced by the political and economic climate. Each national museum has its own museum act legislated by the Legislative Yuan. The organisational structure, personnel, staff employment, departments, etc are all prescribed, and the acts have existed for many years without being revised. The directors of the national museums are assigned by the museum authorities and it is rare to see the promotion of a director from within the organisation. As a result of their organisational structure, the national museums in Taiwan are often thought of as bureaucratic, inflexible, and inefficient.

Museums have developed rapidly over the last twenty years in Taiwan. In the 1980s, the public museum¹ was the principal type of museum, but, in the 1990s, private museums became predominant (Chen Y. S., 2005). The growth of Taiwan's economy at the beginning of the 1990s was spectacular, and, at the same time, as this led to a rapid increase in the national per capita income, more and more people became interested in participating in art activities (Chen 2005). As a result of a change in the dominant political party and the enhancement of local awareness in the 1990s, the total number of museums in Taiwan has increased over the past twenty years. The number of local authority museums and private museums also increased during this period. Statistics obtained from the Chinese Association of Museums (2005) show that 70 public museums and 42 private ones were established before 1990; by contrast, 143 public museums and 171 private ones were established after 1990. Among the 213 public museums in Taiwan, only 16 are national museums established by the central government.

In 1977, the Executive Yuan began to implement the 'Twelve Major Constructions Project', and the number of the libraries, museums and cultural centres was established as the

¹ Including national museums, city museums and local authority museums.

part of this project. Ten of the sixteen museums were established after the completion of the 'Twelve Major Constructions Project', all of which were located in central, southern and eastern Taiwan in order to adjust the balance between city and county.

The museum market in Taiwan has been expanding but the national museums have been unable to alter their management systems in order to keep up with the times, owing to the antiquated and oppressive nature of the organisational management system and the limitations of the civil servant recruitment system (Chen 2002, p. 68). With this situation in mind, on the one hand, the government has to rethink and find a way to solve the problems existing in public museums; on the other hand, the government has to allow the private sector to put new power into the museum industry and make museums more accessible and friendly to the public (Chen 2002, p. 68).

In recent decades, several local authority museums or cultural organisations have given permission to private organisations to operate certain parts of the public museums; for example, the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum. Subsequently, several national museums have introduced the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) or Operate-Transfer (OT) management modes. In 2000, the Taiwanese government assigned regulations under the Executive Yuan and started to consider another management system called "Administrative Corporation" to manage those departments or organisations which should be run by neither the government nor the private sector. The government has announced that all national museums must be transferred to the Administrative Corporation management system by 2008.

This shift to this new management system offers national museums the opportunity not only to re-structure their organisations, but also to re-think their purposes and mission, and thus to work towards operating more effectively and smoothly in the future. However, to date, no national museum has transferred to the Administrative Corporation management system.

In Taiwan, museums have been paying more attention to the concept of marketing in recent years. The reason for this is that, like museums in the rest of the world, Taiwanese museums are faced with the problems of reductions in their budgets and competition from other service and leisure industries. As a result of their inflexible organisational structure and the limitations imposed by the museum acts, it is difficult for the national museums in Taiwan to market and change the service they provide. The government is aware that problems have existed in national museums for several decades and plans to change the management system of the museums. Those national museums which are changing from the traditional management system are now focusing their attention on audience services and marketing strategies. This will give the national museums a new vision. In 2004, the National Chiang Kai-shek Cultural Centre was reorganised and became the first institution to use the Administrative Corporation management system to make it a semi-public organisation in Taiwan.

By the end of the twentieth century, and owing to the rapid increase in the number of museums, the development of museums in Taiwan reached saturation point, and museums faced stiff competition from each other and from the rest of the tourist sector. The most significant change in recent years is the decrease in the amount of support provided by the government. Many alternative strategies have been proposed since the late 1990s; among them, the most widely discussed are the ideas of establishing the BOT (Build, Operate, and Transfer) model and of incorporating an administrative agency (Chiang 2003).

The Global Marketing Strategy of the National Palace Museum (NPM)

Kotler and Andreasen (1995, p.8) mentioned that one of the major changes in nonprofit marketing in the 1990s is paying much attention to the 'international dimensions' and so is the museum. Hennessey (2004, p.4) states that 'a global marketing involves the creation of a single strategy for a product, service, or company for the entire global market. Such a strategy

encompasses many countries simultaneously and is aimed at leveraging the commonalities across many markets”. The American Association of Marketing (2007) defines global marketing as “a marketing strategy that consciously addresses global customers, markets, and competition in formulating a business strategy”. Rectanus (2006, p.381) considers that most museums today are ‘global’ but less apparent. The most successful museum using global marketing to expand its market is the Guggenheim Museum, which expands its universal branches to epitomise the ‘global museum’ (Rectanus 2006, p.381).

The National Palace Museum is the biggest museum in Taiwan as well as a world famous museum, with a full collection about the 7000-year cultural legacy of China. It is the only national museum that is directly administered by the Executive Yuan, which is the highest administrative body, and receives a budget from the Legislation Yuan, which is the highest legislative body in Taiwan. It contracted out its restaurant to a famous five-star hotel in 2006 and the restaurant plans to open in 2008. The global marketing strategies that the NPM delivers are as follows:

1. Renovation of the building public space

Due to the limited space in exhibition hall, the NPM decided to expand the space. After several years, it finally reopened in February 2007. The new exhibition hall is brighter and more friendly to visitors. As it is one of the most popular tourist spots in Taiwan, the NHK, the leading Japanese media company, broadcast a special report on TV about the expansion.

The NPM is currently planning the Southern Branch, and orients it as an Asian museum. This establishment aims to shorten the gap between the north and south of Taiwan in terms of cultural exposure. Also, it aims to strengthen the public’s understanding about the surroundings of Taiwan, and to develop the public’s broadened global view.

2. Branding

The NPM is a landmark in Taiwan because of its traditional Chinese Palace building.

In recent years, the NPM has gained great economic benefit from ‘brand licensing’. The NPM aims to market itself and promote its brand in the world. It devotes great efforts to turning and building the museum’s new image from the old, conservative and hard-to-reach image. It redesigned the Museum’s business identity system and logo (figure 2). de Mooij (1997, p.18) explains that the nature of a brand is that “it is a name in the memory of consumers and a perceptual map of positive and negative associations, a symbolic language, a network of associations”. A good brand can impress the consumers and so establish loyalty and this is an essential factor of marketing. The NPM uses this new identity system on its publications, products, internal and external communication and each object that the visitors see in the museum. The first image advertising was on TV in 2005.

Figure 2. The new NPM logo



Source: the National Palace Museum

3. International exhibitions

The NPM began to launch international exhibitions in 1995 with the loan exhibition of “Famous Painting of the XVI-XIX Centuries from the Louvre Museum”. The international exhibitions the Museum organised included “Splendors of Imperial Chia” which travelled to the USA in 1996, “Western Painting and Sculpture Highlighting the Theme of Women and of the Chang Da-Chien and Pablo Picasso” in 1998, the “Ilha Formosa—the Emergence of Taiwan on the World Scene in the 17th Century” in 2003 and the “Treasures of the Sons of

Heaven—the Imperial Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei” in Germany in 2004. To celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Museum and the reopening of the main exhibition hall, the “Grand View: Painting and Calligraphy from the Northern Sung Dynasty” was held from 25th December 2006 to 25th March 2007. The selected items of this exhibition were the most important and characteristic pieces in the Museum’s collection. The museum statistics showed that 70% of the NPM visitors are tourists, with the Japanese forming the majority. The museum has a good relationship with Japanese travel agencies. The Japanese companies even organised a travel package only for visiting the NPM’s “Grand View” special exhibition.

4. Museum and technology

Due to the development of technology in Taiwan, the government invests a large amount of its budget in developing the digital collections and encourages the national museums to participate in this. In recent years, the NPM has undertaken three major online ventures: the Digital Archives, the Digital Museum and E-learning. These provide a multimedia experience of NPM’s rich cultural and educational resources to audiences worldwide via the internet. In accordance with the National Digital Archives Program, the NPM has been working on setting up a digital database of its collection. Hence, it has also created an international-standard Metadata for search and retrieval. The NPM also has a well-designed website in eight different languages, including Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean, French, German, Spanish and Russian. The official website has won several awards because of its interactive design.

5. On-line stores

The Museum began to develop its on-line store (website: <https://www.npmeshop.com>) in March 2006 selling products like the other international museums do since it could reach a worldwide audience and achieve the aim of global marketing. Consumers could find merchandise information on-line in five languages: Chinese, English, Japanese, French and Spanish. The new products have been continually designed and developed and sold online. The Museum expects to earn an extra NTD\$10,000,000 (approximately 233,500 Euros) per year. In the new refurbished NPM’s giftshop, it is usually crowded and people can be seen queuing for the well-designed products. The NPM has contracted-out a product design and manufacturing project to some companies. They use the NPM as a brand on all of the products, such as biscuits, cakes, sweets, key rings and stationery. The staff in the gift shop mentioned that the profit per day is about NTD 1,000,000 (which is approximately 23,500 Euros).

6. Licensed merchandizes

In accordance with ‘Regulations of Government Publications’ and ‘The Government Procurement Law’, the NPM has publicly selected qualified agencies that own legal dealerships. The NPM has contracted with 26 agencies and actively exploited retail stores, both domestically and abroad. The NPM is now keen to promote ‘brand licensing’ and ‘Old is New’ projects. The vice-director indicated that the NPM has finally made a leap in marketing since it was established eighty years ago. The Museum has registered its trademark in some countries, such as the US, Japan, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, and licensed out its trademark and digital collection to the companies in Taiwan and other countries. Five international companies which have received brand licensing from the NPM are the Franz Collection, Sanrio Far East, the BenQ Corporation, Bright Idea Design and the Ling Yuan International Show, in order to create more business opportunities for the brand and image authorization. The NPM invited the companies and design studios to create new products on

the basis of the NPM's collection. For example, it cooperated with ALESSI to design products that tell stories to the consumers, and NPM's products used ALESSI's 5,000 channels to expand its image and brand worldwide. The purpose of undertaking global marketing is not only to make profits but also to market the NPM throughout the world. This means that the NPM can promote its brand worldwide through the international marketing channels. In 2004, the NPM co-worked with the Taiwan Business Bank to launch the "VISA Platinum Affinity Card" which enabled the cardholders to visit the 10 best museums² in the world without admission fees.

A new revision of the 'NPM Image Authorization Information Management and Fees Standard' has been set up. Hence, the NPM provides the public with its collection image authorization for academy use, research, publication, video broadcasting and commercial and public uses.

7. Co-work with international media

In 2004, the NPM co-operated with the film company to produce 'The NPM Passage'; the museum first became the subject in a Taiwanese movie. The NPM recently worked with the National Geography to film a documentary entitled 'Inside: The Emperor's Treasure' to unveil the NPM. It describes the history of the NPM and the collections in the off-limit treasure vaults of the back mountain. This was the first time that the NPM worked with the international electric media and was the first museum subject in the 'Inside' series of the National Geography. This documentary will be translated into 34 languages and shown in 166 countries.

8. Awards

- The awards that the NPM received last year are: (National Palace Museum, 2007).
- Taiwan Internet Content Rating Promotion Foundation, Taiwan Internet Content Rating Promotion Foundation's Selections for Excellent Websites (Website Excellent).
- American Association of Museums, MUSE Award (GOLD: Promotional and Marketing).
- Government Information Office, 2006 Innovation Awards for Digital Publishing (Bronze Prize).
- Digital Archives e-Park, 2006 Digital Archives Commercial Application Content (Digital Archives/Award of Excellence).
- Yahoo, 1st Yahoo! Search Marketing Awards (Gold Prize Outstanding Brand of the Year).
- Yahoo, 1st Yahoo! Search Marketing Awards (Silver Prize Precision in Search Marketing of the Year).

Discussion

The NPM has paid much attention to building its brand and developing its relationship with the global markets. It also delivers different marketing strategies to the world. The Museum has established good relationship with the media, including that in Taiwan and Japan. To reach a diverse group of visitors, the Museum usually designs its publications, both printed and electronic, in different language. The internal reports also show that the effects of these

2 The museums without admission charges are National Palace Museum (Taiwan), the Louvre Museum (France), the Musee d'Orsay (France), the British Museum (UK), the National Gallery (UK), the Metropolitan Museum (USA), the Museum of Modern Art (USA), the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (USA), the Tokyo National Museum (Japan), The Palace Museum (China) and Shanghai Museum (China).

strategies are beneficial and the feedback they receive is usually positive. However, Black (2005, p.46) indicates that, when museums are developing their global marketing strategies, they have to broaden their audience base and develop strong local links and identity. In the interview with the vice-director, he mentioned that 70% of the visitors are tourists from different countries. Although the NPM is one of the best museums in the world, most Taiwanese are unaware of it and do not appreciate it. The Museum should establish its friendly image to the country and encourage people to engage in museum programmes.

The other difficulty that the Museum faces is the museum act. In Taiwan, each national museum has its own individual museum act and it is very hard to amend or revise it. This means that the museum administration is inflexible and the national museums have to follow the regulations, such as about the personnel, departments and services, and these cannot be decided by the museum director or committee. The government has announced that the national museums will change their management system to the Administrative Corporation in 2008; however, most national museums have negative attitudes towards this and try to oppose it. Marketing has been an important task in the NPM. However, there is still no department or division in charge of it. Also, there are no professional marketing people dealing with the marketing affairs. Most of the staff at the Museum do not have any background or experience in marketing. If the Museum would like to be more specific or plan the marketing programmes, it is necessary to have professionals to deal with this.

Besides, it is quite difficult to market delicate and well-designed products in Taiwan due to the high prices. Some products are too expensive to afford for certain groups. The museums could develop some low cost products. Because of its old image, the Museum finds it hard to reach the local people. If the Museum keeps designing and selling delicate products, the relationship between the Museum and local people will not be close.

In conclusion, the most significant factors for the Museum to market are: the collection, the services and the brand image; the weak factors for marketing are: the organisational structure, the relationship with the local people and the old image existing in Taiwanese.

Conclusion

The National Palace Museum has the best Chinese emperor collection in the world. Many of the works are masterpieces, leading the Museum to become one of the best museums in the world. The museums in Taiwan are facing tremendous challenges from other services and tourist industries. The National Palace Museum is like a hard-to-reach building for the people in Taiwan because of its traditional building and management system. In recent years, it has been trying to reach not only the local people but also the global markets. The statistics shows the NPM is successful in some ways. However, the purpose of global marketing is not only to achieve the global market but also to take care of the local one. The NPM is developing its global marketing strategy and trying to attract more visitors worldwide, on the one hand; on the other hand, the Museum should also focus on developing its local strategy and making the Museum more friendly and easy to reach.

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**Nationhood and otherness in Panamanian
Museums: The case of the National Museum
and the Anthropological Museum
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In my thesis project, *Museums in Panama City: New Media for a New Democracy*, I investigate the role museums play in current democratic processes in Panama. I look at a set of museums predominantly in Panama City, the capital of the country and one of the most diverse cities in Latin America. The development of two new media products - a game about post-conflict memory and a model for a City Museum – complement the analysis of these museums. Both models focus on how to create channels of dialogue between museums and their audiences, as well as investigate the museum's role as a site for change and debate.

Within this study of the narratives present in Panama City museums in the context of democracy build-up, I investigate the decision to dismantle the National Museum in the 1970's and its transformation into a series of specialized National Museums, amongst them the Museum of the Panamanian Man, now known as the Anthropological Museum Reina Torres de Araúz (MARTA). I use the case of the National Museum and its later fragmentation as springboard to discuss the challenges that Panama's rich ethnic and cultural diversity as well as contested history pose for the creation of a museum that expressly attempts to represent the master narrative of Panamanian nationhood.

In this sense, I am interested in who is included or excluded as part of this nationhood, who is portrayed as “us” and who is portrayed as “the other”. In the discussion to come, I point out that what is included in the narratives of nationhood are often those aspects of a group that are more easily acceptable. For example, in the case of current representations of U.S. presence in the country, the emphasis is on the engineering works of the Canal, and not in the political conflicts during most of their military presence in Panama. Another example is

the history of the black community, which is only picked up in museums with the history of the West Indies migrations for the construction of the railroad, evading the previous history of slavery during the Spanish Conquest. I will be discussing in more detail these examples, but my focus will be in Indigenous representations.

I begin by setting the frame for the discussion with a brief background of Panama City and its museums.

Panama City and its Museums Today

Panama City is the epicentre of Panama's rich ethnic and cultural diversity. The city has a 488 years history of ethnicities and cultures both mixing and colliding. This history of migrations makes Panama City museums excellent points of departure to view the challenges posed by the representation of a common national identity within multi-cultural societies.

Panama's role as transit route, one of the main factors of the current diversity of Panama City, began in the Pre-Columbian period when the Isthmus was the North-South route of human migrations in America.¹ The foundation of the city of Panama by the Spanish Empire in 1519 represented a further consolidation of the Isthmus as transit route. Panama City became one of the major passage points, as well as destinations, of human migrations in the east-west Silver Route between Peru and Spain. From this moment to the present, the city continued to receive large waves of migrants, and was therefore constantly changing in ethnic and cultural composition. The Silver Route migrations were followed by even larger migrations produced by the construction of the railroad during the 1850's Gold Rush in California and ultimately the construction of the Panama Canal in the 20th century.

In the period between the end of the dictatorship in 1989 and the reversion of the Canal in the year 2000, the interest in museums increased in Panama. Museums were viewed as important social investments, and major museum projects were started as part of a broader "modernizing" project that encompassed science, culture and technology as main targets in the Panamanian development strategy. All of the new museums were to be located in Panama City.

Briefly, the projects included the construction of the Toucan Museum that now houses the Anthropological Museum Reina Torres de Araúz, MARTA; the restructuring of the national network of museums; and the construction of the Biodiversity Museum. Other recent museums include the Museum of the Inter-oceanic Canal, inaugurated in 1997² and The Panama Viejo Visitor Centre and Monumental Site, inaugurated in 2004.³

However, these museums have grown organically, and not within a structured national plan. Although much money has been put into these museums in recent years, a joint strategy is lacking. A study of the narratives of these museums also points to important gaps in the history of the city and the nation that need to be highlighted. Specifically in the Old Quarter of Panama City, the rapid real estate development is leading to a gentrification where stories are becoming lost – people are being moved out and the ethnic and economic composition of the area is changing dramatically at a very high speed.

Representing ongoing processes at the Old Quarter is nevertheless only one of the many challenges Panamanian museums face. To the challenges posed by globalisation in face of local needs and contexts versus global trends and homogenisation and the complex demands of increasingly diverse audiences, Panamanian museums have to add the difficult task of representing post-conflict memory and colonial past. Today, indigenous populations and the black community continue to be excluded from leading roles in narratives of nationhood in Panama City museums, their role underplayed, or what's worse, silenced. The same happens when looking for representations of the political turmoil of the 1980's. The country was under

1 Araúz, Celestino Andrés, "Un sueño de siglos: el Canal de Panamá", *Revista Tareas* no. 123. CELA, Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos, Justo Arosemena, Panamá: Panamá. Mayo-agosto. 2006, available at <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/panama/cela/tareas/tar123/02Araúz.pdf>.

2 Panama Canal Authority, *The Panama Canal*, 2005 available at <http://www.acp.gob.pa/esp/ctransition/milestones.html>

3 Francisco O, Fernando A. *Historic Antecedents of Panamanian Museums*, Panamanian Association of Museologists APAMUSEOS, 2005.

military rule from 1968 to 1989, and only in 2000 did it become fully sovereign with the release of U.S. control over the Canal Zone. A thorough attempt at narrating this history is lacking in current museum representations.

Perhaps as a response to the pitfalls of narrating this conflictive history, after the reversion, governments in Panama have greatly focused on the Canal as the main icon of Panamanian nationhood. The trend is to emphasize the central role the Panama Canal has for the socio-economic life of the country, and contemporary Panamanian national pride is increasingly based in the recovery of the Canal from U.S. hands. Yet pride is taken on a piece of human engineering and a vocation for world service that were not developed by the “nationals” but by the “others”, the Spanish *Conquistadores* and the United States Government, though this “otherness” may not even be acknowledged. In fact, these “others” have fluctuated between being maternal figures (Spain as “The Mother Country”), convenient allies (as when the United States provided military support when Panama separated from Colombia), monstrous enemies (as the United States was portrayed by Manuel Noriega’s dictatorship), or an important part of the mix (which has produced the *Mestizos* and the *Zonians*)⁴.

Further expanding the issue, Ricaurte Soler has argued that one of the problems of the concept of nationhood in Panama is related to the historical-geographic justifications related to the transit function.⁵ For him, the generalized belief on a privileged geographical position acted to create a sense of authenticity and peculiarity of Panamanian nationhood, yet at the same time privileged utilitarian and practical needs that were in function of an excessive internationalism, as the national slogan “Pro Mundi Beneficio” proclaims. Later on, what Soler calls “the geographic myth” was used in conjunction with anti-imperialism as a way to further enhance the sense of nationhood, in particular during the military regime in the 1970’s, when Panama fought a diplomatic battle with the U.S. that led to the signature of the Canal Treaties.

The historical-geographic narrative of nationhood is not debated but rather repeated in contemporary Panamanian museums. This is clearly seen in the case of the Museum of the Inter-Oceanic Canal. The exhibition starts with the coming of Spanish *Conquistadores* to the Isthmus and the beginning of the transit function, with little or no regard to those populations that had settlements in the region in the Pre-Columbian period. In the opening hall the Indigenous have only one small glass cabinet amongst the large panels narrating the Spanish Conquest. The exhibition then continues with a grand narrative of technological conquest and the dominion of nature by perseverant Canal Commission engineers (U.S. citizens). While French and U.S. engineers have names, black workers are only acknowledged in a blurry photograph that rests “and they also helped build the Canal”.

Also, the dependency on anti-imperialism as a way to justify and give form to Panamanian nationhood that marked the last half of the 20th century in Panama is not part of the debate. When the narrative addresses the difficult diplomatic situation between Panama and the U.S., it focuses in 1977 with the signature of the Canal Treaties, remaining mute about the traumatic events that followed, such as the corrupt narco-dictatorship lead by Manuel Antonio Noriega, former CIA agent⁶. It is also mute about the 1989 invasion, which

4 *Mestizos* are the mix between Spanish and Indigenous, and *Zonians* are the U.S. residents of the former Canal Zone, often a mix between Panamanians and U.S. citizens.

5 Soler, Ricaurte, *Pensamiento panameño y concepción de la nacionalidad durante el siglo XIX*, Librería Cultural Panameña, Panama, 1971, p.93.

6 Koster, Richard. and Sánchez, Guillermo, *In the time of the tyrants, Panama: 1968-1990*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1990, p.273.

was based on the argument of a possible threat to the well functioning of the Canal⁷. The U.S. supported military dictatorship led to the death and torture of around a hundred Panamanians and the exile of at least another hundred during the regime⁸. The invasion led to deaths estimated numbers ranging from 400 to 4000 during the two weeks of armed activities in the largest U.S. military operation after the Vietnam War - a military operation that would serve as practice field for weapons and strategies used in the Gulf War⁹. None of these events, however, are narrated at the Museum of the Inter-oceanic Canal.

Undoubtedly, contemporary Panamanian history has left open wounds that need to be healed. Panamanian museums have the opportunity to take part in a process of reconciliation that includes helping their audiences understand the shared responsibilities that globalisation demands while at the same time enforce a sense of identity and belonging that can strengthen democracy. Yet, I argue, museums in Panama City are not assuming the task, perhaps for the great challenges that it poses.

At the opening of the Museum of the Panamanian Man (now MARTA) in 1976, however, many of these challenges began to be addressed. This museum took for the first time on the duty of creating a master narrative of Panamanian nationhood that included the need to understand Panama as multi-cultural, although it may not have questioned the historical-geographic transitist explanation of nationhood.

In the next section, I look at the development of the National Museum and later transformation into specialized National Museums, with a particular focus on the Museum of the Panamanian Man.

The National Museum and the MARTA

Right after the independence from Spain in 1821, Panama went voluntarily into a union with the Great Colombia, a group of recently emancipated countries that included Venezuela, Ecuador, Nueva Granada and Panama.¹⁰ The union did not last and shortly after the only countries remaining were Panama and Nueva Granada. In time, Panama lost its autonomy and became another province of Nueva Granada, in a centralized system that led to an economic depression in the Isthmus.

However, between 1855 and 1885, Panama became a Federal State, this way regaining some autonomy over social and economic matters¹¹. It is in this period that the initial interest in creating a museum in Panama appears, from an initiative by Don Manuel Valentín Bravo, Panamanian sub-director of the Normal School for Men¹². Bravo issued a memorandum to

7 Vera Calderón, Rodolfo, *The United States Invasion of Panama: A tri-dimensional analysis*, Center for Latin American Studies, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, 2003 available at <http://www.georgetown.edu/sfs/programs/clas/Pubs/entre2003/Panama.html>.

8 Zárte, Abdiel, "Death and missing persons during the military epoch", *Extra-centennial Edition*, La Prensa Newspaper, 9th November 2003, p.15.

9 Cajar Páez, Aristides, "La Invasión", *Extra-centennial Edition*, La Prensa Newspaper, 9th November 2003, p.22.

10 Araúz Monfante, Celestino, Tello de Burgos, Argelia and Figueroa Navarro, Alfredo, *Manual de historia de Panamá, Tomo I*, Litho Editorial Chen, Panama, 2006, p. 373.

11 Kam Rios, Jorge, *Antecedentes históricos para el estudio del Estado Federal de Panamá*. available at <http://www.usma.ac.pa/web/DI/Profesores/JorgeKam/SIGLO%20XIX/Antecedentes%20hist%C3%B3ricos%20para%20el%20estudio%20del%20Estado%20Federal.pdf>.

12 Méndez Pereira, Octavio, *Historia de la instrucción pública en Panamá*, Tipografía Moderna, Panamá, 1915.

the Legislative Assembly of Panama in 1878 asking for the creation of a museum in the Isthmus, but this attempt failed.¹³

Shortly after the separation from Nueva Granada (today's Colombia) in 1903, the liberal¹⁴ government led by Manuel Amador Guerrero allocated funds in 1904 for the creation of a National Museum.¹⁵ This was followed by a contract in 1906 between the Panamanian government and Mr. H.D. Lupi, who was to travel around Panama collecting objects to build a natural science collection for the new museum. The National Museum was inaugurated later in 1906 at the old building of Arts & Crafts Institute (a High School) and just a year later in 1907, it was legally transformed into an institution for secondary education.¹⁶ In view of this it is possible to argue that the educational function was the primary focus for museums (Law of the 22 of June, 1907 turns the National Museum into an institute of secondary education), and museums were in charge of supporting the learning of natural sciences. This resulted in a lack of interest in archaeological and historical collections.¹⁷

Marcela Camargo, director of the Museum of the Panamanian Man in the 1970's, points out that at the time of the separation from Nueva Granada, the new Panamanian government needed to give its institutions a national character. Camargo links the birth of museums in Panama to the liberals' project of consolidating a common Panamanian identity. She also points out that the Panamanian government was influenced by concepts of modernity and civilization tied to the United States and European institutions. Camargo claims that Panamanian politicians felt the urge to replicate these institutions in order to belong to the modern world.

Contrary to Camargo's emphasis on an official intention to build nationhood, I interpret the creation of the National Museum of Panama as a product of the larger investments on expanding the educational infrastructure at the beginning of the Republic, with a greater emphasis on natural sciences as some of the descriptions of the National Exhibition suggest.¹⁸ However, legislation between 1909 and 1916 points to an increase in the interest in objects of archaeological and historical value, as budgets were assigned for the acquisition of pieces of

13 See http://www.pa/secciones/museo_virtual/cronologia.html and Camargo R., Marcela, *Entre penas y glorias: 100 años de museos en Panamá*, in Miró Grimaldo, Rodrigo, Castellero Calvo, Alfredo and Gólcher, Ileana, *Panamá, itinerario de una nación 1903 - 2003*, Panamá: Letras Panameñas, 2003, p. 165.

14 The liberal party was a group of merchants, intellectuals and bureaucrats that wanted changes in the political, social and economic system. They were inspired by the French liberal revolution, and were in opposition to the conservative party, composed by the old colonial elite that searched to maintain the status quo. See Araúz Monfante, Celestino, Tello de Burgos, Argelia and Figueroa Navarro, Alfredo, *Manual de historia de Panamá, Tomo I*, Litho Editorial Chen, Panama, 2006, p. 377.

15 Law 52 of the 20th of May, 1904, destined three millions and two hundred and fifty thousand pesos to invest in public infrastructure in several provinces. Amongst the infrastructure were the building of the National Library and National Museum. Gonzáles, Raul, *Estado actual de los museos en Panamá*, Dominical El Panama America, Sunday 14th of September, 1976, Archives of the Direction of Historic Patrimony.

16 Law 22 of the 1st of June, 1907, Gonzáles, Raul, *Estado actual de los museos en Panamá*, Dominical El Panama America, Sunday 14th of September, 1976, Archives of the Direction of Historic Patrimony.

17 Camargo, R., Marcela, "Entre penas y glorias: 100 años de museos en Panamá", in Miró Grimaldo, Rodrigo, Castellero Calvo, Alfredo and Gólcher, Ileana, *Panamá, itinerario de una nación 1903-2003*, Panamá: Letras Panameñas, 2003, p.166.

18 At the time of the relocation of the National Museum to the Palace of Arts in La Exposición, the museum would "receive the contents of the National Exhibition, which consist in a collection of desiccated birds, mammals, desiccated reptiles, fish, insects, wood from the country, archaeological objects and plants". Article 2, Law 8th of 1916, 23rd of October, in *Gaceta Oficial, Segunda época, Año XII, No. 2467*, November 6th 1916, Panama.

jewellery and ceramics from aboriginals of the American Continent, objects from the period of the Spanish domination, and national products.¹⁹

From the 1920's onwards, the National Museum decayed, moving to the Old Quarter of Panama City and finally to the House of the Teacher in the borough of La Exposición in 1939, where it stayed until 1975. The National Museum was a museum of everything of the Nation, and this created a series of problems in terms of a physical space large enough to host all exhibitions, as well as a lack of clarity of what the museum was about²⁰. Finally in 1974, the collection of the National Museum was distributed amongst the new specialized museums that were part of the Panamanian military regime's plan for the restructuring of this monolithic institution.²¹

This restructuring was part of a national program started in 1973, which created the Direction of Historic Patrimony. This institution would be in charge of safeguarding, putting to value and disseminating, at a mass and educational level, the wide content of the Historic Patrimony of the Nation. For this purpose, the Direction would administer museums and historic sites, and would supervise all Archaeological, Historical, Ethno-historical, Anthropological, Folkloric, Linguistic, Paleontological and Art History investigations in Panama. The Direction of Historic Patrimony would consider possible revenues from tourism for the planning of new museums, and it would also develop legislation to protect archaeological pieces, which at the time were being looted and illegally sold in the United States.

The national program, as mentioned, included the creation of a *series* of National Museums: the Museum of the Panamanian Man, the Museum of Natural Science, the Museum of Colonial Religious Art, The History Museum, the Nationality Museum and the Belisario Porras Museum.²²

Although these specialized museums included a Nationality Museum, this museum's location in an inland province made of the Museum of the Panamanian Man, located in the capital city, the de facto principal narrator of Panamanian nationhood and identity. This museum not only inherited most of the former National Museum's collection, but also became one of the principal tools in the Revolutionary Government's attempts to articulate a national identity that was multi-cultural yet rooted in the indigenous component and in Pre-Columbian history.²³ Reina Torres de Araúz, first director of Historic Patrimony, led the creation of an exhibition that addressed Panamanian multi-cultural character and also posed questions in relation to colonial history and indigenous communities, situating these communities in the present and not in a glamorised distant past.

19 Article 5, Law 8th of 1916, 23rd of October, in *Gaceta Oficial, Segunda época, Año XII, No. 2467*, November 6th 1916, Panama.

20 Interview with Reina Torres de Araúz, "A new law to protect our archaeological treasures", in Pereira de Padilla, Joaquina, y Segura, Ricardo, eds. *Aproximación a la obra de Reina Torres de Araúz*, Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Panama, 1983, p.303.

21 While the military regime was in power, 9 museums were inaugurated, among them the Nationality Museum and the History Museum along with projects for the construction of the Canal Museum. See González, Raul, *Actual State of Museums in Panama*, Panama America Sunday Edition, 14th September 1976, Archives of the National Direction of Historic Patrimony in Horta, Jorge, *Museums of Panama*, National Institute of Culture INAC, National Direction of Historic Patrimony, 1980

22 Torres de Araúz, Reina, "Estado Actual de la Antropología en Panamá", in Pereira de Padilla, Joaquina, y Segura, Ricardo, eds. *Aproximación a la obra de Reina Torres de Araúz*, Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Panama, 1983, p. 153.

23 The 11th of October of 1968, a military coup ousted the recently elected president Arnulfo Arias Madrid. The military regime initially commanded by Omar Torrijos Herrera adopted the name of Revolutionary Government.

The First Exhibition at the Museum of the Panamanian Man

Reina Torres de Araúz declared that the inauguration of the Museum of the Panamanian Man would be “the consummation of an old ambition: to provide our Nation with a Museum where the Panamanian could find himself, in the rich diversity of ethnicities and cultures that compose his nationality”.²⁴ For Reina Torres de Araúz, National Culture “was the product of history, and formed by the national ethnicities, and Nation was a conglomerate founded in geography and supported by the political entity of State”²⁵. Therefore, the task of the museum would be to show the rich array of ethnicities and cultures that were to be found in the territory of the political state of Panama.

The exhibition began at the Synthesis Hall, which portrayed the different elements that conformed Panamanian National Culture and showed the contributions of recent immigrant groups.²⁶ The Chinese, Hebraic and Hindu societies donated objects, photographs and historical documents. The museum adhered to the historical-geographic explanation of Panamanian nationhood, as these elements were arranged in an audiovisual installation that described Panama’s historic role as an inter-oceanic and inter-continental route. This Hall also portrayed the contemporary situation of indigenous groups, with objects, photos and documents about the Chocoos, Teribes, Kunas and Bokotas.²⁷

At the time of the opening of the museum, the Temporary Exhibitions Hall hosted a show on National Visual Arts. Paintings and sculptures of contemporary artists depicted Panamanian population through scenes of folk and urban life, portraits, statues and abstract compositions.

The Contact Hall was an exhibition of large ceramic objects combined with photographs and illustrations describing the various cultural stages of Panama. The narrative began with ceramic objects from the period before the arrival of the Spanish, followed by a narrative about the first contact between Spanish and Indigenous, explaining Hispanic *mestizaje*²⁸, development of inland costumes and mulatto cultures in the Atlantic side. The narrative ended at a model of housing for West Indians during the construction of the Canal.

Next was the Gold Hall, dedicated to jewellery treasures from Pre-Columbian cultures. Following was the Ethnography Hall, an exhibition of open-air scenes of ethnography and folklore that focused on contemporary indigenous populations. The reconstructions of these scenes were inspired in written documents and existing photographs, and the exhibition team had help from the Mexico Institute of Anthropology and History to construct the mannequins for these open-air reconstructions.

The new MARTA

During the relocation of the museum in 2005, however, the old exhibition was not reviewed, but rather abandoned. In the previous period, this museum was in charge of showing that Panama was much more than a Canal, but a conceptual shift occurred in the new relocation.

24 Pereira de Padilla, Joaquina, y Segura, Ricardo, eds. *Aproximación a la obra de Reina Torres de Araúz*, Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Panama, 1983, p. 54.

25 Torres de Araúz, Reina, “Apología de la Cultura Nacional”, in Pereira de Padilla, Joaquina, y Segura, Ricardo, eds. *Aproximación a la obra de Reina Torres de Araúz*, Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Panama, 1983, p. 167.

26 Torres de Araúz, Reina, “Le Musée de L’Homme Panameen, Panama”, in Pereira de Padilla, Joaquina, y Segura, Ricardo, eds. *Aproximación a la obra de Reina Torres de Araúz*, Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Panama, 1983, p. 136.

27 Horna, Jorge, *Museums of Panama*, National Institute of Culture INAC, National Direction of Historic Patrimony, 1980.

28 *Mestizaje* is here understood as the process of ethnic and cultural mix between Spanish and Indigenous.

Now the MARTA is dedicated to the Pre-Columbian history of Panama up to the arrival of the Spanish.²⁹ The new MARTA's exhibition does not include any of the questions on colonial history or the current situation of the country's indigenous communities that the former exhibition raised, and has also left out the sections dealing with the multi-cultural composition of Panamanian society. This new exhibition shows objects from Pre-Columbian communities without inserting them into a contemporary socio-historical narrative.

Museum officials point out that a reason for this may be that Panamanians reject to be associated with the indigenous element. According to Guillermina De Gracia, current sub-director of Historic Patrimony, the Panamanian public does not care if the collections of indigenous artefacts are lost, "because Panamanians don't feel indigenous".³⁰ Cooke has pointed out that schoolbooks in Panama tend to treat Pre-Columbian history as if it was detached from the history of the nation, praising the beauty of the indigenous artefacts while banishing the links between these pieces and the contemporary indigenous populations that make up 8% of the Panamanian population.³¹ The new exhibition at the MARTA reinforces this approach, ignoring the extensive work Reina Torres de Araúz did on contemporary indigenous populations of the Darién region and her writings on a National Culture that would include the indigenous component.³²

Historically, the Panamanian Government has had a policy of acculturation towards the indigenous. For example, in 1904, the Convention in charge of the new legislation for the Republic signed a Project for a Law that "determined how the uncultured indigenous should be governed, so that they could be reduced to civilized life".³³ 70 years later, during the Constitutional Assembly of 1972, Reina Torres de Araúz opposed a clause that established a "scientific method of cultural change for the indigenous communities", arguing that she did not see the necessity of treating the indigenous as different or less Panamanians and subjecting them to a "scientific change".³⁴ The current exhibition at the MARTA does not highlight this part of Reina Torres de Araúz's work, wasting the opportunity to discuss a subject of prime importance for Panama today.

Though there is much more I would like to point out about the case of the MARTA, limitations of space require me to stop here. I end this short presentation with a few more issues that I address in my thesis project.

Final Comments

In my thesis project, I argue that Panamanian nationhood is found in fragments amongst the narratives of the different museums in the country, and these fragments are not integrated into a joint strategy. I also argue that there is a pragmatic political attitude that restrains debates on nationhood in Panamanian museums, because the transit driven economy and considerations

29 Instituto Nacional de Cultura, *Museos de Panamá: Museo Antropológico Reina Torres de Araúz*, available at <http://www.inac.gob.pa/Museos/05Museo%20MARTA.htm>.

30 Arrocha, Vannie, "Museos sin verano", *Ellas Virtual*, feb. 2nd 2007, available at <http://www.ellasvirtual.com/history//2007/02/02/columna/semana3.htm>.

31 Cooke, Richard, "El Período Precolombino", Smithsonian Institute of Tropical Research, in ILDEA, *Visión de la Nacionalidad Panameña*, Supplement of Diario La Prensa, August 8th 1991, Panama.

32 For example, publications such as *Panama Indígena, La Mujer Cuna, Darién: etnología de una región histórica* and the numerous field trips during the proposal of a new Canal through el Darién, the eastern rainforest region of Panama. See Pereira de Padilla, Joaquina, y Segura, Ricardo, eds. *Aproximación a la obra de Reina Torres de Araúz*, Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Panama, 1983.

33 Anales de la Convención, *Project of Law*, Series 3, No. 55, Panama, 15th July 1904, p.438

34 "Reina Torres de Araúz, Constituyente de 1972", in Pereira de Padilla, Joaquina, y Segura, Ricardo, eds. *Aproximación a la obra de Reina Torres de Araúz*, Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Panama, 1983, p.333–334.

in terms of tourism and revenues are given priority at the decision making process in cultural matters.

A preliminary conclusion can be that the question is not whether groups are “in” or “out” of the concept of nationhood, but that only some aspects of these groups are included at times in the representations. This is clear when looking at current representations of the indigenous communities and the black community.

In the case of the MARTA and the National Museum, my attempt has been primarily to point out that the task of debating the common history that shapes our nationhood was not present at the initial creation of museums in the country, yet it did become an important consideration afterwards. The work that was done, however, seems to have been forgotten or dismissed.

By pointing out to the changes in these museums, my intention is to identify elements that can be part of a future strategy for their development. The projected model for a City Museum will incorporate the question of nationhood, and will hopefully add to the debate with a proposal of how the challenges of diversity and contested history can be addressed in Panama.

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Negotiating the Other: Marginalized racial groups and narratives of Canada

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Museums are important public sites for the mediation and authentication of heritage knowledge. But as authoritative sites, what is presented and what is not can have a major impact on how a society sees itself. In Canada, the state and the museum community have formally acknowledged the changing demographics of its citizens and the contested nature of national identity. But while museums have taken some measures to build bridges with marginalized racial communities, embedded bias is revealed upon closer analysis of exhibition practice. This paper asks: where do these groups fit within the institutional construction of national heritage and identity? How is communal heritage knowledge produced and represented, and how do people make sense of and internalize that knowledge? How does the communicative process inherent in museum exhibition-making affect the construction of heritage of such groups? And, how might institutional processes be altered to enable museums as more democratic public spaces of knowledge construction that make possible *new* articulations of heritage, identities and citizenship? My paper examines the evolution of a particular case study, an exhibition developed by the department of Canadian Heritage about the Underground Railroad developed by an active committee of African Canadians. The paper explores how this exhibition process both built bridges with non-typical knowledge producers, and made public aspects of history once not considered a central to Canadian community identity. The story of the conception, development, installation and use of this exhibit casts light on how heritage meanings are negotiated, produced, consumed and reconstructed through an interplay of dominant and marginalized groups. Key to this paper is a discussion of *negotiation* and *expression* of collectivity as essential to the identity formation, citizenship and democratic practice.

Through their exhibitions, museums and heritage sites offer highly selective portrayals of society. What is exhibited, what is not exhibited and how it is exhibited at these sites can have a major impact on how society legitimizes certain versions of history and society – authenticating who belongs and who is ‘othered’. Museum display is a public act, a performance about social identity, and its public-ness makes it consequential. Public exhibitions are texts that have meaning, but they are also stages on which political relationships unfold. Who gets to speak on this stage have historically been the well-educated or well-positioned few – they were spaces of white culture. How might non-white minorities gain access to these spaces, not just as outsiders being allowed in by white culture, but as producers, subjects and users in their own right? This paper explores one particular museum exhibit on the Underground Railroad – the escape by thousands of fugitive slaves from the U.S. to Canada in the mid-1800’s – which was developed by Canada’s National Historic Sites agency and a committee of African Canadians. Displayed from 2002 to 2005 in Toronto, this exhibition was an institutional attempt both to build bridges with non-typical knowledge producers, and to broaden the national narrative to encompass aspects of history once not considered central to Canadian community identity. The broader research project studied the entire circuit of communication – the conditions of production, the exhibit as text, and conditions of reception. This paper aims to cast some light on the process through which the African-Canadian committee made use of this public stage, negotiated heritage meanings, and created both a representation and a forum.

The exhibition, called *Underground Railroad, Next Stop Freedom*, had a unique history. It was sited at Canada’s largest museum, the Royal Ontario Museum, but developed by a national government agency, National Historic Sites. It was created using a consultative committee of African-Canadians; it told a non-mainstream story; it employed ‘object theatre’ technologies not normally found in traditional museums, and it attracted minority, non-white audiences who rarely set foot within museum walls.

Since the 1970’s, there has been considerable struggle within Canadian museums to include ethnic minorities in the national vision but by and large, non-white minorities - non-Europeans - were rarely included in the mix. When they were, there were sometimes embarrassing results, for example the Royal Ontario Museum’s controversial exhibit *Into the Heart of Africa*. In that case, violent protests erupted over what was interpreted as a racist representation. National Historic Sites had, until the late 1990’s, only one national designation devoted to Black history - a single plaque commemorating the Underground Railroad erected in 1928, despite the continuous presence of people of African descent in Canada since the 1600’s. The Underground Railroad exhibit was instigated in December 1998 as one of several new commemorations across Canada about African-Canadians in history. National Historic Sites, for the first time, decided to use what it saw as a more inclusive, collaborative approach – African-Canadians were invited to sit at the table and formed the majority on the project planning team. Interviews with committee members revealed an interesting dynamic of power that evolved both among the participants and with the agency as the project became politicized and the articulation of ‘authentic’ heritage became a thing of negotiation. This paper will outline some of this struggle involved in ‘making’ public knowledge, then compare their intentions with to how visitors actually responded to the exhibit.

The questions of ‘why’ and ‘what’ to represent involved prolonged argument, over a two-year period. Committee members had to move from a multitude of personal points of view to construct something quite different – a public display of collective identity. The committee members possessed a complex mass of identities, allegiances, and power relationships – a range of hyphenated Blackness. One committee member, for example, described herself as Canadian, Caribbean, hetero-female, feminist, African, celebrity, historian, academic and a single mom. But the construction of a ‘public face’, projected for public consumption,

involved both suppression and overemphasis of certain ideas or perspectives. While committee members, on one hand, reacted against a stereotypical identity imposed by white culture, on the other hand all felt a need to speak in a unitary fashion for a hypothetical Black community, and to present a unified public face. What emerged was a position that seemed to stress an anything-but-white kind of perspective – an expression of voice as *not* the expert or authoritative white curatorial voice. The dynamic and negotiations that resulted in an anything-but-white strategic identity reflected the shared interest of the participants to portray a history where Blacks exercised agency. The institution had imagined a straightforward commemoration that would show Canada as a liberal nation that rescued slaves. But, for the African Canadians on the committee, the exhibit took on important objectives of achieving respect and asserting active *history-making* by people of colour – not as victims or charity-cases of whites.

But by focusing on positive Black agency, and avoiding stories that victimized, the question of ongoing racism in Canadian society, starting with the presence of slavery in early Canada, was correspondingly downplayed. Negotiations instead focused on *which* story of Black agency to communicate through the exhibit – famous people and public events, or, heroic day-to-day lives of the Everyman? The *constructedness* of history became apparent to committee members as they tried to transform their sense of lived heritage into a formal public account of Canadian history. What was *not* to be exhibited, not put on stage was subject to heated debate. And in the end, the group chose a particular, positive framing, a performance that smoothed out the edges, simplified, glorified and mythologized, rather than dwelling on the gritty or difficult reality. This management of a mainstream public face emphasized a ‘rags to riches’ story, a dream of freedom in a new land, and the creation of a Black culture in Canada that was ‘superior’ to that in the U.S. A few committee members did interpret this as a ‘domestication’ of identity to allow its acceptance in broader society – ‘Uncle Toming’ in American vernacular – a derogatory image of working for and within an exploitative system. And, in the end, one committee member quit over this decision.

To convey this particular narrative, the consultative committee pushed for a storytelling exhibit mode called an ‘object theatre’, with a holographic female narrator in a dramatic, sound-and-light-show, theatre setting. While this technique is firmly rooted in the heritage exhibit tradition of National Historic Sites, this object theatre would be installed in Canada’s flagship Royal Ontario Museum, which tends to employ the object-text-and-panel approach. It looked at the escape of many slaves over the border and their urban experiences in Toronto through the eyes of a holographic Deborah Brown, a real woman who fled slavery in Maryland in the 1850’s.

How this presentation communicated was evaluated in two ways, by doing a semiotic ‘reading’, and by analyzing how audiences received the exhibit. The reading cannot be elaborated here, except to reinforce that visual design choices had a large impact on both connoted and obtuse communication, especially within this immersive, experiential media form. The choice of settings, objects, images, characterizations, inherent effects of media and the positioning of the audience in relation to the exhibit all reinforced the celebratory, Everyman tone. By directing the audience, by showing objects and images life-size, by immersion in an exciting environment, and by conveying an emotional personal experience, the object theatre controlled the gaze.

To compare the intentions of the committee with audience responses to the exhibit, participant observation, questionnaires, and informal conversation were used over a ten-day period to gauge reactions. I found that the viewing of the exhibit was a process of reception made complex by the media form, but also and importantly by the diversity of motives and backgrounds audience members brought to the experience, and their active production of meaning.

The media form deeply affected most visitors. Regardless of age, most people stayed, absorbed, in the object theatre right through to the end of the 25 minute show. Visitors cited two major sensory impacts: an attention-grabbing enthrallment and an immersive conversation. Audience attention was arrested by dominating the senses, by showing objects life-size and in three dimensions, and by immersion in an environment. And, audiences were drawn into a sensation of reality through the attentive narrator, a life-sized video projection. Sitting in the dark, the viewers engaged with the narrator who seems to address them as individuals. The audience not only gave the presentation its undivided attention, but left the theatre with a sense that this story was authentic.

How audiences responded to the meaning conveyed by the exhibit seemed to be expressed in three ways. Some relayed what they saw as the basic facts of the historical events; others cited the personal story of the narrator as the underlying message, and a third group offered a more philosophical or political summary like the injustice of slavery. There was clearly a difference in these readings based on race, and, to a certain extent based on age. Understandings seemed to be positioned along a continuum from an 'alien' framing, or history of the Other at one extreme, to a 'parallel' framing, or personal memories, on the other end. While most respondents were somewhere in the middle, positioning at the two extremes depended on race. White audience members tended towards an alien framing, most strongly voicing this in one of two ways: expressing the liberal view of how nice it was that Canada helped the slaves, or, voicing moral outrage that the show's positive perspective ignored the struggles of Blacks. Black respondents tended to adopt a strong parallel framing. All but two of the Black respondents specifically applauded the upbeat, celebratory tone. The only voices *protesting* the celebratory tone were young people of both genders, in their twenties, and all of these, except one couple, were white. They criticized the cosy, well-dressed pioneer image of the central character, as one said, "re-invented, fictionalized and caricatured."

So while audience members had differing readings of this exhibit, I would suggest that this was more about who *they* were and what baggage they brought to the experience. That a white person could read this as "Canada did good" as opposed to a black person "Deborah did us proud" versus a young white person who says "this is a whitewash," is notable. The exhibit affected them deeply but in ways that seemed to reinforce their pre-existing beliefs and mythologies, whether of nationalism, or the noble black slave, or, societal oppression.

This account of the negotiations around the fugitive slave exhibit illustrates the difficulties inherent in trying to bring about a more democratic way of enacting group identities through museum exhibits. Did it disrupt or challenge what and how historical narrative gets displayed in museums, how people comprehend what is their heritage, and what is legitimized as heritage? While the disruption of 'white' ways of meaning-making – ways of knowing, showing and seeing – were important to this committee, new problems emerged. This exhibit seemed to be guilty of "mainstreaming," the legitimizing of an elite view of success that celebrates only one perspective of a complex story. While there were complex articulations and contestations in committee, the in-public performance was a cleansed view of 'safe' Black culture that minimized negative political overtones. By playing this game, was this committee simply 'managing' difference, consigning racism to the past, and creating a new, mythologized version of Black heritage? While public displays in sites like museums have the power and authority to signify and redefine identities, these 'mainstreaming' practices can inherently negate this power.

Audiences, for their part, are not able to see the conditions of production – the negotiations and decisions – behind a representation. They must judge the text, or in this case the theatre presentation. This is an inherent problem in exhibit-making: audiences do not see the negotiation and complexity of production, only the generalized representation. In this case, the storyline and media form deeply affected audiences, but they seemed to rely on pre-

existing attitudes in negotiating what was communicated and did not display any change in attitude when they left.

So can a media form like an exhibition, which seems to simplify and purify complex narratives and reinforce existing bias, possibly be transformative? I think the potential here lies in focusing on *process*, on the negotiations themselves, not the final representations. For example, I cannot discount that for the members of the consultative committee in this project, the process *was* transformative. The committee room became a neutral meeting place where a diverse group of African-Canadians could assemble, share, disagree, come up with solutions about what heritage meant to them. Committee members have since gone on to actively participate in other heritage-defining African-Canadian projects. One woman recently received a Governor General Award nomination for other ground-breaking historical research into minority culture. This process of engagement is important.

For National Historic Sites, this was a new *process* of exhibit planning they had not previously attempted. Staff had to learn how to negotiate siting, content and medium with a committee of amateurs. And this initiated a process of other Black history designations, done again in consultation, and some attempts to hire African Canadian staff as managers and historians. On a national scale it reinforced a new Systems Planning process that recognizes other versions of heritage.

While the effect of this exhibit on audiences cannot be said to be transformative, what was engendered was a basic level of awareness about Black history as part of a national narrative. For example, white visitors emerged almost unanimously saying “I had no idea there were Blacks in Canada back then.” Only three individuals in this study seemed to have their ideas challenged or transformed – three Black children and teens took to heart that this story *could have been theirs*. “I could have been a slave” was their chilling response.

But what was missing was an interaction or negotiation between those highly engaged people on the committee, and those viewers who came to the exhibit. How can audiences somehow see and appreciate the complexity of the struggle the committee had? Audiences might have been initially moved and excited, but is it possible to keep the momentum going? The process of production was invisible to viewers who had no recourse to enter a dialogue with those who spoke the message.

Collaborative efforts like this case study might have the potential to create multi-vocal exhibits that bring hidden complexity of identity, community and nations into view. But how to truly engage a sense of *exchange* between producers and viewers is the focus of my continued research. It is here that the process to renegotiate, redefine and represent who belongs in a national community will have a more lasting effect. An acceptance of internal contradictions rather than a reliance on bland, univocal positioning; an emphasis on process not product; and a return to face-to-face modes of communication are all possibilities for a richer, more nuanced exploration of heritage in the museum setting. We must look at ways institutions can perform, enact, engage and produce heritage as a process or a forum that bridges or facilitates more effectively those with stories to tell and those wanting to engage with that heritage or offer their own narratives on the public stage.

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Representing and ‘Consuming’ the Chinese Other at the British Museum

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In this paper, I propose to analyse the way in which the British Museum perceives, interprets and addresses cultural diversity. As a case study, I consider the museum representation of the Chinese ‘Other’. Building on an analysis of the Chinese permanent gallery as well as of the temporary exhibition “The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army”, I set to investigate how the Museum portrays China and Chinese culture. What is exhibited and what is omitted? How is the image of China constructed? What forces – political, economic, social or other – contributed to shape it? Through these questions, I aim at pondering how the representation of China in the British Museum articulates with the expectations of its multicultural and increasingly globalized public.

The colonial past is often a key factor in the museum representation of other cultures, and as such it has legitimately been at the core of the reflection on museums’ approaches to alterity. However, I want to argue that the analysis should not be confined to colonialist or post-colonialist historical perspectives, but remain open to include contemporary socio-political and economic factors. The British Museum case study suggests that the economy of travel, the evolution of consumer tastes and demands, renewed opportunities for commercial exchange and business enterprise, an important Chinese community in London and the UK, and global scale media events such as the 2008 Olympic Games (hosted by China), are all factors that affect museums and museum representations, to the extent that they impact on audiences, on their tastes, interests and expectations. It is of crucial importance to acknowledge that museums are becoming increasingly receptive *vis-à-vis* such patterns of change, all the more if of global scale.

Methodologically, the arguments put forward in this paper rest on an analysis of the museological choices underlying the displays in the Chinese permanent gallery and the temporary exhibition “The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army” aimed at disentangling the narrative lines underlying the exhibitions.

Through this analysis I wish to suggest that the museum representation of the Chinese ‘Other’ at the British Museum rests on two different, though complementary, narrative lines. On the one hand, in the permanent gallery, the

Museum is carrying on its 'traditional' function as a public education institution. On the other, in the temporary exhibition, the Museum is responding to the demand for cultural consumption of its increasingly consumption-oriented audiences.

There is no knowledge of the Other which is not also a temporal, historical, a political act.
(Fabian 1983: 1)

Taking Fabian's provocative assertion as a starting point, I propose to analyse the museum representation of the Chinese 'Other' in the British Museum¹. Building on an analysis of both the Joseph Hotung Gallery of Oriental Antiquities, where most of the Chinese collections are exhibited, and the temporary exhibition entitled 'The First Emperor. China's Terracotta Army', I set out to investigate the way in which the Museum portrays China and Chinese culture. What is exhibited and what is omitted? How is this image constructed? What forces – political, economic, social or other – contribute to shape it?

Through this investigation, I aim at pondering how the representation of China in the British Museum articulates with the challenges of globalisation and the expectations of its multicultural public. My reflection rests on the assumption that the way an institution, in this case the British Museum, depicts Otherness sheds light on how cultural diversity is perceived, re-shuffled and expressed by national museums, understood as public constituencies from which governmental cultural policies emanate. As one of the most prominent museums in the world, the curatorial choices made at the British Museum do bear significant political and social resonances. Unravelling such choices and their logic helps us to better understand the role that national museums play in the formation of individual as well as collective identities.

Methodologically, the arguments put forward in this paper rest on an analysis of the museological choices underlying the displays in the Chinese permanent gallery and the temporary exhibition. The investigation will focus, among others, on the organisation of space, layout, juxtaposition and sequence of objects, labels, panels and other museum texts.

China in the UK

A historical perspective allows a full appreciation of the changes that have been shaping the perception and representation of Chinese art and civilisation in the West, notably in the United Kingdom, over the last two centuries. Far from attempting to summarize the history of Sino-Western cultural and artistic relations in a few paragraphs, my aim here is merely to draw attention to the fact that the view of China and Chinese civilisation has sensibly varied over time as a result of changing international political and economic conjunctures. For instance, until the mid nineteenth century, the image of China in the UK was that of a model society, albeit considered 'exotic and unusual' (Pagani 1998: 28). But later, the break of the Opium War, in 1839, led to a neat decrease in the esteem that China enjoyed in the eyes of the British, to whom victory gave a sense of cultural and technological superiority. As Catherine Pagani remarks, in the second half of the nineteenth century 'China was regarded as a marketable commodity just as were her products' (1998: 29). At the turn of the century, at a time when progressivist ideas were spreading in the UK, the interest for 'things Chinese', especially for late Qing items, was at its lowest. The increasing demand for chinoiserie, a form of art and craft imbued with exoticism, signalled the decline of China's artistic lead 'at the very period when the West, in particular Britain, was enforcing its political and economic hegemony in the Far East' (Clunas 1987: 20). Things changed with the turn of the century, when the interest for Chinese artefacts was enhanced by a series of extraordinary

1 This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the conference *NaMu III: National Museums in a Global World*, Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo, Norway, 19-21 November 2007.

archaeological findings, gradually bringing to the light the cultures of Ancient China². Early Chinese art provided a source of inspiration (somehow echoing the role that primitive art had played for Cubist and Surrealist artists), a ‘novelty’ that came to refresh the image of Chinese art and material culture, notably superscribing the static and decadent qualities of late Imperial art, no longer able to arouse collectors’ interest (c.f. Clunas 1998).

I wish to ponder a few points of this brief excursus of the perception of Chinese art in Britain and the West. Over the nineteenth century, a cleavage gradually formed between worsening considerations of the Chinese people and a relatively high esteem for Chinese art and material culture. In this chasm one might see the seeds of a dissociation between the artistic production of China and its socio-political context – a dissociation that, I argue, persists in today’s museum representations, though in a different form. Indeed, Craig Clunas aptly reminds us that the very notion of ‘Chinese art’ is a creation of nineteenth century Europe and North America. This notion allowed the grouping of a corpus of artistic production spanning over two millennia and including an heterogeneous ensemble of materials, techniques, styles, references, values and meanings. Therefore, in line with Orientalist discursive practices, the notion of ‘Chinese art’ allowed for an emphasis of the differences *between* Chinese and Western art, and the contextual blurring of diversity *within* Chinese art (Clunas 1997a: 9). However, with time, fissures developed along the lines of what was considered art by Chinese *versus* what was considered art by the British colonizer. Once more, Clunas remarks that ‘Chinese elite categorizations of art, as expressed in texts, as well as in the practices of the art and craft markets, excluded much of the Chinese material subsequently displayed in the museum context in Britain’ (1997b: 418). Such a discrepancy between the Chinese and the British concepts of art is intriguingly mirrored by museum Chinese collections. I will take the examples of bronze vessels, jade carvings and calligraphy. Although iconically Chinese, these items rarely constitute highlights in the Chinese collections of British (and for that matter, Western) museums – which rather tend to focus on ceramics, silks and furniture (c.f. Clunas, 1987). In contrast, these same items are almost invariably at the core of collections and exhibitions in China. As a partial explanation for this, I should like to emphasize that the appreciation of these artefacts tends to require a ‘skilled vision’ (Grasseni 2007), intertwined with what I would call a ‘cultured vision’: these items (and associated artistic practices and traditions) embody and convey a system of references that is firmly enshrined in the Chinese cultural universe. Thus, their full appreciation requires some knowledge of, and sensitivity to, their cultural salience. So for instance, Chinese audiences will normally be familiar with the historical ritual use of bronzes to symbolize the legitimate detention of political authority, or the historical associations between calligraphy and the literati class. Consequently, the prominence granted to these artefacts in museum exhibitions in China is not only unquestioned, but indeed expected.

As we have seen, for centuries China and Chinese art have attracted (with various degrees of success) the interest of Western audiences, and this movement of interest extends to the present day. Indeed, I would say that over the last two decades, we have been witnessing a marked renewal of interest for Chinese art. An indicator of that is the total refurbishment, in the early 1990s, of the Chinese galleries of two major museums in the UK – the Victoria&Albert and the British Museum. So, what is happening, why are we today more than ever so fascinated by China? As an explanation of the interest for China over the first half of

2 I refer for instance to the archaeological findings of the Anyang site, Henan, in 1928, followed, among the others, by the excavations in Mawangdui, Hunan 1972, the discovery of the Terracotta Army, Xi’an, Shaanxi, in 1974, of Shang funerary complexes in Anyang and Shaanxi, in 1976, the tomb of Yi Marquis of Zeng, Hupei, in 1978, and the Ancient Shu civilisation, Guanghan, Sichuan, in 1986.

the twentieth century, Craig Clunas argues that, following the disappearance of the old ‘empires’ – the Russia of the czars, the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman – the ‘nostalgia for one empire slid across into nostalgia for all and souvenirs of empire became fetishes of consolation’ (1998: 48). Although I am not persuaded that the disappearance of the old empires generated a collective need for consolation, I feel that with the references to nostalgia and the souvenir-fetish, Clunas is touching upon crucial knots of the process of encounter with the Chinese Other, knots that, as I try to show in this paper, are not confined to the past. Building on Clunas’ insights, one might caution that the frenzy for culture consumption that accompanies ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions such as ‘The First Emperor. China’s Terracotta Army’ may be framed as a collective attempt to appropriate both the past (with the demand for ‘souvenirs’) and the Other (with the demand for ‘fetishes’). I will return to this point in the conclusive remarks. To disentangle these questions, one might start with an analysis of one of the main loci of representation of China in the West: the exhibition rooms of the British Museum.

The Joseph Hotung Gallery of Oriental Antiquities

The Chinese collections are exhibited in what is today known as the Joseph Hotung Gallery of Oriental Antiquities, thoroughly refurbished in 1992 in respect with the original architecture dating back to 1914. The gallery is part of the former department of Asia (previously Oriental Antiquities, created in 1933³). The department’s art-historical approach to artefacts was emphasized following the destination of part of the collections to the department of ethnography in 1946 (from which they were separated and again incorporated into the department of Asia in 2005). Today, the gallery appears as a wide, bright space where Western neoclassic architecture and mahogany glass cases counterpoint the ‘Orientalism’ of the exhibits (Figure 1).

Figure 1: View of the Joseph Hotung Gallery of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.



Photo by the author.

3 In 2003, the Departments of Oriental Antiquities and Japanese Antiquities merged to form the Department of Asia.

It is known that the architecture of a museum is a statement in its own right, it sets the tone and complements the museum experience (see for instance Giebelhausen, 2003). The Hotung gallery is no exception: its neoclassic style, the ascending steps, the grandiose doorways and imposing colonnades implicitly suggest and induce a formal, respectful, almost reverential approach. At the same time, the reference to ancient civilisations such as the Greeks and the Romans asserts a continuity with that past and its values: beauty, symmetry, harmony, purity of forms, rationality, rigour and overall, political, intellectual and moral authority – these elements are particularly relevant in a permanent gallery devoted to non-European cultures. The objects on display include bronzes, ceramics, decorative items and religious sculpture, spanning from the Neolithic to the late Qing Dynasty. The collection is the outcome of over two centuries of scattered collecting activities, mostly conducted in the framework of the colonial system, hence inspired by the idea of *revealing* China to Western audiences. Although the aesthetics of objects is taken into account (as witness the detailed descriptions of decorative patterns for instance) several elements suggest that the educational dimension primes over artistic concerns. I refer for instance to the historical-ethnographic style of the layout, where sets of objects are grouped by periodicity and function so as to create sequences showing the variety and the evolution of forms (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The Joseph Hotung Gallery of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum.



Photo by the author.

An educational approach is also elicited by the use of demonstrative models to illustrate technical processes such as bronze casting techniques, or the cutting and carving of jade. In a similar vein, a ‘hands-on’ table allows visitors to physically familiarize themselves with some artefacts. But objects are not merely defined by their materiality: texts supply ample information about the socio-political historical contexts of production and use. Consistently, extensive labels offer not only basic details such as material, period and location, but also information about the utilitarian or ritual functions, the significance and value of the item. For instance, text panels include extracts from Chinese classic texts (such as the *Book of Songs*) and poems to explain at length the ritual relevance of bronze vessels and jade accoutrements. In addition, it is interesting to note that the exhibition includes items of the material culture of non-Han peoples, although these do not refer to present-day ethnic minorities, but are archaeological findings relating to ancient cultures dating back to the third century BC (reference is made to ancient Mongolian bronze ornaments and weapons, and Yunnanese bronzes). A comparative approach emerges from the exhibition, which emphasizes the uniqueness of Chinese cultural traits, implicitly juxtaposing them to their Western correspondent (or their absence). The gallery’s main introductory text announces in fact that ‘the gallery illustrates ways of life and systems of belief very different from those valued from Western cultures’⁴.

In spite of the variety of materials, styles and epochs, the exhibits in the Oriental Antiquities gallery share an important feature: they are mostly ceremonial, ornamental, or prestige items. They speak of the refinement, the technological advancement and the social organisation of the Chinese civilisation, whose development is presented here as a linear progression almost deprived of hiatus. So historicized and essentialized, China is constructed as a unified, homogeneous entity crystallized in both time and space. For instance, non-Han material culture is presented as peripheral in relation to the centrality of the Imperial system and its Court culture, ultimately resting at the core of the display. In a successful, though anachronistic exercise of objectification, the Hotung gallery delivers the image of a refined, cultivated, elitist, male, urban, Imperial China – an image that is made to signify ‘China’ and ‘Chineseness’ in the eyes of the world.

The Temporary Exhibition “The First Emperor. China’s Terracotta Army”

From September 2007 to April 2008, the British Museum is hosting the exhibition ‘The First Emperor. China’s terracotta army’. To describe it, the media have talked of a ‘show’, ‘a grand theatre’, a ‘blockbuster exhibition’ a ‘life-time event’. Let us then take a closer look at it.

The display includes some 120 objects on loan from Chinese Museums including twenty figures from the Qin Shi Huang Terracotta Warriors and Horses Museum, in Xi’an. The exhibition is divided into two sections. The first describes the accomplishments of the Emperor during his reign, the second focuses on the after life, and notably on the funerary set. The achievements of the Emperor are illustrated through warfare implements, decorative items and symbols of authority (such as seals and Imperial standards: money, measuring cups and weights), whilst the tomb accoutrements mainly revolve around the famous terracotta soldiers. In proportion to the number of objects on display, the exhibition presents a relatively important amount of information support material. This includes for instance large scale pictures, replicas (a chariot, a wooden bow), a model of the Imperial palace, as well as two short videos, the first an extract from a Chinese epic film, the second a computerized virtual reconstruction of the tomb interiors. The exhibition layout privileges a relatively small number of objects in large glass cases, individual glass boxes and, as in the case of the

4 Museum panel, Joseph Hotung Gallery of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum. Last visited October 2007.

terracotta warriors, the elimination of physical barriers allowing an all-round, unmediated appreciation of the details. Heavy use is made of contraposition techniques: objects are immersed in cones of light against a very dark background – tomb-like, precisely. Contrasting effects are also created through materials, surfaces, textures, whereby the rough, irregular, porous texture of terracotta contrasts with the polished surfaces of floors and panels, and the smoothness of background textiles. This layout is the outcome of a specific museological approach to objects – an approach that can be found in many of the most recent art and history museums in China as well. In this museological paradigm, artefacts are alienated from their contexts of creation or use. In a somehow ironic twist, these objects – which are in fact the outcome of a mass-production system (see Clunas 1997a, Ledderose 2000) – are today exhibited as individualized works of art in their own right. It is intriguing that, as Ladislav Kesner notes in his meta-critique of the sculptures, Chinese archaeologists tend to similarly focus on the sculptures’ materiality, highlighting for instance their ‘realism’, the wealth and precision of details, the correctness of proportions and so on. However, their vision is not guided by aesthetic concerns, but rather, explains Kesner, is imprinted with the Marxist approach to art, whereby “‘realism’ per se stands for a sign of artistic quality and evolutionary progress’ (1995: 117). Conversely, Craig Clunas notes that it is not so much the material, nor the aesthetics, nor the realism of sculptures that deserve note, but rather the scale and the techniques employed: a modular system combining sets of prefabricated parts. This remarkable feat, requesting an unprecedented mobilization of resources, has made Clunas comment “the army is a triumph of bureaucracy as much as of art” (1997a: 30). But crucially, this does not emerge from the exhibition, which rather stresses the objects’ individuality, in an attempt to singularize them, to emphasize their materiality, their charismatic aura, their aesthetics and ultimately assert their status of art objects. Consistently with such a view, objects have to be aesthetically pleasant, ideally complete (for instance, efforts have been made to disguise the mutilation of a one-legged acrobat sculpture), and aseptic (any sensory appreciation, other than visual, is carefully removed: any trace of soil, dust, stains, smell of mould or of smoke that the visitor might witness in Xi’an, would most probably be perceived as highly inappropriate in this specific context)⁵.

Thus ‘epurated’, the exhibits are suitable to unfold the hagiography of the First Emperor. Through the singularisation of his funerary accoutrements, the exhibition substantiates the singularisation of the Emperor’s persona. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition adds a further, illuminating statement: ‘[the *First Emperor*] has become a symbol of China’s long and coherent cultural history and, now that China is rapidly developing, it reminds the world of China’s future potential’ (Portal and Duan, 2007). Following a practice largely employed by museums in China, a parallel is drawn between Ancient and contemporary China, whereby the admiration for the splendour of the Chinese past is projected onto its present. This is achieved through what Prasenjit Duara calls the strategy of ‘superscription of symbols’, whereby ‘what we have is a view of myth and its cultural symbols as simultaneously continuous and discontinuous. (...) cultural symbols are able to lend continuity at one level to changing social groups and interests even as the symbols themselves undergo transformations’ (1988: 779). In our case, it could be said that, paraphrasing Duara, the cultural symbol ‘The Terracotta Army’ is interpreted in such a way as to lend continuity to the myth of the ‘First Emperor’, making it relevant for the present. However, the discourses in which this cultural symbol is embedded in its British Museum representation vary sensibly

5 My point here is not so much to lament the lack of non-visual sensory appreciation, as to acknowledge the potential for a different exhibitionary approach. More to the point, I refer to a recent museological orientation that advocates a (re-)introduction of the senses in the museum landscape. See for instance Edwards, Gosden and Phillips 2006.

from those of its Chinese counterparts. From the point of view of Chinese archaeologists and museologists, who, as noted, interpret the findings through the prism of Marxist theory – whereby the past is a dark era of oppression – the army represents, in the words of Fowler, a ‘visible symbol of the strength and genius of the People throughout three millennia of oppression that ended in 1949’ (1987: 239). In the British Museum, in contrast, the People are virtually absent, the narrative being entirely centred on the figure of the Emperor, constructed as an icon of the long, mythical, mysterious and magnificent Chinese past, crucially made to reverberate on China’s present. Framed through these lenses, and with the obvious endorsement of the Chinese government, the exhibition is an invitation to acknowledge China’s contemporary international status, to reassert the good diplomatic relations with the host of the 2012 Olympic Games, and possibly, more subtly, to ‘correct’ and improve on the opacities of an international image still suffering from a poor human-rights record, the environmental hazards of a ill-regulated industry sector, and the unpredictability of the Communist leadership. But China’s present is overall, and foremost, market-lead. A fact of which the visitor is abruptly reminded when at the end of the visit, leaving the dimly-lit, soft and solemn space of the exhibition, one suddenly finds oneself projected into the heart of the souvenir shop, for the occasion crammed full of First Emperor gadgets and merchandise (Figure 3).

Figure 3: British Museum souvenir shop, October 2007.



Photo by the author.

Discussion: comparing the gallery and the temporary exhibition

Through this analysis of the two displays of Chinese material culture – in the permanent gallery and the temporary exhibition – I wish to suggest that the museum representation of the

Chinese Other at the British Museum rests on two different, though complementary, narrative lines. On the one hand, in the permanent gallery, the museum is carrying out its 'traditional' function as a public education institution. On the other, through the sensationalism of the exhibition, it is promoting the entertaining aspect of the museum experience. To some extent, such division of functions between temporary and permanent exhibitions echoes Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's reading of Franz Boas's partition between 'the "exposition method" of commercial exhibits and the "museum method", which was systematic, scientific and educational' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 36). And yet the two representations share two major features: both essentialize Chinese culture, and both hark back to China's past, painstakingly reiterating its importance to understand a present that is actually eluded in both museum representations. Although there exists some kind of complementarity, to the extent that the temporary exhibition is actually 'filling a gap' in the permanent collection (very poor in objects of the Qin period), there is no patent link or cross-reference between the two displays. Although only a few meters distant, they appear totally separate, encapsulated in two distinct time/space, conceptual and museological bubbles.

I want then to ask: how is one to make sense of such an incongruous representation of the Chinese Other? I want to argue that in differentiating its offer – as didactic and leisure locus – the British Museum is negotiating its colonial past to adjust to political, economic and social changes at large. In step with the political agendas of both countries, the British Museum is interpreting and reflecting on the growing prominence of China in the UK and on the world scene. The booming economy of travel, the evolution of consumer tastes and demands (coupled with a more general trend of cultural consumerism), renewed opportunities for commercial exchanges and business enterprises, an important Chinese community in London and the UK, and global scale media events such as the 2008 Olympic Games (hosted by China), are all factors that affect the museum representation of China, to the extent that they impact on audiences and on their expectations. Operating on a responsive mode, the British Museum is striving to satisfy the demand for cultural consumption of its increasingly cosmopolitan, multicultural, informed and consumption-oriented audiences.

Commercialisation frames a new form of cultural appreciation, whereby leisure and consumption appear intricately linked. We are invited to 'buy' the Other, to bring it at home and consume it. Here the exhibition catalogue, the merchandise and the gadgets in the museum shop have metaphorically replaced the colonial trophies. But in this new form of cultural colonialism (or cultural cannibalism?) the ancient dualisms Empire/periphery and colonizer/colonized have thoroughly dissolved, giving way to an atomization, whereby each individual is given the option of enacting his/her own form of colonialism, of appropriation of the Other, or as Craig Clunas puts it, of 'private fetishism' (1998: 50). Daniel Miller has theoretically framed consumption practices as strategies through which individuals define their own identity (or identities) (Miller 1987). Drawing from Miller's insight, we might then see the 'consumption' of cultural diversity as a particular form of identity construction whereby the definition of the self involves the appropriation of the cultural Other. Here, citizenship and cultural boundaries collapse and gradually fade against a background where individual and collective cultural identities seem to be increasingly defined by (cultural) consumption practices.

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Canada at the “Crossroads”: Global Citizenship, Narrative History, and The Canadian Museum for Human Rights

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This essay considers the intentions of the twenty-first century narrative history museum in relation to the museological genre’s predecessor in eighteenth-century France. In particular, the example of the newly-founded Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Canada’s first and only museum dedicated entirely to the subject of human rights, and the first federal museum to be erected outside of the nation’s capital in 40 years, signals great change in the contemporary concept of “nation”. The globalized world we inhabit has given rise to a new historiography: one that is transnational and that addresses such universal issues as human rights, oppression, violence, and pandemic crises such as AIDS. In light of the new historiography and political landscape of our shared global community, this essay considers the impact of globalization on the museum institution, by examining the foundations and conceptual development of the most recent type of narrative history museum to appear in Canada. Broadly speaking, this article asks what it means to present the new historiography in the context of the contemporary narrative history museum, while exploring the implications of exhibiting this subject matter and how it engages the critical consciousness and imagination of a universal citizenry.

Introduction: Home is Always an Imaginary Place...

In my previous presentations at NaMu (I + II), I discussed aspects of my doctoral research on a museological genre I refer to as the narrative history museum. As distinct from a history museum, whose mandate is to collect objects of history, the narrative history museum uses objects to evoke ideas and to tell a cohesive story about history. By definition, the narrative museum is philosophical, not rational, and creates meaning through the combined narrative of its collections, scenography, and architectural program. Contemporary examples of this genre include the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and Johannesburg's Apartheid Museum in South Africa. As a synthesized or "total" narrative environment, the narrative history museum is the museographic equivalent of the *gesamkunstwerk*. Today, this genre has undergone profound change, owing to transformations in societal attitudes toward time, representation, and historiography, in addition to technological innovations that permit simulated rather than authentic experience.

While the narrative history museum is a familiar feature of contemporary museum design, in my doctoral research I sought origins and intentions for this genre in France's first national museum of sculpture, the Musée des Monuments français (1795-1816), founded and curated by Alexandre Lenoir. This museum inaugurated the period room, while becoming one of Europe's first chronological museum displays. In this paper, I shall consider the example of a narrative history museum that is currently being planned for a site in Winnipeg, Manitoba – The Canadian Museum for Human Rights – and how the narrative museum in its twenty-first century form differs from its predecessor in eighteenth-century France, by responding to the multicultural processes of our contemporary, global condition.

One such distinction is in the devolution of the concept of "nation" in what is ostensibly a "national" museum institution. As a point of comparison, in the very title he gave to the catalogues he began creating for the *Musée des Monuments français* in 1800, Lenoir specifically stated that the Musée perform as both a history of nation and art – in an era when the concept of "history" had not yet been so narrowly defined as it would with the emergence of the nineteenth-century scientific discipline. For Lenoir and his society – a mere two hundred years ago – there was no inherent disjuncture in the notion that history and art narrated the past as one, and thus Lenoir used the opportunity of the museum to rally the French around a glorious national past that was, in the late eighteenth century, being born again.

The globalized world we inhabit has given rise to a new historiography: one that is transnational and that addresses such universal issues as human rights, oppression, violence, and pandemic crises such as AIDS. In this paradigm, the construction of the "Other" is no longer construed as the specific enemy of any single geo-political state, but rather occupies a more nebulous, borderless abode. Having recognized that its mission is far greater than to serve the populace of a given political territory, the new national museum has radically altered its message to address political issues and concerns of a heterogeneous and universal citizenry. In short, the new narrative museum has dispensed with that particular trope of Romantic historiography that centered on monarchical lineage and victorious military defeats, a trope that continues to define the exhibits of many history museums founded in the previous century, in favour of a storyline that engages themes with global – rather than local – resonance. As the literary historian Alberto Manguel recently mused while delivering the annual Massey lectures across Canada¹ – a series he dedicated to the themes of identity and

1 The Massey lectures are an annual lecture series created in honour of the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, former Governor General of Canada (Canada's highest political office). Alberto Manguel

storytelling – “The arrival of new cultures, the ravages of war and of industrial upheavals, the shifts of political divisions and ethnic regroupings, the strategies of multinational companies and global trade, make it almost impossible to hold for long on to a shared definition of nationality (...) Nationalities, ethnicities, tribal, and religious filiations imply geographical and political definitions of some kind, and yet, partly because of our nomad nature and partly due to the fluctuations of history, our geography is less grounded in a physical than in a phantom landscape. Home is always an imaginary place.”²

I would like to argue that the concept of nation in our contemporary moment is no less important than it was in the nineteenth-century, but with the crucial difference that nationhood today is defined increasingly by values, rather than geographic borders. I would also like to argue that it is precisely because we – as a social collective – live within a context that fundamentally recognizes the richness of multiculturalism and diversity as the product of these values, that it has become imperative that we resolve, at a social level, the issues of political instability that Manguel so aptly described. Manguel argues that only through greater inclusion and respect for difference can we achieve harmony and balance. It may therefore at first glance seem contradictory to speak of the museum’s role in this social project. Historically, the museum and its precursor, the curiosity cabinet, have been places marked by their exclusionary practices, rather than for their inclusiveness. Private collectors and national armies have historically mined foreign lands for exotic objects and priceless art pieces, objects which have, by virtue of their placement within the museum, retained something of the narrative of their initial displacement. It is thus a legitimate question to ask how, even in our contemporary moment, the museum might be re-imagined so as to enable Manguel’s concept of inclusion to exist.

Were he attending this conference today, I imagine that Manguel would proffer the uniquely human art and act of storytelling as the means to regain some form of political and social balance. Stories that bring together people communally, and probe the imagination to remind us of our humanity, have become essential to preserving this communality: “Dreaming up stories, telling stories, putting stories into writing, reading stories,” Manguel writes, “are all complementary arts that lend words to our sense of reality, and can serve as vicarious learning, as transmission of memory, as instruction or as warning.”³ He reminds us that in ancient Anglo-Saxon tradition, the very word for poet was *maker*, blending metaphors of stories with building the material world.

The narrative history museum – literally an architecture that aims to tell a story – seems the ideal venue for meaningful stories to be exchanged and yet, it has come to occupy volatile territory in Manguel’s landscape of words, if for no other reason than that of the contemporary propensity for museums to probe such difficult questions as those related to war and oppression, in highly evocative terms – Bonnell and Simon’s concept of “difficult exhibitions” (2007).⁴ If the narrative history museum (such as Holocaust museums and the Apartheid Museum) as a genre fulfills an important institutional function in addressing abuses of social and political power, in the specific manner these museums often position the visitor as victim the museum’s role is less convincing, and in some cases, the potential ethical

delivered his lectures in addresses to audiences at five separate Canadian universities in the month of October (2007). These lectures are published by the House of Anansi Press in Toronto under the title, *The City of Words* (2007).

2 Alberto Manguel, *The City of Words* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2007) 143, 144-145.

3 Manguel, *City of Words*, 10.

4 Jennifer Bonnell and Roger Simon, “ ‘Difficult’ exhibitions and intimate encounters,” *Museum and Society* 5 (2) (July 2007) 65-85.

function of these museums has been compromised altogether by the high degree of moralizing, commodification and sensationalism in their exhibition designs.

In light of the new historiography and political landscape of our shared global community, I will, in the remainder of this essay, consider this workshop's prevailing theme, the impact of globalization on the museum institution, by examining the foundations and conceptual development of the most recent type of narrative history museum to appear in Canada. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights, slated to open in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 2011 (construction to begin once funding is in place) is, not insignificantly, Canada's first new federal museum in 40 years, and its conception in this post-millennium moment indicates a provocative statement about the role that the contemporary museum may play in furthering world interest and knowledge about ideas of universal importance. It is also notable that this museum will be located far from the nation's capital, Ottawa, and is the only Canadian national museum sited outside of this region. Broadly speaking, this paper asks what it means to present the new historiography in the context of the contemporary narrative history museum, while exploring the implications of exhibiting this subject matter and how it engages the critical consciousness and imagination of a universal citizenry.⁵

'Nation' at the Crossroads

Dedicating an entire museum to the subject of human rights has not been without controversy for the advocates of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). The project of Canada's first and only museum of human rights was conceived by the late Dr. Israel Asper, who launched the CMHR on 17 April 2003, coinciding with the 21st anniversary of the signing of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (on April 17, 1982),⁶ and a mere six months before the philanthropist's death. A lawyer who also dabbled in provincial politics,⁷ Asper built the media company he founded in 1974, CanWest Global Communications, into the multi-billion dollar industry that it is today. As one of Canada's largest international media companies, CanWest dominates the Canadian media landscape with its ownership of a major television network (Global Television Network), one of Canada's two daily national newspapers (*The National Post*), and more than 60 Canadian regional newspapers.⁸ A little over a quarter century since its foundation, CanWest now employs over 11,000 people, and has an annual budget that exceeds \$2.61 billion. With its head office located in Winnipeg's tallest building (CanWest Global Place), CanWest will – in more ways than one – tower over the posthumous construction of Izzy Asper's dream.

Dr. Asper chose the site of his native city of Winnipeg, near the geographic centre of Canada yet far from the nation's capital, as the home for this new national institution. "At the

5 For images of the future Canadian Museum for Human Rights, please consult the CMHR website: www.canadianmuseumforhumanrights.com.

6 This document was created in 1982 and integrated as part of Canada's Constitution, and guarantees Canadians' rights and freedoms. According to the website of the Canadian Department of Justice, "The *Charter* protects Canadians' rights and freedoms by limiting the ability of governments to pass laws or take actions that discriminate or infringe on human rights. This means that all individuals must be treated equally, regardless of their race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. The *Charter* also protects Canada's linguistic duality and multicultural character." http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/fs/2003/doc_30898.html (Accessed November 5, 2007).

7 Dr. Israel Asper was elected Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party in 1970, where his views tended toward right-libertarian, or conservative ideas. He championed a laissez-faire economy, and fought for the elimination of the welfare state. Under his leadership the Liberals suffered defeat, and Asper resigned as party leader and MLA in 1975.

8 Beyond the frontier, CanWest owns three radio stations in the U.K., and until recently, held shares in New Zealand's MediaWorks NZ, including a number of radio networks and stations.

crossroads of Canada” literally describes the museum’s site at the fork of two significant waterways, the Assiniboine and Red Rivers. The Forks has been a historic meeting place for First Nations peoples to peacefully resolve conflict for centuries, while Winnipeg itself is said to have witnessed an impressive array of human rights struggles of its own – ranging from French language and Métis rights led by Louis Riel, to Labour rights, and the Women’s rights and suffragette movement headed by Nellie McClung. The site could not be more appropriately selected, we are told, as Winnipeg is today home to dozens of ethnic and cultural communities, no doubt with stories of their own.

However this museum at the crossroads of Canada also aptly describes the metaphor of an institution poised to address issues related to human rights – in a moment when Canada is itself embroiled in debates about political and religious intolerance. In Québec, the separatist *Parti Québécois* only recently attempted to introduce Bill 195 into the National Assembly, legislation which proposed that Québec issue its own “citizenship” while requiring that its citizens pass a French language exam in order to partake in such democratic processes as holding political office, while the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, appointed by Québec’s Premier, Jean Charest, in February 2007, was created to determine the extent of “reasonable accommodation” for religious minorities living in Québec and has unwittingly created a forum in which the most astounding and disappointingly anti-immigrant viewpoints have been voiced.

In light of the intense pressures that surround the creation of a museum dedicated to issues of human rights, it is not insignificant to consider that Asper – whose political leanings toward Zionism were well-known – used his media empire to wage his own battles on international politics. He was also opposed to public broadcasting media for competing with the private sector – in particular, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation,⁹ who sponsored the very Massey Lecture series with which I began this essay. And while Asper has gone on record as stating that the museum “will be totally apolitical and antiseptic in terms of trying to preach a message of one kind of inhumanity over another,” his admonition that the CMHR not become “a propaganda device for a particular political point of view”¹⁰ is perhaps less evident. There are clear indications that Asper’s own causes will be well represented in the museum’s thematic plan, notably in the dedication of an entire hall to the subject of the Holocaust genocide. The Asper Family Foundation already sponsors annual student trips to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, a philanthropic venture that is designed to sensitize young students to the atrocities of the Holocaust. In the context of a museum devoted to the subject of human rights, the Holocaust is one of many narratives related to genocide that could be told, but in the personal context of Izzy Asper, it is the obvious one.

Almost four years to the day that Asper launched The Canadian Museum for Human Rights project,¹¹ the federal government declared the CMHR a federal institution, an act that brings with it the promise of a substantial infusion of financial aid. While the Canadian public eagerly awaits news of the results of this new government-community partnership, one can be sure that the government’s involvement comes with many strings attached. The branding of the museum a national institution has engendered the inevitable dialogue over what constitutes a national museum and its mandate. Clearly the content of the museum will be of national importance? It will reflect national sensibilities and common values over what constitutes human rights? Surely the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a product of the Trudeau era and a model of democratic ideals for other young democracies, will constitute the keystone of the institution? According to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights’

9 With its said pro-Palestinian position.

10 Michael Friscolanti, “Tribute to Human Rights,” *National Post*, Thursday, April 17, 2004.

11 On April 20, 2007.

Mission statement, the museum has set for itself the ambitious task of advancing “understanding and support for human rights in Canada and throughout the world,”¹² while further claiming the CMRH to be “a powerful symbol of Canada’s unwavering commitment to recognizing, promoting and celebrating human rights.”¹³ It will, in this context, become a “national and international destination – a centre of learning and history where Canadians and people from other countries can engage in dialogue and commit to taking action to combat the forces of hate and oppression.”¹⁴

It would seem that realizing Dr. Asper’s dream of creating an institution for human rights would be the ideal incarnation of the museum as a means of addressing multiculturalism in a globalized world. According to its literature, the museum will trace the development of the human rights movement and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹⁵ it will highlight international stories related to genocides such as those of Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur, and it will also address the struggles of historically disenfranchised social groups, including women, children, gays and lesbians, the disabled and refugees. As such, these are all universal themes. Moreover, the museum’s literature claims, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights will “change attitudes through education and empathy (especially amongst our nation’s young people) to combat bullying, racism, hatred, intolerance and ignorance.”¹⁶ But something in this same passage should give us pause. The museum will change attitudes “through education and empathy”? Empathy? Why must we impose empathy upon the already ambitious task of overcoming hatred, intolerance, and ignorance? Why must we assume that a state-imposed form of emotional transference be required to address human shortcomings?

The Walls of Inclusivity

Perhaps because I am an optimist, I would like to believe that there is a space for an institution dedicated to the issues surrounding human rights, although, as one writer has already remarked, it would seem more appropriate to locate such intentions in an institute of study rather than the more popular typology of the museum, where creating empathetic responses often trumps a truly critical engagement with the material at hand. The CMHR’s literature clearly states that it seeks inclusivity in its exhibit content, and for this reason it is crucial to ask what histories will be preserved, what human rights stories will be told, and perhaps even more crucially, how, in this new Canadian national museum.

As in any museum, architecture is central to communicating intentionality. In a lecture he delivered at McGill University, the Canadian-Israeli architect Moshe Safdie recently claimed that “exhibitory and architecture must come together as one,”¹⁷ as they have in works such as Yad Vashem and the U.S. Institute for Peace, to produce a unified message. It would seem that the Friends of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights share this opinion of the centrality of architecture to the museum project, for the Architectural Review Committee launched an ambitious international architectural design competition in 2003 that paired 62 initial entries from 21 countries and 5 continents, down to 30 architectural firms invited to

12 Canadian Museum for Human Rights website (www.canadianmuseumforhumanrights.com), Vision, p.5.

13 Canadian Museum for Human Rights website, Vision, p.3.

14 Canadian Museum for Human Rights website, Vision, p.3.

15 Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948.

16 From information package prepared by the Friends of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Montréal, 2007: Fact, “An Extraordinary Opportunity for Canada.”

17 Moshe Safdie, David Azrieli Lecture, McGill University School of Architecture, Monday, October 15, 2007.

submit conceptual design proposals for Stage 2 of the competition, to eight firms invited to present their proposals at the semi-final stage,¹⁸ to a final panel of three.

Ultimately, the Architectural Review Committee selected a design by internationally renowned and award-winning American architect Antoine Predock¹⁹ as one that could “fulfill the objectives for an inspirational building that achieves a complexity relating to the diversity of the human experience.”²⁰ The American firm beat out the two other finalists, Canadian firms Saucier + Perrotte Architectes and Dan S. Hanganu Architects & The Arcop Group, both of Montréal. Predock described the winning scheme as one that

is rooted in humanity, making visible in the architecture the fundamental commonality of humankind – a symbolic apparition of ice, clouds and stone set in a field of sweet grass. Carved into the earth and dissolving into the sky on the Winnipeg horizon, the abstract ephemeral wings of a white dove embrace a mythic stone mountain of 450 million year old Tyndall limestone in the creation of a unifying and timeless landmark for all nations and cultures of the world.²¹

Predock likens the journey through the museum to the epic journey that is life, injecting anthropomorphic and life-affirming metaphors that begin with the building’s roots, become cleansed by the Garden of Contemplation’s purifying lung, and culminate in the vaporous Cloud that is the Tower of Hope – like water, life-giving in its proclamation of humanity’s commitment to human rights.²²

The 100-metre high crystalline Tower of Hope will soar above the museum and recalls, in name and oversimplified intention, other famous towers crowning famous buildings, Daniel Libeskind’s Holocaust Tower at the Jewish Museum, Berlin, among them. The museum’s

18 These semi-finalists were Antoine Predock Architect (USA); Charles Correa Associates (India); Dan S. Hanganu Architects & The Arcop Group (Canada); Mashabane Rose Architects (South Africa); Michael Maltzan Architect, Inc. (USA); Saucier + Perrotte Architectes (Canada); Schmidt Hammer & Lassen (Denmark); and Frederic Schwartz Architects and EHDD Architecture (USA).

19 Antoine Predock was the recipient of the 2006 American Institute of Architects (AIA) Gold Medal. This award, given annually, is the highest honor the AIA confers on an architect. The Gold Medal honors an individual whose significant body of work has had a lasting influence on the theory and practice of architecture.

20 Canadian Museum for Human Rights website, Architecture, 1.

21 From Antoine Predock’s website (www.predock.com) accessed November 5, 2007.

22 Excerpt from the website: “The Journey through the museum parallels an epic journey through life. Visitors enter the museum between the Roots, protective stone arms suggestive of an ancient geological event. Clutching the earth, the roots are calibrated to block northern and northwestern winds and celebrate the sun, with apertures marking paths of equinox and solstice. Containing the essential public interface functions of the museum, the Roots create a framework for ceremonial outdoor events with roof terraces and amphitheater seating. The journey begins with a descent into the earth, a symbolic recognition of the earth as the spiritual center for many indigenous cultures. Arriving at the heart of the building, the Great Hall. Carved from the earth, the archaeologically rich void of the Great Hall evokes the memory of ancient gatherings at the Forks of First Nations peoples, and later, settlers and immigrants.

Like a mirage within the Museum, the Garden of Contemplation is Winnipeg’s Winter Garden. Basalt columns emerge from the top surface of the timeless granite monolith. Water and medicinal plants define space and suggest content. The First Nations sacred relationship to water is honored, as a place of healing and solace amidst reflections of earth and sky. The space of the Garden functions as a purifying “lung” reinforcing the fundamental environmental ethic, which grounds the building.

The journey culminates in an ascent of the Tower of Hope, with controlled view release to panoramic views of sky, city and the natural realm. Glacial in its timelessness, the Tower of Hope is a beacon for humanity. Symbolic of changes in the physical state of water, material and form, it speaks to the life affirming hope for positive changes in humanity. An allusion to the vaporous state of water, the Cloud, houses the functional support of the Museum. With strong overlaps to the visitor experience, the cloud is envisioned as light filled and buoyant, in marked contrast to the geologic evocation of the Roots and Stone Galleries, providing a visible reminder from the exterior, in tandem with the Tower, of the power and necessity of hope and tolerance.” Accessed 5 November, 2007.

literature proclaims of the tower that its “iconic symbol could be a beacon of light on the urban landscape and (would) surely be visible from Winnipeg’s grand avenue stretching from the Legislature and terminating at the historical Union Station at the western edge of the site.” Presumably this tower would also be visible from CanWest Global Place?

Of any comment one could make about Antoine Predock’s body of work,²³ it is that his designs are nothing if not spiritually and holistically grounded. His buildings rise solidly – at times, majestically – from the depths of a geological landscape to which they always pay utmost respect. Indeed, the natural elements play an essential role in Predock’s architecture, as they will at the CMHR, which is oriented around a central Garden of Contemplation filled with water and plants. At the CMHR, visitors will proceed through an entrance that appears to be carved out of the earth, and emerge into a space that metamorphoses into a glass embrace, only to then be enfolded into a cinematographic experience aided by digital media.

However the ability of architecture to symbolically communicate the continuing struggle for human rights notwithstanding, it is the proposed master plan for a multi-sensory visitor journey enhanced by drama, technology, and visual and audio presentations that demands further attention. The CMHR’s literature states that the exhibits of the museum will emphasize the necessity of respecting difference in order to achieve social dignity and equality. Its narratives are intended to be communicated in a compelling, engaging and otherwise interactive way through the combined uses of “experience theatres,” where visitors may engage in human rights stories; forums for discussion and engagement; multicultural viewpoints to ensure that a multitude of perspectives be conveyed, and a section called “Canadian encounters,” a nebulous category that promises a space for Canadian stories to be exhibited.²⁴ Ultimately, we are told, the museum hopes to produce a politically engaged citizen.

If the language and intentions of the museum to create a “compelling” visit sound at all familiar, it is because the visitor’s journey is being choreographed by Ralph Appelbaum Associates (RAA), a popular New-York based interpretive museum design firm. With offices in New York City, London, and Beijing, the firm has over one hundred built projects to its credit, notably museum exhibitions, visitor centres, and educational environments, covering subjects that range from natural history and the physical sciences, to cultural and social history and the fine arts. With its interdisciplinary personnel of more than 75 specialists in design and communications, Ralph Appelbaum Associates is not only the largest interpretive museum design firm in the world, but a well-oiled machine. In the context of the narrative history museum, it was RAA who produced the permanent exhibition at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., an exhibit that won the firm a host of top design awards.²⁵ RAA also designed the Nelson and Napoléon installation for the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich in 2005 (a museum which was the subject of a NaMu analysis at the previous workshop in Leicester in June 2007), and the firm’s influence is also keenly felt at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Appelbaum claims of the CMHR’s multi-levelled and multi-layered “journey of hope” that it is one in which the focus is squarely rooted in the present and future, and not the past, a claim that is not immediately apparent from the description of the master plan. Visitors will journey first through a theatre dedicated to issues concerning Aboriginal Rights and historic

23 Notable among Predock’s projects is the design he produced for the National Archive of Denmark in Copenhagen (1996; unbuilt); also the Tacoma Art Museum in Washington (1997-2003), and the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library in Colorado (2003).

24 Canadian Museum for Human Rights website, Exhibits, p.4.

25 Including the 1994 Gold Industrial Design Excellence Award and the Top Honors American Association of Museums Award (1994).

treaties with the British Crown and Canadian government; on to a Garden of Contemplation for an experience of solace and healing; through a two-storey gallery addressing human rights advocacy, laws and institutions in Canada; to a space promising a global perspective on human rights issues in “Eye on the World.” In this space, a real-time map of human rights issues will include a news wall of broadcast feeds from around the world, broadcasting the changing contemporary issues of concern. Yet another gallery explores the Human Rights Movement as a modern phenomenon, begun in the post-Holocaust era, while a separate space specifically addresses the Nazi Holocaust. A final Hall of Commitment, in the building’s uppermost gallery, provides the space of reflection for visitors to respond to their visit. Visitors will travel through the museum with a “smartcard,” a device used to gain access to many of the museum’s interactive exhibits, and also to retain information of their tour. In the manner it provides structure and narrative to the visitor’s journey, the smartcard is a convention reminiscent of the passport the visitor receives at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., or the “racial identity” the tourist is arbitrarily given at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg.

There are many ethno-groups partaking in the dialogue surrounding the development of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, including a well-pedigreed community of Human Rights “experts” and a Human Rights Advisory Committee. To be sure, the stakes are high in the decision-making process guiding the development of the content and form of this new museum type. But communities must be vigilant. For the narrative history museum to be truly effective as an educational venue, it cannot and should not mistake evoking empathy for bringing about change. The metaphors of journey-making that abound in this museum’s master plan are not, as Ralph Appelbaum has claimed them to be, intended to put “people in a personal journey.”²⁶ They are, rather, highly choreographed and technological environments that are designed to evoke a range of human responses, from shame and sadness, to enlightenment and inspiration. The CMHR may well be a space designed to engage the visitor morally, to have the visitor face her/his own conscience, and its designers may well hope that the visitor will emerge ready to engage the world as an active, sentient, and global citizen. But to impose such emotions and expect a homogeneous response is careless at best, if not, naïve, and moreover, is a misinterpretation of Manguel’s notion of inclusiveness.

Today, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights remains a project on paper, a project over which many people have collaborated to produce a space of reflection and a space of learning for the global citizen. With its shift from an object-based collection to an institution founded on ideas, the CMHR incarnates the museum institution’s attempt to adapt to globalization. The attendant shift in narrative, to one that engages universal issues and themes, is also a product of the contemporary era. Yet the founding ideal of the museum to be a pedagogical institution remains strong, and the challenges that this museum will undoubtedly face as it conceives of a master plan worthy of upholding a museum dedicated to issues of human rights are many. That which must remain at the forefront of the conceptual development of this museum is the fundamental paradox on which the institution has historically been premised, and yet which must be overcome: to truly be an institution of the global world, the museum institution must shed its ambition of creating a context of permanence, in order to create a space in which perspectives are always, inevitably, about change.

26 Darcy Keith, “Designer Unveils Vision for Human Rights Museum,” *National Post* (May 5, 2007).

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Who is “the Other” Now? Mediation of History in Multi-Cultural South Africa and Scandinavia of Today

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss how some museums in South Africa and Scandinavia address the task of being part of a “new” multi-cultural society, and what happens to the narrative roles of “Us” and the “Others” in museum mediation of history today. In South Africa, 14 years after the transition from apartheid to democratic policies, old museums are struggling with their identity, with their legacy and with their collections. Some museums make a powerful effort to help people regain a space and a voice in the present by accentuating the presence in the past. This makes for interesting discussions on identity, national heritage and the mediation of history in a multi-cultural society. Who was “the Other” that was not represented before and who is “the Other” today, for example in the mediation of history in a place like the Robben Island Museum, celebrating the liberation struggle with an inclusive approach but also with a very distinct cast of actors, those good and those bad – “Us” and “the Others”?

From 2005 to 2008 the exhibition *Kongospår – Traces of the Congo* – has opened its doors in national museums in Scandinavia and Finland. This exhibition’s starting point is “Why are there so many artefacts from the Congo in our collections and why are there so many traces of the Congo in Scandinavia?” It is a reflective exhibition that tries to problematize colonialism and the presence of the whites – the Scandinavians – in the history of the Congo. What is interesting is that in problematizing the gaze of the past upon “the Others” – the people of the Congo – the exhibition can also be interpreted as critically problematizing the notion of “Us” in the past. Who were the “We” who thought that we had the right to exploit the Africans or saw it as “our” mission to civilize “the Other”? But in distancing ourselves from the exploiters and colonizers of the past, and in a multi-cultural and inclusive society of today, who is allotted the narrative roles of “Us” and “the Other” – Who is “the Other” now?

Introduction

This article will deal with the question of how some museums in Scandinavia and South Africa address the challenge of being part of a “new” multi-cultural society. In the interest of consolidating a national cultural heritage, or legitimizing a social order, the mediation of history, also in museums, has often marked out a distinct line between “Us” and “the Others”.¹ But in a multi-cultural setting and in societies with clearly defined policies of democracy, equality and multi-culturalism, a common and official “national identity” is no longer so easily defined. A clear example of this is the case of “the new South Africa,” after the fall of apartheid and after the democratic elections in 1994, and it has also become a reality in the European societies. Michel Azar, for example, writes: “[...] the meaning in the denotation [Swedish is] constantly [...] adrift and [can only] be defined through its excluding function: *a true Swede is the person who is not like the one who is not.*”² (my translation). This characterization offers little practical help (which is obviously the point!) in defining an identity or a cultural heritage. For instance, if we look at national museums, would this then mean that they should display “objects that are not like the objects that are not from the culture in question?”

However, perhaps it is not self evident that museums should deal with the issue of national identity and national cultural heritage at all any more? Janet Hall, from a “Third World”-point of view even questions the very idea of the museum in “Museums, myths and missionaries: redressing the past for a new South Africa”:

As stated earlier, a museum is a Eurocentric concept and as such is something which has no equivalent in traditional Africa. [...]

[...] it is generally agreed by First World nations that they are essential as a means of preserving the past, defining national identity, and giving purpose to and providing continuity in life.

Yet are any of these considered vital by a nation in the Third World?³

In the case of “the new South Africa” it is certainly relevant to ask the question if museums should really *preserve* the structures, narratives and collections of the recent past. The past should perhaps rather be contrasted to the new, and present, as it is defined and expressed in contemporary policies. Wouldn't it, however, also be interesting to turn Halls question around and ask: Is “preserving the past, defining national identity, and giving purpose to and providing continuity in life” still relevant in *Western Society* – in Europe? What role does a national museum really play in an era when “nationalism” is an ugly word, such as in Scandinavia, and the task and challenge is to promote multi-culturalism and democratic values?

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- 1 See for instance Axelsson, Cecilia *Afrikafararna. Historieförmedling och historiebruk på Svenska Emigrantinstitutet och Kalmar läns museum*. Unpublished licentiate's thesis, Växjö University, Sweden (2006). or Ajagán-Lester, Luis. *De Andra. Afrikaner i svenska pedagogiska texter (1768-1965)*. Höskoleförlaget vid Lärarhögskolan i Stockholm, Stockholm (2000). See also for instance Coombes, Annie E *History After Apartheid. Visual culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* Duke University Press, Durham and London (2003),
 - 2 Azar, Michael “Det symboliska objektet” i *Den koloniala bumerangen. Från schibbolet till körkort i svenskhet*. Brutus Östlings bokförlag Symposion, Stockholm/Stehag (2006)
 - 3 Hall, Janet “Museums, myths and missionaries: redressing the past for a new South Africa” In *Museum, media, message* (ed) Eilian Hooper-Greenhill, Routledge, London and New York (1995)

Although it might be true that *preserving* a historical national identity is not relevant in South Africa, *defining a new one* is, however, seen by many as of vital and pressing importance, if this nation should have any kind of future. This is a challenge that different museums in South Africa have addressed in different ways, which I shall return to later on in this article. Perhaps this is also the challenge for European national museums? This new challenge does, not, however, take us any further from the problem of *how to* define this identity. But perhaps the narrative patterns that have been used before are still of use? Is it perhaps only the line-up in the (hi)story that has been recast? In a multi-cultural and inclusive society of today, who is allotted the narrative roles of “Us” and “the Other” – Who is “the Other” now?

“Us” and “The Others” in Scandinavia? – The Exhibition *Kongospår*

Exploring the question of how national and other museums in Scandinavia address the issues connected to the overriding goal of multi-culturalism can really, in my opinion, best be done with a comprehensive and integrative approach of exploring the museum exhibition as a process of mediation, where aspects of production, mediation, *and* reception and deliberation are considered in the light of each other. It is then possible to say something about how the museum both intends to and really does address certain issues, and about how this seems to work in the meeting with the public.⁴ When discussing the particular issue of how museums in Europe address challenges of multi-culturalism and “the Other” in the process of promoting, or discussing, a national identity, it is obviously interesting to look at exhibitions that explicitly deal with meetings and contacts between “Us” and “Others”. *Kongospår* is such an exhibition.⁵

From 2005 to 2007 the exhibition *Kongospår* – Traces of the Congo – has visited four museums of, perhaps, national stature in Scandinavia and Finland. One of these is, for example, the National Museum in Copenhagen and another The Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, one of the Swedish state’s four museums for world culture. *Kongospår* is produced by a team of professional museologists, ethnologists and archivists. It consists of a core exhibition that has been moved between the Nordic countries and where the local host-museum adds, or leads the visitor to, its own artefacts and traces from the Congo. Because the exhibition explores the traces of contacts between Scandinavia and the (Belgian) Congo this exhibition is of much interest when discussing perspectives on migration, mediation of cultures and people in contact, perspectives of ‘Us’ and ‘the Others’, and on using museum exhibitions to mediate a message of tolerance, understanding and multi-culturalism. My observations are chiefly from the exhibition at the National Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark.

In the National Museum *Kongospår* was shown in two rooms that led in to the permanent collections of the museum of artefacts from Africa and other parts of the world. The first two rooms were dimly lit and the walls were black. The carpet was deep red. There were glass-fronted display-cases in the walls and there were also low display-cases in a row in the floor,

4 See my paper for the first NaMu conference: Setting the Frames in Norrköping – *Exploring the museum – a comprehensive approach*, accessible from the NaMu homepage.

5 *Kongospår* was produced by Riksställningar in cooperation with Etnografiska museet/Statens museer för världskultur in Sweden, and other ethnographical museums in the Nordic countries. It has been shown at Etnografiska Museet Stockholm (Nov 19, 2005 – April 17, 2006), Kulturernas Museum Helsingfors, Finland (May 08, 2006 – Oct 08, 2006), Nationalmuseet Köpenhamn, Danmark (Nov 04, 2006 – March 18, 2007) and Kulturhistorisk Museum, Oslo University (April 27, 2007 – Nov 18, 2007), and is presently on its way to Världskulturmuseet in Gothenburg, Sweden.

leading the visitor from one room to the next. Two high-school girls that visited the exhibition described it as “mystic” and “sad”.⁶

A large amount of artefacts were displayed in the cases and there were also many photos, and lots of texts to read. In the second room there were two films projected on the wall – one of a street-corner in Kinshasa today, showing commotion and traffic, in colour. The other (contrasting?) screen showed old black-and-white-films taken by colonial masters and missionaries depicting everything from traditional dances by medicine men, mass-baptisms and school gymnastics, to military parades, and “life in the village” etc. It was possible to sit down in a chair, put on some headphones and listen to Congolese people that live in Scandinavia today, to a Scandinavian who was the son of missionaries and had grown up in the Congo, and others, talk about their lives. There was also a large amount of reading material about the Congo available. In the adjacent rooms were very large display-cases with the museum’s own collections from Africa. In these cases were hundreds, if not thousands, of artefacts arranged thematically, but without texts or contextualization.

The starting point of *Kongospår* is “Why are there so many artefacts from the Congo in our collections and why are there so many traces of the Congo in Scandinavia?” The idea is to use the objects as stepping-boards. The objects that are found in homes and public places such as restaurants etc, throughout Scandinavia, together with letters and recounts from trips and longer stays in the Congo, become traces of meetings and contacts, evidence of networks that tie Scandinavia and the Congo together.

The gaze in the exhibition – in display-cases, in excerpts from letters and diaries, in texts and books about the Congo – is the gaze of the Scandinavians upon the Congo. The museum visitor ‘sees’ the Congo from the eyes of Scandinavian sailors, military men, missionaries, explorers, and, museum staff. Congolese people could be heard only in the headphones. When visiting the exhibition with a group of high-school students, some of them said that when they came to the headphones these were already occupied. The students then moved on to the next room and “didn’t have the strength” to go back later. These students did thus not have the opportunity to take part of a change of perspective from the Scandinavian point of view to the Congolese. The traditional patterns of “Us” and “Them” were not really problematized.

The exhibition can in one way be described as a didactic one. There are a lot of texts that explain the objects and put them in a context. But it is also a reflective exhibition that tries to problematize colonialism and the presence of the whites – the Scandinavians – in the history of the Congo by asking the question “what are the stories behind these objects?” There is however little of a “grand narrative” expressed explicitly in the exhibition and the visitors must thus work actively to piece together the back-drop of the concept of (and the effects of) colonialism, against which all the artefacts, and the texts connected to them, collectively make sense. One of the producers of the exhibition said in an interview: “[As a producer] I have chosen the topic but I don’t have the priority of interpretation. I do however offer facts. I offer a point of departure, a start, a provocation, a push! Then one hands [the initiative] over to the visitor and hopes..!”⁷ (my translation) The challenge for the visitor is thus to not get lost in all the artefacts but to see beyond them to what they represent and want to mediate collectively – to make meaning of the exhibition. It is up to the visitor to “get the message” of the exhibition, even though it might not be explicit.

The exhibition is reflective in the way that it broadens the question of how these objects from the Congo ended up in Scandinavia to include the collections in the museums that host the exhibition: “How come there are so many objects from the Congo in the museum

6 Interview with high-school students, Malmö (2007-03-23).

7 Notes from interview with exhibition producer, Stockholm (Sep 10, 2007).

archives? Who collected them? And by what means? How did museums depict and mediate the people and stories from the Congo in the past?”

“Us” and “the Others” – Then and Now

Kongospår is not only about the past, however. In the press material of Riksställningar the exhibition was presented with the following words:

Today Nordic soldiers patrol the Congo again – like they also did in UN-uniforms in the 1960s. In our media the Congo again return with stories of conflict and war.

And we still have a common history with the Congo. The Nordic countries have become the home of many hundreds of Congolese, which now contribute to our society and our history. There are traces everywhere. Both here and there.⁸ (my translation)

There is thus an effort to follow the networks and processes that tie the two geographical places of Scandinavia and the Congo together, from history to the present. This is done by including recent footage, current products and interviews with contemporary people who are connected to both places in one way or another. The exhibition can thus be described as an effort to address issues of multi-culturalism by, in a didactic way if you will, pointing out and open up for discussion, how the connections and contacts have a long history and how it is only to expect that they should continue, in our era of globalization, multi-culturalism and exchange on both a cultural, social, political and economical level. There is also, one can expect, an idea that the museums are in fact promoting understanding and tolerance simply by trying to mediate something of the history and culture of the Congo to the people in Scandinavia, and by problematizing “our” role in the colonial history.

Important questions raised by the exhibition (which, from a didactic point of view, might actually have benefited from being asked more explicitly in the exhibition) are, of course: “What is the difference between the *historical* contacts between the Congo and Scandinavia, and the *present* ones? Is there really any difference at all?” Asking these questions is also asking questions about “We” or “Us” and “the Others”. As the exhibitions shows, the missionaries and the colonialists of the past that subordinated the people of the Congo, and made it possible to extract from the country riches and objects that now in some cases have become museum artefacts, certainly saw themselves as “We” and the Congolese as “the Other”. The same goes for the museum staff, that in the past displayed the objects and mediated the culture of the Congo as something exotic, different and with an undertone of superiority. But what about now? According to the producer, *Kongospår* is also about how we look upon these “enlightened” missionaries, clad in white, on the black-and white footage and photos from the Congo, in relation to ourselves.⁹ This, in my opinion, thus makes it interesting to ask: Is it possible that the “We” of the past suddenly, in the bright lights of self-reflection, and in the effort to perhaps distance ourselves from the unequal, undemocratic, and intolerant, can become “the ‘new’ Others” in this present-day way of looking at and mediating history?

8 Press material, home page of Riksställningar (2007-10-30).

9 Interview with exhibition producer, Stockholm (Sep 10, 2007).

New Ways of Addressing Old Issues – The South African challenge

In South Africa, 14 years after the transition from apartheid to democracy, old museums are still struggling with their identity, with their legacy and with their collections.¹⁰ In apartheid South Africa “the Other” in the mediation of history and culture in the national institutions was “unproblematic” in the sense that the mediation of history often followed the same colonial and apartheid patterns that were the official policy of the country. Now, after the transition into a new paradigm of policies, different museums deal with this legacy in different ways. For example, in the museum in the Castle of Good Hope, the castle which Jan van Riebeck had built in the 1600s, the issue of rethinking the mediation of history seems to be avoided almost completely. Histories told here are about the colonial masters and from a colonial point of view. “The Other” is present in the form of the slaves, or not incorporated in the stories at all, only implicitly as the ones whom it was necessary to build a stronghold for to subdue. Although the mediation of history cannot explicitly follow apartheid patterns any more it is easy to incorporate the history mediated here in the old tradition in which The Castle and the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria are landmarks. In the Voortrekker Monument it is described how the Boers, the descendants of the Dutch in the Cape province, in ox-carts trekked in to the interior of the country to colonize it, and how they endured hardships and in bloody battles defeated the black tribes that came in their way. The Voortrekker Monument for a long time played a significant part in the triumphant cult that during the apartheid-era celebrated the supremacy of the white population over the black.¹¹ But even in the Voortrekker Monument history has had to be renegotiated and told in a different, and more nuanced, way. Perhaps shortly the same phenomenon as could be discerned in *Kongospår* will take precedence here as well: the “We of today” (whites, blacks and ‘coloreds’ – “everyone”) look upon the “We of yesterday” (whites) as “the Other”.

A recently opened museum, The Origins Centre in Johannesburg – “A museum in Africa for the People of the World” – makes a very distinct effort to address the gap in history that was left unaddressed in the old history-writings; the times before 1652 when the Europeans came to southern Africa. Using such diverse methods as the results of dna-testing and biological explanations, the archaeological findings of cave paintings, old rites and traditions – social and cultural models of explanation – the effort is to *regain* the history that was silenced during the colonial and apartheid eras. It also comes across as an effort to prove not only that there were people, such as the Khoi and the San, there long before the whites came to the area, that deserve rehabilitation, but also that the origins of all of man-kind is to be found in Southern Africa. It is a powerful effort to regain a space and a voice in the present by accentuating the presence in the past. In a sense the table is turned here and history and heritage is now mediated by the people with the longest recorded history in this part of the world. Here, it is almost as if the role of “the Other” is now played by the white colonial masters and also, in a sense, by the whites of today.

Master Narrative vs. Proliferation of Voices

The people of South Africa that once were “the Others”, now, after many years of struggle, find themselves with an opportunity to make their voices heard. The District Six museum commemorates the multicultural community of District Six in Cape Town that was virtually

10 Section about museums in South Africa based on observations, guided tours and visits to the museums in question, during a research trip in South Africa (May 28 to June 18, 2007).

11 See for instance Coombes, Annie E “Translating the Past: Apartheid Monuments in Postapartheid South Africa”, in *History After Apartheid. Visual culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*. Duke University Press, Durham and London (2003).

eradicated by the apartheid regime. The museum is a place for memory and healing and the museum guards itself carefully against any interference from the government even today. The story in the museum is told by a proliferation of voices. Anyone with a claim to this history and with a need to express his or her memories is invited to take part in the conversation that is the memory of District Six.

In stark contrast to this approach are some of the views expressed in the discussion on how best to preserve the legacy of the prison on Robben Island. The general idea is to let this place function as a national rallying point and a center for education in democracy for the future. But how is this best done? Annie E Coombes, for example, asks if the prison should be “untouched” or “retouched” to better serve as a museum?¹² Coombes also cites mr Ahmed Kathrada, one of the “freedom fighters” who was incarcerated for political reasons on Robben Island, and who now functions as a guide there. He said:

I’ve suggested that a group of us who’ve been on the island should independently record things so that in the end we can have a uniform story to tell. [...] it is important to present to the public one message of our Robben Island experience.¹³

What mr Kathrada is suggesting is that a master narrative is formed out of the stories of a number of ex-prisoners. To him it is important, in the name of unity and nation-building, that only one story is told in the museum. In this case, the particular people who would contribute to the story would, one can suspect, be the ANC-members who were incarcerated for their political standpoint, not just anyone of the thousands of prisoners who spent years suffering on the island. Most importantly, the question is if members of other parties than the ANC would be asked to contribute to the story.

To return to the discussion of “Us” and “the Others” the above might be interpreted as different examples of the same phenomenon: in a new political and social setting it is important to (re)claim a history and make one’s voice heard. In the struggle for space and political power it is important to form a solid group which share common interests, and to define the boundaries against those who do not. The rewriting of history in South Africa has obviously very much to do with present day politics. And museums, as the above examples show, are certainly important actors in the process of recasting the line-up in the reconstructed history of the new nation. Only, in this new era where the overriding principle is multiculturalism, and the political goals are equality and unity, the markers are perhaps more political than they are national, cultural or racial. At least seemingly so.

The most interesting example, finally, of a museum’s approach to the challenges of renegotiating history and cultural heritage in a South African museum is perhaps the Iziko South African National Gallery of Art in Cape Town. The visitor is welcomed into a great hall with display-cases of artefacts and art objects on the floor, and significant pieces of South African art on the walls. But some frames are empty – there are “gaps in the collection.” This exhibition shows the problems of the legacies and collections of South African museums very clearly, where pieces by black or ‘colored’ artists were never obtained by the museum. Nowadays the museum, as the exhibition points out, has no funding to repair this damage and fill the blatant gaps. “If the task is to present the national legacy of South African art, how are we best to do this, considering the circumstances?”, the museum asks the visitors quite frankly. What is really asked is: “Who should be part of the national heritage and who can never be?” The question is if the people who were “the Others” before will ever really have a chance of becoming part of “Us”, due to economical and perhaps also other reasons.

12 Coombes (2003) p 71.

13 Coombes (2003) p 100.

Who Are “We” Now?

The purpose of this paper was to show different examples of how museums, some of which enjoy a national stature, in both Scandinavia and South Africa, have dealt with the challenges of multi-culturalism and, more specifically, the question of identity-formation and cultural heritage – in defining “Ourselves” by means of defining “the Other”. In a new political and social context, where multi-culturalism, rather than nationalism is the official principle, histories have to be renegotiated and museum collections problematized. I believe all of the museum exhibitions described above are examples of this.

The South African examples clearly show how the old distinction between “Us” and “the Others” in the official history and in the museums, was based on racial markers, where the whites were the “We” and the blacks and ‘coloreds’ were “the Others”. Those who have won the struggle and are now in political and, perhaps, economical power also won the right to rewrite and tell history from their point of view. This means that there are examples, for instance the District Six museum and The Origins Center, of how the tables are turned completely around and the “We” of yesterday are now the “Others” of today. There is also an interesting example (Iziko South African National Gallery of Art) of how the issue is not solved by the museum, but the problem pointed out, and then handed over to the visitors.

In *Kongospår*, the Scandinavian exhibition, one of the aims was to discuss and problematize the “Us” of the past in relation to the “Us” now. This might make the visitor think about structures and power-relations in colonial times, which also play a significant part in how the world functions today, and our own part in those power-relations. It is also possible to see how, in the process of distancing ourselves politically and ideologically today from the “Us” of yesterday, we run the risk of giving in to a sort of “historical colonialism”. The idea would then be that the “Us of today” are much more ‘enlightened’ than the “Us of yesterday” and therefore the “Us of yesterday” represent what we are not. They become the new “Others”. I believe this approach to the issue could be discerned in several museums in South Africa. In a society where multi-culturalism, and reconciliation as the case is in South Africa, has replaced nationalism as the overriding official ideological principle, and when group identity can no longer be formed under the notion of a (seemingly) homogenous nation, it seems as if one (politically correct?) way to address the issue of how to define “ourselves” in contrast to “the Others” is to use the historical notion of “We” as the contrasting party – “the Other”. If this is a current trend, and after trying to answer the question: “Who is ‘the Other’ now?” we might also reflect upon the problem: “Who, then, might ‘the Other’ be tomorrow”?

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Exhibitions and Museums

Kongospår was produced by Riksutställningar in cooperation with Etnografiska museet/Statens museer för världskultur in Sweden, and other ethnographical museums in the Nordic countries. It has been shown at Etnografiska Museet Stockholm (Nov 19, 2005 – April 17, 2006), Kulturernas Museum Helsingfors, Finland (May 08, 2006 – Oct 08, 2006), Nationalmuseet Köpenhamn, Danmark (Nov 04, 2006 – March 18, 2007) and Kulturhistorisk Museum, Oslo University (April 27, 2007 – Nov 18, 2007), and can presently be visited at Världskulturmuseet in Gothenburg, Sweden.

South African museums (visited May 28 to June 18, 2007):

The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town

District Six Museum, Cape Town

Iziko South African National Gallery of Art in Cape Town

Origins Center, Johannesburg

Robben Island Museum, Cape Town

Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria

Confronting the Other in the Nationalist Art History Narratives and National Museum of India

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As part of the struggle to achieve Indian Independence and to rewrite Orientalist narratives of history, Indian art scholars in the early decades of the 20th century authored a Nationalist art history that found a voice first in the pages of the art history journal, *Rupam*, and, in the late 1940s, promotion in the National Museum of India.¹ This Nationalist art history was forged out of criticism of earlier art historical narratives of Indian art created by Orientalist scholars around the turn of the century, and was tested in and by the mission, goals, and activities of the National Museum of India. As such, the National Museum became an arena for playing out and examining the separation that had been built, intellectually and philosophically, between India and Britain in the field of art history. This, I contest, was one way that India dealt with its complicated history with a ruling Other as it forged its new independent identity. As the confrontation with the Other was played out in the realm of interpretation and appreciation of Indian art, the museum revealed certain successes and limitations of the rewritten, re-appropriated art history. In my paper I discuss the Nationalist art history as an intellectual separation from colonial rule and the colonial Other, and then discuss the successes and limitations of the promotion of this art history in the institution of the National Museum.

1 The scholars I cite in my thesis in developing the British scholarship at the turn of the century considered themselves “Orientalists” and had training in Indian history and art history. It is for this reason that I, like Tapati Guha-Thakurta in her work, refer to them as such. The authors who contributed to *Rupam*, the art journal upon which I base my argument for the development of the Nationalist art history, are not as individuals necessarily Indian Nationalists. The scholarship in the journal as a whole, however, is – or is sympathetic and supportive of the Nationalist movement – and I use the term “Nationalist” broadly to indicate its anticolonial viewpoint.

Introduction

The story I seek to tell here not an institutional one, but rather it is the story of evolving discourses about object interpretation, and of the National Museum's role in promoting these discourses on a visible, national scale. In the process, the museum was forged out of a dialogue between what appear to be contradictions among these discourses. These contradictions, and the methods the museum's organizers use to handle them, reveal the ways in which art historical narratives – both Orientalist and Nationalist – provided the philosophical and methodological approach of the institution.

This story is an outcome of a new Nationalist art history developed in relation to India's past colonial narratives, and the National Museum's negotiation between them in its project of enshrining the state-sanctioned, post-independence version. It is a story of reworking an art history and giving it tangible shape in the institution of the museum. Although rooted in the art history put forth by *Rupam*, published in India between 1920–1930, the Nationalist art history narrative did not move directly from being housed in the pages of a journal to being enshrined within the walls of a museum. Rather than working completely in concert with the Nationalist art history, the National Museum ironically relied on older, colonial versions as well – those authored by British Orientalists in the late 19th century. The art history narrative that the museum arrived at and packaged was, like the National Museum itself, a result of both “old guard” approaches and Indian Nationalist critiques. My work describes how object narratives and museums can navigate between past, present, and a wished-for future to do the work of symbolically unifying and homogenizing the peoples of a nation, negotiating between a colonial past and an independent present, and in the process explore the complicated ways in which the Other is inextricably intertwined with the nation.

Orientalist Constructions of an Indian Art History

Orientalist constructions of, and relationships with, Indian art objects in the late 19th century tell much about what Britain sought to achieve in the colony. To the colonizers, India was a place that needed to be organized, ordered, and assigned a history.² It was a place, in these interpretations, that was static, unchanged, and deeply religious. It was seen as a form of traditional, pre-industrial Europe, with defined periods of progression and subsequent decline, as well as a place to be studied and observed for its mysterious, Western-influenced past.³ It was available to be mined for the exotic, fine craftsmanship that satisfied European demands for foreign goods and resources.

In my analysis, I draw mainly on the works of Percy Brown, Sir George Birdwood, Sir George Watt, James Fergusson and Hermann Goetz – sources that focus largely on what Birdwood deemed Indian “industrial” arts.⁴ In their writings, these scholars create a gulf

2 Many scholars have focused on these ideas. See Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Romila Thapar, “Politics and the Rewriting of History in India,” *Critical Quarterly* 47 (1-2): 195-203; Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

3 The Western-influence I refer to here is the supposed one of the Greco-Romans (see the following section). See the works of Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

4 By “industrial” arts Birdwood referred to decorative, ornamental art forms that, in his opinion, were not governed by the same rules of “decorum” that “high” arts were subject to. Birdwood, according to Mitter, was not attacking the forms of Indian art per se but rather the religious meanings of these forms. Birdwood compared Hindu temples to Gothic cathedrals, stating that the architecture of the former “expressed no noble universal ideas.” When confronted with a statue of the Buddha as a counterargument to his claim that

between fine and ornamental or “industrial” arts – arts with a utilitarian or functional purpose – by discussing the function, history and craft of the pieces, and their religious iconography. Throughout their careers, most of these scholars held to their conviction that fine art did not exist in India. Brown stated in an exhibition catalogue that fine arts in India were “little known and less practiced.”⁵ Birdwood infamously held to his conviction that fine arts did not exist in India – although he produced several monographs on the subject of Indian art, and was instrumental in representing India at the International Exhibitions from 1857 to 1901.

These scholars read Indian art/archaeological objects as “evidence” of particular historical narratives that helped justify imperial rule. They presented the contradictory readings of India-as-past on the one hand – static, unchanging, rooted in religion and unquestioned heritage; and India-as-museum on the other – a somewhat fragile showcase of crafts, goods, and methods.

Firmly Fixed and Incapable of Change: India-as-Past

One way of imagining India in art historical/archaeological scholarship at the turn of the 20th century was that the country, its people, and its people were firmly fixed in the past. Western scholars imagined they had stepped into a zone untouched by the changes that had recently brought such a huge impact upon the European social and political landscapes – namely, industrialization.⁶ The religion, social structure, and cultural environment of India, in this model, had existed as it was for countless years and, because of being set in its backwards-looking ways, was impenetrable to change. Any change at all was a decline from a more pious religious past, rather than progression towards a progressive future.⁷

Scholars locked India in the past in part by the designating objects not as “fine art” but rather as “archaeology.” This designation placed analytical focus not on aesthetics but on religious iconographical motifs. Furthermore, it emphasized a discussion of the utilitarian or functional roles of the pieces, while also denying the presence of any individualized artistic expression. Cultural value in this narrative was assigned to the bygone “golden age” of the Gupta period.⁸ From this supposed “golden age,” Indian art, culture, and social structure had declined into the present “depraved” age contemporary with colonial rule. Past cultural greatness, evidenced in art (“archaeological”) objects, was largely associated with Buddhism and Greco-Roman influence, and its value and influence was seen as unavailable to present-day Indians. When art created in the period contemporary to these scholars is discussed, it is generally to bemoan the decline in artistic skillfulness and to underline the loss of a “golden age” in the past. This mysterious past, it was believed, had to be instead uncovered, retrieved, and interpreted – in a sense, rescued – by colonial scholars. The need for Indian past to be “rescued” reveals a contradiction inherent in this model of India – India is a landscape untouched by modern influences, but, at the same time, is severed from its own distant past of

fine art did not exist in India, Birdwood reportedly stated “a boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol of passionless purity and serenity of soul.” See Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922, Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51-52 and corresponding footnote.

5 See Partha Mitter 1994, 285.

6 See the comments of Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 78, 80.

7 See the comments of Birdwood on the “change and decay” of Hindus from the time of the Ramayana to the present, in *The Industrial Arts of India* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1880), 1.

8 The Gupta dynasty lasted from c. 320-mid 400s, although some scholars push it later, into the 700s. Much of the art is from the later period, but by this time the dynasty had lost many of its territories. There is little indication of direct imperial patronage during this period, and many of the statues appear to be commissioned by a variety of individuals.

cultural greatness. The past that India was supposed to have been locked in, then, is a constructed past falling between India's actual history of earlier great empires and India's imagined future of potential industrialization. Throughout this narrative, India is a passive recipient of outside, Western influence – its culture was elevated when Greco-Roman style entered, and degraded when the vehicle for this influence, Buddhism, departed.

In Need of Preservation Against Outside Influences: India-as-Museum

Although on the one hand India needed to be shaped by the cultural and intellectual influences of the West, on the other India was in need of preservation from outside influences. Orientalist scholars at the late 19th/early 20th centuries viewed India itself as a museum of early Europe – untouched and unchanged by industrialization, available for research and observation. Simultaneously, India was sufficiently exotic and fragile enough to need preservation against the stronger forces of the West. Through objects collection, codification, and presentation, this unchanging, exotic “past” civilization could be studied and viewed, and historical narratives interpreted.

These scholars looked to “traditional” societies like India to fill their nostalgic need for a time untouched by industrialization, and any “corrupting” or “cheapening” influence on Indian artists and artisans was seen as negative. They wanted to find an India that was exotic and traditional enough to meet European, industrial-era demands for custom and ritual. India and its arts should ideally represent what Europeans had lost in the Industrial Revolution.⁹ Every “cheap toy and earthen vessel” was, in India, a work of art, because they were hand, not machine, wrought.¹⁰ The maintenance of tradition was no longer available in the West, but, with some care and guidance on the part of the colonizers, it was possible to maintain it in India. India and its art were looked to as a last bastion of simple, uncorrupted, “traditional” style. India was, in a sense, a gallery of old-style ways and old-style arts to be viewed, studied, and preserved (and exploited) by the West. The “quality” of these Indian arts is highly dependent on the pieces’ “traditional” characteristics and lack of “foreign” influence. Indian art was expected to exist as in a museum case; art had to be sufficiently “ancient” and devoid of outside influence. Present-day artists should embrace supposed cultural stagnancy and make their arts and wares as though untouched by the passing of time, in an act of preservation.

These narratives of India-as-past and India-as-museum cast India as a country that, although once great, had fallen into decline. Its present condition was hopelessly separated from both the glorious “golden age” of past empires and from the superior culture of Europe. It was instead not a site for promise, growth, or potential, but a site in need of management, and a site for nostalgia for an invented past and romantic notions of an exotic land. As such, India was unable to author its own histories and to read into them strength, equal status with the West, and active influence on the art histories of other nations and regions. This Orientalist art history, as I show in the following section, was directly contested by later scholars (Indian and Western) in the art journal *Rupam* in efforts to establish an indigenous art history.

9 See the comments of Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 80.

10 However, “this is not meant to rank the decorative art of India with the fine art of Europe.” George C. M. Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1880), 131.

Rupam: The Creation of a Nationalist Art History

The scholarly art journal, *Rupam* was published between 1920 and 1930 in conjunction with the Indian Society of Oriental Art of Calcutta, which was led by Rabindranath Tagore.¹¹ The Indian Society of Oriental Art sought to make India an active creator of its own unique artistic tradition.¹² Correspondingly, the editors of *Rupam* sought to rewrite Indian art history and the meanings of historic art pieces. The journal featured articles by Indian and Western scholars in English. During the shaping of the Nationalist movement and the struggle for Indian Independence, *Rupam* worked to construct the types of dialogues that became the basis of the decision-making process in the building of collections and exhibits of the National Museum. Several recurring writers for *Rupam* later played direct roles in the founding and operations of the museum, most notably V.S. Agrawala and C. Sivaramamurti.¹³ Like the National Museum, *Rupam* was a collaboration of Western and Eastern scholars. Indian scholars appearing in the journal were, by and large, Nationalist-minded, Western/English-educated male art scholars, many of whom were – or would soon be – affiliated directly with museums and exhibitions of Indian art. Westerners whose articles appeared in the journal were art scholars who, having been more adequately and rigorously trained in South Asian languages, history, and art styles than their predecessors, wished to set the art history record straight by critiquing and revising earlier, outdated Orientalist scholarship. The desire of these Western scholars to reshape old arguments while projecting a new way of approaching Indian art objects proved useful to the Nationalist agenda.

In authoring a new art history, scholars addressed, discounted, or rewrote earlier notions. *Rupam* scholars then promoted a new art history in line with the Nationalist agenda and vision for the nation. This new indigenous art history was a new way of interpreting Indian art that was based on a continuity with Indian's "glorious" artistic and cultural past, and the affirmation of Indian art as a separate but equal entity in terms of the art of the West – one whose influence played a role in the shaping of world art history. Further, it evoked a cultural unity – or, perhaps, homogeneity – of the nation and its people.

Breaking with the Past: Shaking Off the Outmoded Work of Earlier Scholars

Rupam contributors targeted earlier colonial scholars – Birdwood, Watt, Brown –referring to the "mystic imaginations" and "lack of taste" of these "certain amateurs," stating that this earlier work has resulted in many "mistaken viewpoints."¹⁴ They denounced notions of a lost golden age by drawing on the works and time periods valued by Orientalist scholars and establishing direct links between that past and the present day, denoting the vibrancy and skill alive in contemporary Indian art. Indian art objects were discussed as "fine art" rather than as "archaeology," denoting modernity and progression,¹⁵ making them more immediately comparable to the fine art of the West, and offering a sense of continuity between past and present. The spiritual or religious nature of the objects was de-emphasized; the discussion was

11 After 1930 the journal was published as *The Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*.

12 See Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India: 1850 – 1922: Occidental Orientations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 12-13.

13 Agrawala organized the Delhi Exhibition of Indian Art, 1948; Sivaramamurti managed the transition of the Exhibition's art collection to the National Museum in 1956. Agrawala, originally a Sanskritist, served as antiquities curator of several Indian museums and championed the Hindi language movement. Sivaramamurti acted as keeper of the archaeological collections of the Government Museum in Madras and the India Museum in Calcutta before worked with the National Museum.

14 E. Blochet, "On a Book of Kings of About 1200 A.D.," *Rupam* (41), 1930: 4.

15 See Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 59.

instead moved instead towards one of aesthetics. Historical foreign influence on Indian art was mitigated by focusing instead on the influence that Indian style and art philosophy have had abroad, particularly in East Asia; the history of art in India was effectively rewritten in *Rupam* to be active rather than passive.

Establishing a New Art History in the Pages of *Rupam*

This new indigenous, Nationalist art history recast ideas about past glory and forgotten skill and expanded the heritage of a rich Indian culture into the present day. Since art, as I demonstrate in the following section, would have a new role as cultural educator following Independence, scholars had to emphasize its universal appeal and ability to speak to a wide audience. At the same time, it had to be uniquely Indian, and just beyond the scope of what a Westerner trained in Classical art could grasp (and therefore critique). Being unique meant that Indian art had some tangible value in the discourse on world art history; this value would aid India in its broader struggle for its identity as an independent nation.

Art therefore had to act as a vehicle for teaching and communicating “Indianess” while serving as a repository for Indian identity. The new art history had to signal progress and autonomy, and indicate forward-looking modernity anchored in uniquely Indian tradition. It had to break with stereotypes about Indian backwardness without losing a uniquely Indian identity. In order to do this, it had to first be established as a high cultural form (no longer with the designation of “primitive” or “traditional”), and an equal player with equal import as Western art. Secondly, a grasp of its motifs and designs had to be deemed available to all Indians as part of their cultural heritage. Thirdly, Indian art in the Nationalist art history model had to act as a vehicle for educating the masses via its presence in museums. Here, objects are recast to serve as “evidence” of a very different story than the one they were called upon to tell before and around the turn the century. These new narratives set the stage for the interpretation of Indian art, culture, and history sanctified in the National Museum.

The National Museum: Reworking the Past, Promoting the Future

The successes and limitations of the Nationalist art history are visible in the ways in which the National Museum assembled an art history narrative – in its promotion of a national heritage, and in its performance of the social roles it was called upon to play.

The specific goal of the National Museum was to establish, house, and display an Indian national heritage of art objects. As a state-sanctioned institution, the National Museum, along with the national heritage it presented, served social roles in the newly-independent nation – communicating both inwards and outwards to the Indian people and to the outside world. In its role as keeper of national heritage, the museum inherited the various narratives surrounding these objects that I discuss in previous chapters – those authored by Orientalist scholars, and those formulated in the pursuit of a new art history in *Rupam*. In establishing its exhibition and collection strategies and its own art historical narrative, the museum negotiated these earlier narratives and arrived at a version informed by both the colonial and the nationalist pasts. Rather than rejecting one narrative for the other, the museum – itself the result of a conjunction of colonial and nationalist efforts – showcased imperialist methods alongside nationalist ideologies. This negotiation revealed the lasting historical influence of the former, and the inherent limitations of the latter.

I focus on a narrow scope of the National Museum’s history – from 1947 to 1949. This, I contend, is the moment when the approach, policies, and focus of the National Museum were decided. This moment occurred when the decision was made to transform the objects and philosophy behind the temporary, traveling “Exhibit of Indian Art” into the core collection and philosophy of a permanent, state-sanctioned institution. The exhibit, shown in London in 1947–1948 and in Delhi in the state rooms at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the final months of

1948, consisted of objects borrowed from museums and private collectors across India. At the close of the exhibit, requests were released to the loaning museums and collectors, urging them to surrender object ownership to what was to become the National Museum.¹⁶ A few months later, in August 1949, the National Museum was inaugurated. Until the mid-1950s, it essentially remained a permanent version of the temporary exhibit – consisting of the same pieces, and remaining in the state rooms. In the years to follow, it would actively increase its staff and collections.¹⁷ I focus on the short span of time when the exhibit, without changing significantly its content or display, was deemed representative of the art history of the nation and came to be renamed the National Museum. In developing my argument and exploring the philosophy and policies of the National Museum, I rely on the *Exhibition of Indian Art, Held at the Government House November 6 – December 31, 1948*, and on the related *Indian Art Through the Ages*.

Assembling an Art History Narrative

The National Museum's art history was based largely on the philosophies of the art history established in *Rupam*, but was packaged in a fashion more akin to the scholarship of earlier Orientalist scholars writing at the turn of the century. The image of India promoted by The National Museum adhered to the goals of the Nationalist art history in that, like the art journal, the museum sought to celebrate and glorify India's past greatness, present potential, and active role in world art history. At the same time, the museum's collection and exhibit methods were based on those suggested by Orientalist scholars and used in colonial-era British museums in India. Closely following Indian Independence, at a time when one might expect a decided rejection of the nation's colonial past in its struggle to promote its own identity, the museum instead negotiated between the two art histories. The National Museum adhered to each of the Nationalist art history goals previously described, even as it relied on colonial-era museological methods in achieving the presentation of these goals.

The National Museum, like *Rupam*, acknowledged and celebrated a past "golden age" while linking it to modern, present day potential for greatness. This was achieved by the museum's efforts to expand the past "golden age" to encompass not just a segment of Indian history – the Gupta period, for example – but instead Indian history in its entirety. This method eliminated the need to discuss periods of greatness as though they were contained within periods of cultural decline. Instead, the history of India is depicted as one long stretch of high culture, one vast blanket "golden age" that covered all of Indian art and cultural history from the Harrappan civilization to the present day.

V.S. Agrawala's introduction to the *Exhibition of Indian Art* guide achieves this with its celebratory tone and discussion of the "golden age" of the Gupta period.¹⁸ Agrawala states that the Gupta period was not the beginning and end of great art and culture; rather, it merely

16 In at least one case, that of the Central Asian Antiquities Museum at New Delhi, a museum ceased to exist because its entire collection was subsumed by what became the National Museum. The fact of this "request" (or, perhaps, demand) for ownership is widely documented; see I.D. Mathur, "National Museum of India: A Retrospect," *National Museum Bulletin No. 9*, (Delhi: National Museum, 2002) for an institutional perspective. See also Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), Chapter 6 but especially page 179.

17 In 1955 building began on the new (and current) location of the National Museum at Rajpath and Janpath. In 1957 control of the museum was shifted to the Ministry of Education; following this shift the museum began to significantly increase both its staff and its collections using funds from the Art Purchase Committee.

18 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Held at the Government House, November 6-December 31, 1948, Catalogue* (New Delhi: Department of Archaeology, 1948).

“ushered in the Golden Age of Indian art” that went on to extend into the present day. According to the guide, the objects in the exhibit attest that artistic greatness was achieved at all points in India history. Accordingly, each time period and genre discussed by Agrawala was given equally high status. Thus, he remarked on the “highly developed civilizations” at Mohenjodaro and Harrappa, and described Chola period (10–13th century) bronzes as the “highest examples of metal casting,” Rajasthani pictorial art from the Rajputana era (16–17th century) as indicative of the “Indian genius,” the Ajanta cave paintings as the “national pictorial archives of India.”¹⁹ Even the Mughals – long downplayed, demonized, or ignored by both earlier British and Indian nationalist scholars – were recast by Agrawala as “enlightened patrons of art, under whom architecture, painting, textiles, and carving burst into a new efflorescence.”²⁰ Agrawala finds not a limited period or specific genre in which Indian artistic greatness is evident, but instead an extended list of examples across time and genre.

Agrawala also relates Indian present with Indian past by drawing an unbroken line between the two. Thus we are told that the history of fine Indian textiles extends from the Vedic period unbroken into the 19th century. Agrawala also states that the history of Indian art opened “in the Indus Valley, in the third millennium B.C.,” by “the highly developed Mohenjodaro and Harrappan civilizations,” thereby claiming the ancient advanced inhabitants of the subcontinent as Indians, as though the nation of India and the concept of a national art had been conceived of in the third millennium.²¹ The greatness of the past, whether it was of the Vedic period or of the ancient Indus Valley civilizations, can be accessed by modern-day Indians through more recent art.

This connection with the modern day is strengthened in other publications affiliated with the National Museum’s collections. The booklet, *Indian Art Through the Ages*, was published in 1948, at the time of the exhibition in Delhi. It contains Agrawala’s text verbatim from the official exhibit guide, but features an additional nine-page section on modern Indian painting.²² This additional section consists of a brief introduction to the Bengal and Bombay schools of painting, words of praise for the artists by art historians (including *Rupam* editor Gangoly and several frequent contributors), and eight pages of full-color prints of the paintings of artists such as Abinindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Gaganendranath Tagore, and Jamini Roy.

There were no modern Indian art works on display in the Delhi exhibit – although several had been featured in a smaller section of the London exhibit – but the book includes them within the fold of its timeline of great Indian art. By following a description of the museum’s much older collections with a section on modern, nationalist artists, the text creates a direct line between ancient art (Harrappan, Gupta, Chola) and modern art (works by Tagore, Jamini Roy, Nandalal Bose). The booklet places the works of Tagore, Mazumdar, and Chowdhury within the fold of the expansive “golden age.” It calls upon the greatness of the past to lend legitimization to the present, stating that both are connected to a common Indian cultural greatness.

The approach used in by Agrawala and the *Indian Art Through the Ages* booklet is made clearer by contrast with the text of the London exhibit guide. The tone of Basil Gray’s introduction to the exhibit paintings is decidedly less celebratory in tone, as he discusses the

19 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, x-xxvi.

20 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, xix. This approach has the related effect of creating a national unity; I discuss this created unity later in the present chapter.

21 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, x.

22 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1948). These nine pages are significant, considering they make up almost half of the total number of pages in the booklet.

“small influence” of Gujarat and Rajasthan, and the “not yet fully developed” style employed by painters in the Mughal tradition.²³ Gray, head of the Oriental department at the British Museum between 1945–1969, described the influx of quality and significance that occurred throughout Indian art history. He, like Watt and Birdwood before him, spoke of “golden ages” and subsequent artistic declines that punctuated Indian art history. Art from different ages is judged, rather than being described as having equal significance or quality – and some of it falls short. By omitting the rise-and-falls of Indian art and cultural history, the Delhi exhibit guide instead puts all Indian art on the same high-quality level and expands the “golden age” onward, unbroken, into the present day.

In addition to addressing and establishing India’s long history of greatness, the Nationalist art history also made India an active player in world art history. In the same manner, the National Museum promoted this active role in its presentation of the interactions between the West and India, and between East Asia and India. Much as in the pages of *Rupam*, the National Museum presented Indian art as separate in philosophy but at least equal in stature to Western art. Through its collections and displays, it simultaneously neutralized the portrayal of India as passive receiver of artistic and cultural influence and promoted the nation instead as an active player in world art history.

Where *Rupam* established India’s active and equal status by noting differences between Indian art and Western art – focusing on the accessibility and innate spirituality of the former and the frivolous eliteness of the latter – the National Museum established this status instead by noting similarities.²⁴ In his introduction to the Delhi catalogue, Agrawala described Indian art using Greco-Roman metaphors (“springing into full magnificent form like Minerva born in panoply”), in effect equating the motifs and spirit of the two traditions and conflating the greatness of the Western tradition with that of India.²⁵

At other times, divisions between Indian and Western styles are diminished or removed completely. Artists are described as being above the language and confines of nationality.²⁶ In the section on modern painting in *Indian Art Through the Ages*, artists are presented as sophisticated pickers and choosers of stylistic influences from Europe, China, and Japan. Thus, Abanindranath Tagore was introduced as being capable of appealing not only to “the Hindu mind,” but was also able to “perfect” and incorporate the artistic techniques of both Persia and Japan.²⁷ Gaganendranath Tagore was described as “the most idealist and imaginative cubistic and impressionistic artist.”²⁸ A quote from Stella Kramrisch states that the art of Jamini Roy utilized the “universals of form which are understood by all who know art, whether from the East or of the West.”²⁹ Similarly, D.P. Roy Chowdhury “combines harmoniously and very ably the technical features of both Eastern and Western art.”³⁰ Artistic trends are read not as specific to “West” or “East,” but as non-region-specific universalities.

23 Basil Gray, “Painting,” in *The Art of India and Pakistan: A Commemorative Catalogue of the Exhibition Held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1947-8*, ed. Royal Academy of Arts and Leigh Ashton, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1950), 95.

24 The exhibit and museum guides continued to discuss the accessibility and innate spirituality of Indian art, but its effect is more towards establishing a national unity; see my section on the formation of a national heritage in this chapter.

25 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, x.

26 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1948), 24.

27 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1948, 24.

28 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1948, 24.

29 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1948, 24.

30 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1948, 24.

Furthermore, in these quotes Indian artists were depicted as active agents, rather than passive receivers, who were in the pursuit of a uniquely Indian art. The artists and their art were spoken about in the same breath and as having the same level of status as those of the West. Modern Indian artists were not passive receptors or followers of the stylistic influences of other nations' art; they instead acted as connoisseurs of world art trends, past and present.

Art, both Western and Eastern, and the similarities between them were talked about in broad and general terms that encompassed all time periods and all regional variations. In effect, the difference between the two is watered down and neutralized. This, in addition to the equated status of Indian artists in the above quotes with artists the world over – both in the East and in the West – had the effect of referring to a broad world art history, in which Eastern and Western artists are equal players.

Where in *Rupam* foreign influence is downplayed or countered, in the Delhi exhibit and in the museum it is ignored altogether. There is no mention whatsoever of any pivotal or devastating outside stylistic influence – Western or otherwise – in the Delhi guide. When outside influence is mentioned, as it is in *Indian Art Through the Ages* in the section on modern painting, a decidedly Indian grounding of the schools is first established – “some of the artists have imitated modern European styles but their work is essentially Indian in character.”³¹ Further, “for the first twenty-five years, the school was Oriental in inspiration and technique, but later some of the artists were influenced by modern European and more specifically by French schools.”³² These comments affirm the “Indianness” of the modern Indian painting while reducing Western artistic influence, and all but canceling out that of the British. The history of Western stylistic influence on Indian painting schools and works of art is explained away as something Indian artists dabbled in, together with “Chinese and Japanese styles,” as part of their “spirit of the quest” in exploring new inspiration.³³ Western influence is represented as something that Indian artists experimented with – not succumbed to – in the course of their work.

The neutralization of Indian vs. Western stylistic and historical differences and “foreign invasion” in the guide to the Delhi exhibit is more obvious when it is compared to the approach of the London guide. The London guide clearly distinguished between “Western” and “Indian” art styles and described stylistic influence as flowing from West to East. It devoted much time to discussions of Western influence on Indian art, listing the impacts chronologically and thus presenting a long history of Indian development that resulted from Western guidance. Basil Gray, for example, inserted Western stylistic and aesthetic influence into his history of Indian painting, remarking on the “profound effects” that the Jesuit missionaries and their illustrated Bibles had on horizon and perspective in Mughal paintings.³⁴ Indian art is portrayed as a fragile thing, which, for better or for worse, had a history of succumbing to stronger outside influences. Mughal styles, for example, “obscured traditional Indian designs,” and Persian art had lasting and very significant impact.³⁵ The

31 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1948), 24.

32 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1948), 24.

33 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1948), 24.

34 Basil Gray, “Painting,” in *The Art of India and Pakistan: A Commemorative Catalogue of the Exhibition Held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1947-8*, ed. Royal Academy of Arts and Leigh Ashton, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1950), 95.

35 Royal Academy of Arts, ed. 1950, 201 and 89, respectively.

London guide searched Indian art for evidence of the artistic influences of “foreign invaders,” while implying and describing India’s inability to counter this artistic infiltration.³⁶

Even as it worked to achieve the goals of the Nationalist art history formulated in *Rupam* – displaying examples of past achievements to signify present greatness and presenting India as an active, equal player in world art history – the museum utilized methods that were decidedly Orientalist-derived. This resulted in the performance of the Nationalist art history, packaged in the format of earlier colonial scholarship. The museum’s collection focus was overwhelmingly on ancient objects – the same objects valued highly by Orientalist scholars – to the exclusion of modern works, although in the Nationalist narrative and in *Rupam* modern art plays a significant role. The original Delhi exhibition that came to form the core of the National Museum’s collection was heavily concentrated on pre-18th century sculpture, bronzes, and paintings. Such a collection focus might be read as an answer to the emphasis on “golden age archaeology” by Orientalist scholars. Having a strong “archaeological” core of objects within the collection enabled the National Museum to tap into a certain historical space within national narratives.³⁷

The museum relied on older, Orientalist ideas not only in terms of its collection and focus, but also for direction in its organizational structure. According to the Delhi exhibit and the museum guides, the display was organized in the manner promoted by Watt in the Victorian era, but rejected by *Rupam* scholars in the 1920s and 1930s – by type of object rather than by chronology or regional context.³⁸ The display was organized in the broad categories of sculpture, paintings, bronzes, and textiles. The choice to display objects in this way can be read as an incorporation of older ideas, a negotiation between the methods established in the first, British-run museums in India and the newer methods set forth by Indian art historians and scholars.

The National Museum, then, was shaped by several key elements of the art history presented in *Rupam*. It too strove to present the art history of India as being part of a long tradition of cultural greatness, one that developed alongside or independent from – rather than as a result of – Western art and stylistic influence. However, the museum reveals not only the tenets of a Nationalist art history, but also the history authored by turn-of-the-century Orientalists. As such, the art history promoted and presented by the National Museum reflects both its colonial and nationalist past and present. The National Museum went beyond simply repackaging and promoting art history narratives, however, and in the following section I explore how the tenets of the museum’s art history narrative were used to enact and display a national art heritage of India. This national heritage, like the art history displayed in the National Museum, was the result of both Orientalist and Nationalist discourses. These two strands of thought, taken together in the museum, inform the creation of India’s national art heritage.

36 What constitutes “non-foreign” India is difficult to decipher; British contributors to the London exhibition guide separate “Indians” from “Sikh, Nepalese, and Muslim invaders.” Muslim influence, for example, is described as having “obscured ‘traditional’ Indian designs” – “traditional” Indian designs being “hand painting, brocading, resist dyeing, and embroidery.” Royal Academy of Arts, ed. 1950, 96-97.

37 Kristy Phillips, *The National Museum of India: A Monument to and of the “Nation”* (unpublished paper presented at NaMu conference, Korrkoping, Sweden, February 27, 2007), 3.

38 For Watt’s original organizational suggestions, see Sir George Watt, *Indian Art at Delhi, 1903, Being the Official Catalogue of the Delhi Exhibition, 1902-1903* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1903). For an attack of Watt’s suggestions in *Rupam*, see G., “Review of the Catalogue of the George Eumorfopoulos Collection of Chinese, Korean [sic] and Siamese Paintings by Laurence Binyon of the British Museum,” *Rupam* (41): 1930, 19. This method of display organization continues to be used in the current exhibits of the National Museum.

Promoting a National Heritage

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, envisioned the National Museum to be a place where Indians could collectively take pride in their pasts while being inspired towards the future.³⁹ The National Museum was a public, accessible, state-sanctioned, institution that acted as presenter and preserver of the nation's art and art history. In the institution of the museum, the tenets of the Nationalist art history were given a state-sanctioned and more visible face than they had in the scholarly journal. Objects that were deemed representative of the nation's art were appropriated from museums and private collectors in India for inclusion in the National Museum. In accordance with its role as *the* national museum of India, the museum was responsible for collecting and assembling the objects that were to be considered India's national heritage, and for making them accessible to the public.⁴⁰ Through the museum, objects were designated as national resources that belonged to the people of the nation via the National Museum.

The very existence of publications like *Indian Art Through the Ages* is one example of the reliance on the National Museum to provide a definitive art history and national art heritage. The booklet consists of text produced explicitly for the National Museum's collections and exhibit; there is, however, no mention of the National Museum or of the original author, Agrawala. That exhibit itself becomes the history of Indian art "through the ages," the definitive art history of the nation, and the description of it is quoted without citation as though it were absolute fact. That the National Museum has the authority to assemble and write the history of Indian art, and collect the objects that make up the nation's art heritage is recognized by the Indian government in publishing the booklet.

In order to comply with the mission and purpose of the National Museum, the national heritage it presented and preserved had to be accessible to the public. Just as Indian art had earlier been touted as a necessary component to Indian cultural and spiritual life – unlike the "elitist" art of the West, accessible only to the select few – the museum was expected to be a readily-available and integral part of the lives of the Indian people. Objects had been appropriated from smaller, more remote institutions and from the private collections of individuals in order that the national heritage of India might be viewed and appreciated by a larger segment of the population. Admission prices are listed in the Delhi guide as having been at the cost of four annas per person, with lower prices for children and students. The exhibit was advertised as being open every day of the week except Saturday, for an average of 6 hours a day. The sales counter sold reproductions of art images and photo prints, in addition to the exhibit guide. A series of fourteen lectures was carried out in the span of two months. Looking at the guidebook, the exhibition had every appearance of being reasonably accessible to the public.⁴¹

In addition to being – or at least appearing to be – a physical space that was accessible to the public, the museum had to present and arrange its content to be accessible to the masses. In order to the claim the existence of a national heritage in a country with such diversity as

39 For more on Nehru's role in the formation of the National Museum, see Kristy Phillips, *The National Museum of India: A Monument to and of the "Nation."* (paper presented at NaMu conference, Korrkoping, Sweden, February 26-28, 2007).

40 Preziosi and Farago argue that the very concept of a "national culture" is made possible by national museums. See Donald Preziosi and Claire J. Farago, *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishers, 2004), 5.

41 In reality, however, its accessibility was limited. Lectures were specialized and given mostly in English; the building was in the protected governmental sector of Delhi; limited hours and admission prices required leisure hours and disposable income. For a more on these difficulties and a description of the role that architecture in particular played, see Kristy Phillips, *A Museum for the Nation: Publics and Politics at the National Museum of India*, (unpublished PhD dissertation at the University of Minnesota, 2006).

India, and to select the items that would represent this heritage, the National Museum downplayed regional, religious, and class difference. It did this by referring to a fictive homogenous “Indian” experience, by discussing art in terms of aesthetics rather than iconography, and by erasing the distinction between folk or industrial and fine art.

Just as *Rupam* did twenty years earlier, the National Museum spoke about Indian art as being inherently appealing and accessible to Indians, in effect unifying Indians and homogenizing their interests and experiences. The museum projected a common Indian ownership of all periods, styles, influence, and times by praising each with equal enthusiasm in its catalog (“each specimen seems to offer a rich feast to the eye”), by referring to what was projected as a common and overwhelming “nation-wide interest” in the Delhi exhibit, and by discussing the museum pieces’ ability to “reveal the mind of the Indian people” as though a collective mind existed.⁴² Art in India, according to the Delhi guide, acted as “a mirror” of Indian society and was necessary for the “comprehension of all that India has stood for through the ages.”⁴³ Art itself is called “a chapter of pre-eminent glory in the history of the Indian people,” as though there was one history of India and one homogenous Indian people.⁴⁴ Indian society, according to the Delhi guide, was a single entity with a common experience, rather than a conglomeration of regional, religious, and class differences, and was capable of being represented by the set of art objects housed in the National Museum.

The guide could discuss a homogenous Indian experience partly because of its reference to the aesthetic, rather than iconographical, elements of Indian art. This designation is akin to the efforts of *Rupam* to steer the discussion from “archeological” to “artistic.” The objects in the National Museum’s collection were discussed in terms of aesthetics, the appreciation of which was available to all Indians, rather than in terms of a specific religion, which would have emphasized difference. Focusing on aesthetics – form, stylistic motifs, and technique – diffused or avoided discussions of religious iconography.

Each section describing a different genre in the Delhi guide devotes more time to discussions of form and technique than to discussions of religious motifs. The guide states that objects were chosen for their “intrinsic aesthetic appeal” – because of this aesthetic appeal the objects are denoted as “something great” with the power to “move millions with [their] emotional and spiritual appeal.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, the meaning and significance attached to the pieces is aesthetic. Thus, the most notable features of paintings with Jain and Hindu motifs are not their iconographical meanings, but rather the execution of the facial features and artistic perspective.⁴⁶ Similarly, any “divine majesty” evident in the *yaksha/yahkshi* sculptures in the collection are a result of their aesthetically “magnificent form, rather than [of their] spiritual expression.”⁴⁷

Just as in *Rupam*, any reference to religion used the vague and inclusive language of “spirituality.” Art containing religious motifs was described as representative not of specific – and therefore segregated – religious beliefs, but rather the general and “universal” qualities of

42 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Catalogue* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1948), iv-v.

43 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Catalogue* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1948), ix.

44 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, iv.

45 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Held at the Government House, November 6-December 31, 1948, Catalogue* (New Delhi: Department of Archaeology, 1948), ix.

46 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Held at the Government House, November 6-December 31, 1948, Catalogue* (New Delhi: Department of Archaeology, 1948), xv.

47 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, x.

“humanity, spirit of freedom,” “order hope, strength, and beauty.”⁴⁸ Painted works in general were said to “form the comprehensive record of the religious and emotional life of the people” – all Indian religions and emotions were gathered into a collective experience that unites “the [Indian] people” as one communal entity.⁴⁹ As in *Rupam*, the Ajanta cave paintings – held in esteem by both Orientalist British scholars and later Nationalist scholars – are called the “national art” of India, accessible to all Indians regardless of their religion.⁵⁰ In establishing a national heritage, the National Museum rendered religious art approachable and applicable to all Indians, regardless of their individual religious beliefs.

Similar to the way in which it erased religious difference by ignoring it or referring to it vaguely as “spirituality,” the National Museum erased the dilemma of designating objects as “industrial” or “fine” art by raising the status of crafts to that of art. Because the design and form of folk art was often rooted in regional variation and was created by traditional artisans, and fine art was largely the domain of the elite and educated, discussing “folk art” alongside “fine art” – and giving equal importance to each – de-emphasized regional and class difference.

The modern painters discussed in *Indian Art Through the Ages* text were said to have staged the modern “revival of the art forms of India” following careful study of both the “Ajanta and Bagh, Mughal, Persian, and Rajput paintings” and “folk and village art.” Courtly arts and traditional crafts were given equal significance in their power to influence these esteemed modern artists. Although ancient sculpture and courtly paintings outnumbered crafts by far in the museum’s collection, what region-specific crafts were featured were given equal time and parallel status with ancient and courtly art. The *patola*, or silk sari specific to the region of Gujarat, for example, was given its own section in the Delhi exhibition guide and called a “marvel of technical skill.”⁵¹ Dacca muslins are described as having “attained the status of a national art, backed by the most intricate process of spinning, weaving, darning, washing, and packing;” the Dacca weaver’s skill has “never been beaten either in India or out of it.”⁵² In the National Museum, well-constructed, representative crafts are as much a component of national heritage as ancient sculpture and courtly fine arts.

In this way, the museum incorporated objects with specific regional and religious meanings and values into the fold of a common “Indian” experience by canceling their specific contexts. Objects on display became not indicators of difference but of a collective experience that was meant to be celebrated. Creating this fictive common Indian experience, and pretending that the whole of the Indian population was welcome and able to join in its celebration, was important to the museum’s mission of presenting and preserving India’s national heritage. In doing so, the museum was able to take on specific social roles in the service of the nation. In the following section I discuss how National Museum, as keeper of the national heritage, performed its appointed social roles.

Performance of the National Museum’s Social Roles

Due to its location in the institution of the national museum, this resulting heritage is put to social use and has particular social roles to play. As preserver and protector of India’s national heritage, the National Museum was called upon to perform several social roles. Housed in the institution of the museum, art history was thus capable of meeting the demands of the nation.

48 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1948), 2.

49 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1948, 5.

50 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, xiv.

51 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, xxiii.

52 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, xxii.

Accordingly, the National Museum served as “proof” that India was a civilized nation to those outside its borders, and acted as an education center to those within. As such it was an arena for both inward and outward communication – presenting a public face of the nation to itself as it sought to educate and inspire pride in its citizens, and presenting a unified front and glorious heritage to its viewers from other nations.

The National Museum, by its very nature, occupied a unique place in the political landscape, and played an important role in the efforts of nation-building. It acted as a staged environment for the performance of an Indian art history narrative in the public sphere – and by its authority as an official, state-sanctioned institution, it lent authority and “official” status to the narrative it presented.

It also served as “proof” that the newly-independent nation was civilized and on par with other independent nations, especially with European countries.⁵³ The 1948 Delhi Exhibition of Indian Art, as the immediate precursor to the formation of the National Museum, was described as evidence that “India [could] take her due rank as a first-class artistic power.”⁵⁴ According to this guide, the National Museum allowed Indian art and the nation of India itself to be taken seriously. Housed in the high-profile institution of the National Museum, Indian art was “imparted a high status in the cultural life of new India.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, the National Museum was cited as a means for India to retrieve its own past – the implication being that its past had to be rescued from colonial powers and colonial-authored histories.⁵⁶ It was a vehicle for lending legitimization to an indigenous art history, and to the self-ruled nation. The National Museum could serve as a stage upon which a glorious past and a promising future were exhibited, both for the consideration of citizens of the nation and for an outside (Western) gaze.

While this role served Indians both directly – as state-sanctioned keeper of the national heritage – and indirectly – as an institution that garnered legitimacy from outside of India – the museum’s second social role, that of educator, was of more immediately direct significance. The museum was deemed capable of educating the masses by presenting art in a way that would allow it to serve as a “university for the illiterate.”⁵⁷ Coomaraswamy, as quoted in the Delhi exhibition guide, stated that the art that represents the “well-known land of our own experience” is the best for educational purposes – that Indian art, because of an inherent understanding of it by Indians, can and should be used to convey spiritual, historical, and cultural meanings to the Indian people.⁵⁸ According to the guide, the simple act of viewing Indian art provides, for Indians, an invaluable history lesson. Indian art, then, has the natural ability to educate Indians on the subject of Indian history and culture – and museums, as the stewards of art, act as educational sites.

Thus the National Museum was called upon to manipulate art – itself “necessary for understanding the soul of India” – in order to teach Indians about the nation’s past history and achievements.⁵⁹ The National Museum, then, performed the role that *Rupam* suggested – and

53 Kavita Singh, “The Museum is National” in *India: A National Culture?* Sen, Geeti, ed. (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2003), 176.

54 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Catalogue* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1948), ix.

55 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Catalogue* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1948), ix.

56 Singh 2003, 176.

57 Ordhendra C. Gangoly, “Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benares,” *Rupam* (41) 1930: 24.

58 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1948), xvii.

59 India, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1951), 1.

as an institution went beyond what the journal was capable of doing. *Rupam*, while it promoted itself as a space accessible for wide-scale participation, debate, and interaction, was in actuality a scholarly journal that appeared only in English and with a limited circulation and readership. The National Museum, housing, as I show in the previous section, a national heritage that appealed and applied to every Indian, saw itself as truly accessible and therefore capable of fostering social improvement.

Conclusions: Addressing the Past and Moving Towards the Future

The success of the art history promoted by *Rupam* was visible in the museum's commitment to its mission – if not in the realization of this mission. The institution was symbolic of the belief in its ability to retrieve India's past and to link it and its glory to the present. Like *Rupam*, the museum believed firmly in the unifying abilities of the history of art in India, and the ways in which it was capable of furthering the cause of the nation, and its art, in the present day. The National Museum was successful in its commitment to promoting this belief on a larger, more accessible scale.

In a more tangible way, the museum was successful in providing a space for holding the artifacts deemed by *Rupam* to be of national significance, against smaller institutions and private collectors. In this way the assemblage of a national heritage was possible, and objects representing it were protected against a loss of visibility and public access in the public sphere. The museum continues to serve as a space for the safekeeping of an increasing number of collections representative of India's national heritage.

The museum reveals that the Nationalist art history was limited in that, although it provided the philosophy for approaching the topic of Indian art, it did not offer a method for the realization of it in terms of museum collecting and exhibiting policies. As a result, the art history promoted by *Rupam* is more evident in the publications produced by and in affiliation with the museum – while the exhibits and collections of the museum are more akin to the methods and approaches proscribed by Orientalist narratives. Instead of calling into question the narratives of colonial scholars like Birdwood and Watt, as *Rupam* did, the museum employed these approaches, even as they stand in contrast to the philosophies of the Nationalist art history.

As a legacy of this colonial packaging of Nationalist ideas, the museum even today retains a dated look. The core exhibit, in essence an expanded – not modified – version of the original 1948 Delhi exhibit, remains organized by object type in sacrifice of a chronology or regional context. Collections are heavily focused on ancient sculpture. Conferences at the National Museum, such as the one held on July 26, 2006 entitled, “Indian Museums and National Integration,” discuss ways of expanding its audience and diversifying its collections – in short, of achieving the goals of the Nationalist art history – but the public face of the museum remains largely unchanged.

This art history, strong in its ability to unify India in theory and to celebrate an active, glorious Indian past, falls short in providing a tangible means of achieving its goals in the setting of the museum institution. Relying on earlier Orientalist narratives to package the Nationalist art history compromised and undermined its message, and revealed the limitations of the history promoted in *Rupam*. As such, the museum, in achieving its goals and performing its institutional roles, incorporates the somewhat restrictive methods of its colonial past alongside the art history endorsed by the newly-independent nation. One main goal of the Nationalist art history, however, remains intact and unfettered; this goal is achieved in the museum's authority to collect art and its interpretation in the service of the nation and its people. As such, the spirit of *Rupam* – that is, the negotiation with and struggle against past ideologies of the Other and present politics of the Other – is one among the entities preserved in and by the National Museum of India, and as such is kept alive, active, and accessible.

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The Effects of Globalization on the Policy of the National Ethnographic Museum in Bulgaria

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The effects of globalization have started to influence the national museums in Bulgaria since the beginning of the 1990s. The reasons for the long-lasting isolation up to the democratic transition stem from the communist regime which practically closed the state borders and abandoned freedom of thought and movement.

Nevertheless, questions of diversity could not have been swept under the rug by the ethnographic museum. The presentation of ‘Us’ always implies comparison with the ‘Other’. Like many other regions in the world the Balkans are inhabited by a mix of cultures historically and geographically interrelated. No doubt, the Bulgarian National Ethnographic Museum (NEM) has tried actively to participate in the nation-building process ever since its own foundation.

The museum’s tradition in presenting the Bulgarian national culture for a long time had excluded the display of other ethnic communities’ cultures. Until recently, such materials had never been subject to collecting as if they were not to be found within this same country. This element of NEM’s politics was changed under the influence of globalization and re-opening of the state after the fall of the communist regime in 1989.

Turning the tide with the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the museum mission was changed in order to escape the link with the discredited past. The stress was firmly put on ‘difference’ in its various geographic, ethnic or religious aspects. The collecting and exhibiting policies were focused on the past and avoided any current social or cultural issues.

The influence of globalization seen as intercultural relationships and exchange of information could be traced in NEM’s exhibitions presenting the Bulgarian diaspora from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. As a result of the impact of multiculturalism on ethnological research, NEM has started to present the ethnic communities in a series of temporary exhibitions. The series of displays have come to support state political concept of the “Bulgarian tolerance”.



Photo: National Ethnographic Museum, Sofia.

Introduction

The effects of globalization have started to influence the national museums in Bulgaria since the beginning of the 1990s. The reasons for the long-lasting isolation up to the democratic transition stem from the communist regime which practically closed the state borders and abandoned freedom of thought and movement.

Nevertheless, questions of diversity could not have been swept under the rug by the ethnographic museums. The presentation of 'Us' always implies comparison with the 'Other'. Even when the museum is set to represent the unity of the nation and to avoid the display of foreign cultures, it deals with diversity. Like many other regions in the world the Balkans are inhabited by a mix of cultures historically and geographically interrelated. Given their crossroad situation linking the East to the West the Balkan people have had a bias feeling of belonging both to Europe and the Orient. Nationalism and the museum institution have guided and supported the overcome and the solving of this identity problem. The Bulgarian National Ethnographic Museum (NEM) has tried actively to participate in the nation-building process ever since its own foundation.

For a long time the museum's tradition in presenting the Bulgarian national culture had presumably excluded the display of other ethnic communities' cultures. Until recently, such materials had never been subject to collecting as if they were not to be found within this same country. This aspect of NEM's politics was changed under the influence of globalization and re-opening of the state after the fall of the communist regime in 1989.

This paper deals with the directions and dimensions of change in the National Ethnographic Museum's politics under the influence of globalization. It aims to find out the forms and gaps of the 1990s' reforms by examining the public activities of the Museum. The text is based on two sources of information. Personal opinions were gathered by informal interviews with the curators responsible for the particular exhibition projects. The curators were asked to present their own vision of the exhibition making process and the outcomes. The overview of the intentions in policy making in the museum are available in the interviews with NEM's director, as well as in recent publications. The discussions of museum policy problems are visible in the records of the Museum Council's meetings. The National Ethnographic Museum Archive supplied the study with exhibition plans, texts and photo documentation of the exhibitions. Some visitors' opinions were archived in the Visitor's books. Unfortunately, the NEM Archive is not fully supplied with copies of exhibition documents, so the analysis of the information faced difficulties in assembling the NEM's public policy 'puzzle'.

The research tried to place the museum activities in their social context attempting to outline the main factors influencing the policy shift. They were sought either in the intensification of external relations with other museums, or in the 1990s' social transformations (such as 'deflation' in the museum experience and reduction of organized visitor flows). The highest rate of impact on museum policy was expected from the academic discipline – the Ethnology. In 1990s Bulgarian ethnology slowly but surely adopted multiculturalism which opened a totally different opportunities for the NEM¹.

A Short Rewind

Since the time of the Museum's foundation in 1892 until the end of World War II, the curators had used to consider it crucial to include in the collections objects from lands falling

1 Its influence has been facilitated by the close relations between the museum curators and the ethnologists working together for almost 50 years in one institution – the Ethnographic Institute and Museum, part of which the NEM has currently been.

outside the Bulgarian political borders. These were territories surrounding the present-day Bulgaria, including parts of Macedonia, the so called Eastern and Western Thrace (now in Turkey and Greece), the ‘Western borderlands’ (now in Serbia) and Northern Dobrudzha (now in Rumania). Materials from these lands were supposed to provide arguments for the nation-state dreams of a historically deep-rooted and geographically large Bulgarian community. The diversity was to be searched for inside the nation, and not outside it. The stress was put on the entity and solidarity, not on the diversity, which was assumed as a threat to the imagined community. These collections from outside the political borders of Bulgaria were compiled chiefly during the Balkan wars and after World War I as a result of the mass migration processes and population exchange². The collections from these so called “Bulgarian ethnic lands” were mixed together with the other ethnographic objects in the museum and they were all labeled “Bulgarian” regardless of any current political issues. At that time ‘collecting’ meant ‘appropriating’ cultures. Even the museum sections (repositories) have been divided according to types of materials, not on place of origin.

At the beginning of the next period marked by the power of the communist regime the museum mission was subject to reform. The museum was expected to follow strictly the state politics and restrict its collecting activities only to the Bulgarian political territory. Moreover, the “nation” had almost negative connotation and therefore could hardly be on focus of the visible side of a museum’s activities. Another kind of community was to be constructed, examined and put on show – the meta-national communist, “internationalist” society. An imagined kinship relation within the Slavic population was verbalized and promoted by the museum exhibition and especially by the guide throughout the visit. In the 1980s there was a slight shift in the state politics with a stronger accent upon the national specifics of the socialist society. The “socialist nation” was to be presented in its integrity. No mention of ethnic differences or minority problems was allowed as part of the museum presentations. Massive parts of the collection (e.g. from Macedonia, Thrace and so on) were hidden back in the repositories and abandoned from public view till the 1990s as politically inappropriate. They were even divided in a separate department under the name “Materials from outside the Bulgarian lands”. Thus, the material culture from these lands was re-defined as foreign, distant and, thus, unfit for the museum space in Bulgaria. In other words, the museum presentation was expected first and foremost to be politically correct. And its “correctness” was defined through exclusion.

The Shift

Turning the tide with the fall of the communist regime in November 1989, the museum mission was changed again in order to escape any associations with the discredited (communist) past. The reopening of the state affected NEM’s policy as a whole – its collecting practices and its public activities, resulting in revising the museum functions in regard to the museum – society interaction. Nevertheless, the commitment to nationalism remained its most visible political engagement.

Most evident was the shift in the exhibiting policy. A look from above could outline three major trends in exhibition-making:

1. Presentations based on regional cultural diversity in proof of the “one-nation” concept (14 temporary exhibitions)

2 During this period mostly clothing was collected. Since then the typical clothing has had a special aura inside the professional museum community. It was assigned the symbolic meaning which it used to have before entering the museum space, i.e. indicating personal ethnic and/ or religious affiliation.

2. Introduction of ethnic communities' cultures in the Museum (5 temporary displays)
3. Presentations discussing current social problems (1 temporary display)

One could clearly see the domination of exhibitions dealing with nationalism. Although the curators state their ideas about the institution as politically neutral, the staging of such problems involves the National Ethnographic Museum in contemporary politics and relates it to some extreme parties' ideas.

Exhibitions of "Macedonian" and "Thracian" clothing and embroideries turned to become integral parts of NEM's public policy. They came to represent the wish for reconstructing the broken continuity within the history of the institution as well as the curators' strive for introducing diversity as part of the one-nation policy. The materials collected from the lands surrounding present-day Bulgaria were displayed next to objects from the country. Although the labels included information like the village name and its regional localization, no mention about its state localization was considered necessary. They were arranged to be perceived as Bulgarian. Regarding the macro-political context of these exhibitions, namely the disintegration of former Yugoslavia and the positions of the surrounding Macedonia countries (i.e. Greece and Bulgaria), the curators provoke visitors' perceptions with the hot issues of ethnic identity. Consciously or not, they engage the audiences in a nationalistic discourse focused on up-to-date political problems. The arguments supporting the curators' nationalist concepts are excerpted from the past. They refer to the strongest years of the Bulgarian nationalism when the struggle for unification of the Bulgarian people and territories culminated in taking a side in war conflicts.

During the transition period from the 1990 till the present day the accent of the public activities was firmly put on exhibiting difference in its various aspects. The impact of globalization seen as maintaining intercultural bonds and flow of information could be traced also in the NEM's exhibitions presenting the Bulgarian diaspora from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century³. This trend in exhibiting once again came to support the concept for the solidity of the nation. But it also opened a gap in the museum – society relations by ignoring the current emigration processes and the new Bulgarian diaspora. Thus the concept for the (ethnographic) museum in Bulgaria remained bound to its essential subject - "the Past". The exhibitions have always played the role of illustration material to the particular institution's academic research. Although the museum has maintained the relation between academia and the society, its activities could not be referred to as representative for the majority of the society. Moreover, the museum has turned out to be representative of the preconceptions of a quite small community – its own curators and the researchers working for the Ethnographic Institute. By dealing only with the past, the curators in NEM demonstrate a lack of proper tools for examining and displaying "the Present".

In fact, the Museum showed once, just at the beginning of the 1990s, an attempt to address current social problems. The curators of an exhibition, called "The Bulgarians and the nature", looked up for ecological strategies in the traditional culture of the Bulgarians. It came at a time of strong social protests against the lack of ecological state policy after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster⁴. The display was a kind of revolutionary compared to NEM's previous exhibiting experience, because the curators chose an approach predominantly

3 "Bulgarian Antiquities from Macedonia" (1992), "The Half-Cut Yard. Weekdays and Holidays of the Bulgarians in the Western Borderlands" (1996). "From the Life of the Bulgarians in Banat" (1998). We came upon a confusing attitude towards the objects donated from Bulgarian emigrants in Moldavia. They have been stored in the "Foreign arts" Department in the Museum after they were once presented as Bulgarian.

4 The fall of the communist regime and the democratic reforms in Bulgaria started from these protests.

educational, not aesthetic. By implication “The Bulgarians and the Nature” constructed bridges between past and present, staying loyal to the museum identity as linked to the past.

The truly significant “opening” of the NEM due to the impact of multiculturalism on Bulgarian ethnological research came in 1995 when the Museum started a series of presentations on ethnic communities’ cultures in Bulgaria. First was “Roma/ Gypsies from Times Past” (1995) followed by exhibits on Jewish, Armenian, Karakachan and Aromanian culture⁵. They were usually arranged on half of the exhibition space while the other half was reserved for different aspects of Bulgarian culture⁶. The public activities organized for and by the “other” communities’ representatives have really been a breakthrough in the straight political image of the museum. It appears as though the museum was no longer for and of the Bulgarian nation.

The Outcomes

But this feeling is illusionary. The “ethnic” presentations were simply supplementary to the main exhibiting trend about the Bulgarian culture which was shown simultaneously on the next floor. Only a carefully selected list of ethnic cultures had the chance to be shown in the NEM. They conformed to the positive stereotype⁷ of the close “other”. The negative ethnic images were simply excluded or failed to pass the curators’ discussions with no motivation. These were the Turks, the Bulgarian Muslims, the Tatars and the Gagauz. They are characterized either as Muslims or as having Turkic origin and/ or speaking a kind of Turkish dialect.

The stated aim of the exhibition series was to demonstrate the good practices of coping with the different ethnic groups, living in the Bulgarian lands for centuries (Decheva 2005). That is the reason these exhibitions to be qualified as quietly supporting the state policy towards the ethnic communities in the country (the 1990s’ government concept of the “Bulgarian ethnic tolerance”). Not surprisingly, all of these displays focused on past features of the ethnic cultures. For example, the Roma/ Gypsies were presented only by a selected list of professions: the musician, the craftsman and the fortune-teller, thus drawing an exotic collective image. Not a word was mentioned about current discrimination, segregation and other social group problems. The communities were shown as close “Other”, but with no notion of intercultural relations or stereotypes presented. The communication between the majority and the minorities was not a subject of exhibiting. It could eventually be heard in the guide’s remarks. The exhibitions did not come to eliminate the predominantly negative attitude of the Bulgarians towards “their neighbours”. They simply facilitated a short-lived encounter between the museum visitor with the “other” culture. I would just cite one of the comments, addressed to me as a guide by one of the visitors at the “Karakachans in Bulgaria” exhibition: “Why do you keep on setting these ethnic exhibits in the museum? You were supposed to show Bulgarian things and to educate the nation”. Her protest was not surprising. It was the expected outcome of a long-lasting, highly considered state and museum politics.

The more important and, I would say, unintended effect of displaying ethnic communities’ cultures in the NEM was their institutionalization. By entering the National museum their presence in Bulgaria was approved.

5 “The Holy Path. The Bulgarian Jews through the Centuries” (1998), “Armenians in Bulgaria” (1999), “Karakachans in Bulgaria” (2001-2002), “Aromanians in Bulgaria” (2005).

6 Since the 1988 the museum management has decided to remove the permanent exhibition and start a series of thematic temporary displays. The museum space has then been divided into two parts and there have usually been two exhibitions staged at a time.

7 The positive image of the “Other” is usually described as having characteristics similar to the Bulgarian national ones.

In the case of the Roma/ Gypsies the museum team helped the community articulate its own “collective” memories in a very extraordinary way. The community did not consider the Past that vital to its collective identity⁸ as the museums do. So the exhibition could be assumed as presenting curators’ point of view or the politically correct one.

The following “ethnic” displays at the NEM developed the museum – community relations altering both their roles into almost equal. The community representatives were for the first time considered experts, not only mere respondents. This change was only temporary and did not affect the exhibiting of Bulgarian culture. In 2005 the NEM ended the series of presentations on ethnic cultures. During the discussions in the Museum council meetings the director pointed the visitors’ will as an argument for this decision.

In most of the 1990s’ official documents issued by the NEM the Museum is called “the most Bulgarian institution”. Comparing this definition to the museum image described in the visitor’s words cited above one could notice the full agreement between the curators’ and the visitors’ notion of museum. The nation is conceived as an endangered species that needs a special protection and would better be kept in safe, museum space. Still, in the 1990s and the 2000s the NEM is assigned the role of a cage or a reliquary.

Resources

The National Ethnographic Museum Archive

Records of the meetings of the National Ethnographic Museum’s Council

Interviews at the National Ethnographic Museum:

A. Komitska, curator of Bulgarian Folk Clothing Department (Macedonia and Thrace Section), 18 October 2005.

Nadezhda Teneva, Deputy Director, Curator of Woodcarving and Home Crafts and Furniture Departments, 12 October 2005.

Vladlena Nestorova, curator of Jewels Department, 12 October 2005.

Mirella Decheva, curator of Fabrics and Embroidery Department, 1 November 2005.

Iva Philipova, ex-guide at the NEM (1995-2003), 1 November 2005.

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Ковачева-Костадинова, Вяра (1997), ‘Едно столетие НЕМ (минало и настояще)’, в: Родина, I-II: 267-291// Kovacheva-Kostadinova, Vyara (1997) ‘A Century of the NEM (Past and Present)’, in: Rodina, I-II: 267–291.

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Радонов, Здравко (1971) ‘Учредяване, първоначална дейност и международни културни връзки на Народния етнографски музей в София (1906 – 1944)’, ИЕИМ, XIII: 245-268// Radonov, Zdravko (1971) ‘Establishment, Initial Activities and International Cultural Relations of the National Ethnographic Museum in Sofia (1906-1944)’, Proceedings of the Ethnographic Institute and Museum, XIII: 245–268.

8 I would even argue the definition of the Roma/ Gypsies a “community” for this could be only an outsider point of view or an attempt to provoke the construction of an imagined community. The so called Roma/ Gypsy community is reported as highly heterogeneous with almost no sense of collective identity.

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Mapping New Trajectories: The Case of the Exhibition Frontières at the Musée des Confluences in Lyon, France

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This paper offers a critical reading of the exhibition Frontières produced in 2006 by the Musée des Confluences in Lyon, France. Using a post-structural framework, it compares the museum intent, the exhibition, and the public reception, in order to tease out questions of authoring, representation in the context of identity formation and global culture.

I was recently invited by the Musée des Confluences in Lyon, France to write a critique of their temporary exhibition, *Frontières*. This invitation is part of a continuing collaboration between the Musée des Confluences and the UBC Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness in Vancouver, Canada.

The subject of the exhibition immediately intrigued me. The idea of the museum addressing the topic of geo-political frontiers on four continents embodied an intrinsic tension. On one hand, the topic echoed the ambition of the Enlightenment's museums to document, display and explain the world. On the other hand, it seemed to offer a counterpoint to the current discourse of cultural homogenization and "border flattening" often associated with globalization.

I should acknowledge at the onset that I never visited the exhibition. The way I came to understand it was through films, photo-documentation and the artefacts of exhibit production. The museum provided me with the text and visuals pertaining to the concepts and physical production of the project. It also supplied the press coverage and evaluation reports made both in-house and by a third-party research center. In addition, I interviewed and corresponded with museum staff. The nature of this analysis was exploratory; I anticipated that not viewing the exhibition in person would be limiting at times and yet, could potentially compel/force me to consider the exhibition differently.

This paper will provide a brief description of the exhibition. It will then launch a critique, in which I compare the museum intent, the exhibition, and the public reception, in order to tease out questions of authoring, representation in the context of identity formation and global culture.

The Institution

Frontières is a 700 m² temporary exhibition co-produced by the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle de Lyon (recently renamed the Musée des Confluences) and by the Centro de la Cultura Contemporanea in Barcelona. It was displayed in Lyon for four months in 2006 and in Barcelona for four months in 2007. The exhibition was recently presented in Université de Lille (November 07) and is now touring in several cities in Spain. It is important to note that in this collaboration, Musée des Confluences clearly played the role of initiator, leader and producer. For this reason, my analysis will concentrate on the Musée des Confluences' agency.¹

It is essential to introduce the Musée des Confluences, however briefly. It is a publicly funded institution administered by the Département du Rhône. It has recently undergone a revitalization program by broadening its focus from natural history (collections in mineralogy, paleontology, entomology, and ethnology, to name a few) to a conceptual premise encompassing two thematic axes: science and society. Founded as the Musée d'histoire naturelle de Lyon in 1772, the museum is now constructing a new identity. A name change and a building change are part of the schema². The museum experienced, in an accelerated mode since 2001, a paradigm shift from positivist to post-modernist ideals. These ideals favour Lyotard's (1984) "incredulity for the meta-narrative" by being wary of changeless, foundational relationships that escape the contingencies of time and space. *Frontières*' role in consolidating this new identity is manifest through various strategies that will be discussed in this paper.

1 The reverse situation took place with *Harem's Fantasies and new Scheherazades* (2005) in which the Barcelonian institution played the leading role. The Director of the Musée de Confluences qualified the relationship as "one of complicity and trust" animated by a desire to continue developing these interdisciplinary collaborations (based on interview with Michel Cote, Sept. 15, 2007).

2 The museum will be moving into in a brand new facility in Lyon in 2009.

The Exhibition

The aim of the project, as stated in the exhibition text, was to interrogate the notion of geo-political frontiers in ways that expose its complexities and ambiguities. Frontiers are presented as both dividing and linking devices; they can be painful and yet they are necessary contact zones; they are ruptures and passages. They are natural but mostly artificial lines. “There is no identity without frontiers,” signals the guest curator-geographer who insists that a world without frontiers is not conceivable.

This complexity and the inherent paradoxes are eloquently expressed in the exhibitions by means of texts, maps and centrally, the *photo-reportage* (photo news reporting). The selected frontiers or frontier phenomena may be characterized by their social and political instability:

- The European limits: the flux of the European Community’s frontiers; zoom in on the “new neighbours” at the Oriental borders.
- World migrations and the European pre-frontiers: the migration fluxes, the hardening of European frontiers and the resulting illegal passages; zoom in on Kinsley’s clandestine journey from Cameroun to France.
- North Korea: the most hermetic frontier in the world; zoom in on the spectacle of a guided/controlled visit of Pyongyang with an official guide.
- The contentious territory: Kashmir, torn region, forgotten paradise. The territorial conflicts between India and Pakistan both claiming the Kashmir region; zoom in on images presenting the *mythical beauty* of the Pakistani Himalayan region and its people to contrast with the usual images of war.
- Uncertain, unrecognized frontiers: the Israel/Palestine territorial conflicts; zoom in on the plight of Palestinians living at the foot of the wall built by Israel.
- The world sanctuaries: The case of the Mexican-American border. A laboratory of economic globalization/corporatization. The frontier is both porous and repressive; zoom in on Mexicans and their complex relationships with the lines and the creation of a “third country.”
- The Roms Diaspora: the *truly* European people; zoom in on families living in different parts of Europe.
- Exiles and refuges: evokes the notion of trauma and loss associated with leaving one’s country. Zoom in on (staged) nocturnal scenes inhabited by fluorescent human shadows alluding to the escape, illegal passage and loss of identity.

General Layout/Design Solutions (As Seen/Understood From Documentation)

The exhibition layout consists of eight thematic zones, each zone introducing one frontier or a “frontier phenomenon” as a microcosm. Each zone is sub-divided into a “pre-world” where experts’ texts, maps, and soundscapes set the stage before penetrating “a world,” the frontier, contained in a stylized hut (*cabane*). Central to the exploration of each world is the photo-reportage. The eight *photo-reportages* emphasize a specific set of social consequences of these frontiers. The juxtaposition of a pre-world (introduction of a particular frontier issue) and a world (illustration of the issue through the focus of one frontier) creates a zoom out/zoom in effect and provides a rhythm to the visit. The *photo-reportages*, the central element of the exhibit narrative, depict people experiencing, under various circumstances, the political weight of the frontiers. These photographs were not commissioned for this exhibition. Instead, they were pieces that had been produced for magazines or other types of publication and were often owned or promoted by photo agencies or art galleries. In other words, these photographic productions and their authors were validated in multiple ways before entering the museum. It is important to mention that of the eight photo-reportages, two

were produced by photo-artists rather than by reporters. This aspect of the selection makes apparent the museum's intention to blur the distinctions between traditional disciplines, i.e., photography as artistic endeavour and photography as documentary.

The photographs appear to be the product of privileged relationships between the photographers and the photographed subjects. In many cases, the fieldwork involved in making these documentaries took several years to prepare and create. These images depict ordinary moments, waiting moments, moments of despair and hope, moments of fear.

The exhibit design concept offers elements of difference and sameness and conveys an impression of sobriety and sleekness. Each zone or frontier is given the same formal vocabulary to orient the visitor with particular exhibit syntax evocative of the frontier's anatomy: lines, thresholds, passages, transition spaces, and limits. The specificity of the frontier is conveyed by a different colour for each zone, and with an image treatment (scale, number of photographs, image substrate and montage) that varies radically from one zone to another. This contrast propels the photographic work in the fore plan. In many ways, the museography parallels the aesthetic of installation art presented in contemporary art galleries. It is a poetic rather than literal representation of the topic; the design solutions do not fall into a design that is explicit and didactic. Three aspects, the photograph as artefact (its sense of immediacy and reproducibility), the topic (its currency and criticality), and the museography (its poetic aesthetic) converge toward a representation of reality that insists on the "here and now," capturing a particular time and space. The photographs, like the representation of the topic in the exhibition space, are snapshots of reality that are rigorous in their argumentation and yet subjective and fragmented.

Multitude of Voices, Similar Perspectives

In addition to the photographers- reporters' work, multiple actors are involved in the production of meaning in this exhibition.

The visitor encounters the experts' voices on three different panels:

- - The geographer-curator speaks about the frontier or frontier-phenomena;
- - A specialist (often a social scientist) offers another angle on the subject. Despite being written in the third person, these texts are not neutral; they explore, they denounce, and they read like short essays, not scientific abstracts;
- - The cartographer's maps are hand-drawn, emphasizing the subjectivity involved in map-making and frontier making. Specifically created for this exhibition, these maps emphasize conflicting views on territoriality and locate the site of tensions and tragedies related to frontiers.

These voices provide rich interdisciplinary perspectives and yet they converge toward similar positions about the existence of frontiers. As a visitor comments: "The frontiers are considered [in this exhibition] like a "necessary evil", we don't hear from people who say that frontiers are a great thing. I would have liked to see conflicting perspectives." (Le Marec, 2006, p. 13).

Public Reception

Who Came?

More than 29,000 people visited *Frontières* during the four months it was presented at the Musée des Confluences. This figure is in the norm of visitation at the museum. Visitor statistics indicated an increase in high school visits and adolescents visiting without adults. *Frontières* was a social activity for adults (91%) with 76% of them visiting in the company of

other adults. Visitors had a higher level of education than previously observed in past or concurrent exhibitions. Half the visitors were less than 34 years old: the age segment 25-34 was particularly well represented (34%) and the 18-24 represented (16%). There were a significant proportion of visitors who had never come to the museum before (38%). Almost half of the respondents had heard of the exhibition through word of mouth (40%); this supports the idea of visitor agency extending the museum experience by talking about it with others.

Press Coverage

The extensive media coverage was very positive. They welcomed the choice of topic and the politically engaged approach. Visitor surveys indicate that press coverage had a positive impact on visitation; as much as 37% of the visitors had heard of *Frontieres* through media coverage. We could speculate that it contributed toward a favourable public image of critical work produced by the museum.

Public Response: Evaluation Results Highlights

A survey (380 respondents), an analysis of the visitor's comment book (190 comments) and in-depth interviews (40 participants) were used to collect information about the public reception of *Frontieres*. Here is a summary of key findings taken from the evaluators' reports:

- Visitors invested time exploring the exhibition: 69% spent between one and two hours; 21% spent between two and three hours;
- The survey indicated that 56% of respondent had a high level of appreciation for the exhibition and (39%) were satisfied. Respondents were very satisfied (45%) and quite satisfied (45%) by the knowledge they acquired; and satisfied with the way the exhibition provoked reflection and questioning and stimulated discussion in the group (91%);
- The exhibition solicited visitor's emotions (78%); there were also elements of surprise (89%);
- Although the general reaction was positive and responsive to the museographic approach, a significant proportion of visitors (20%) expressed some level of dissatisfaction about accessibility of information: too much text, too expert-like, or not enough contextualization for the layperson;
- In-depth interviews indicated that visitors connected these images with media coverage. A few interviewees were frustrated by this "déjà vu" aspect, but for most people, it added to the interest of the topic;
- In-depth interviews reveal that people were aware of the multiple voices. Two visitors did comment on the consensual aspect of the perspectives and would have preferred to see conflicted views on the topic (Le Marec, 2007, p. 19-20);
- In-depth interviews indicate that visitors interpreted the exhibitions in two different registers: the geopolitical dimension (associated with the media) and the testimonials from the various exhibit voices.
- In-depth interviews that several visitors felt personally implicated by the topics: "It's demanding us to questions ourselves; it's happening close to us; it could be in anywhere." (Le Marec, p. 5); "At the beginning it was fine but at the end, I found it difficult to listen to people's experience immigrating to Lyon." (Le Marec, p.43)

Below are a few quotes illustrating the range of visitors' views in regards to the notion of museum's impartiality. An interesting aspect emerging from the visitor studies is the duality

of viewpoints represented by the quotes below. Some visitors welcome the critical stance of the museum, whereas others deplore its lack of neutrality and objectivity. The negative comments represented only a very small minority of visitors' response. Nevertheless they are indicative of the range of visitor's opinions. This contrast is related to the public's expectations relative to the museum's role in relation to knowledge legitimation. This point will be further developed in the critique section.

Fascinating- congratulations for daring to address this theme and for the way you address and comment it. Thank you for opening our horizon. (*CV 10. from public reception report p.19*).

When visiting a national or departmental museum we expect to have impartial information. I found myself confronted to biased politics. It's scandalous! [. . .] People bring their children in confidence and this confidence is exploited. It's scandalous. (*VC-DEC from public reception report p. 20*)

. . . Thank you for this intelligent and sensitive approach to the topic of economic, social, cultural, historical frontiers. It is after all also about our intellectual frontiers. . Great exhibition. Thank you. (*CV Jan. from public reception report p.21*).

It is disappointing to see that there are always biases when conflicts are evoked" Certain details have been omitted. It's shameful. . . (*S238 p. 20*)

The presentation of conflict should be impartial (*S.237 p. 20*)

Critique: Collective Identity: Meeting the Other, Meeting Oneself

Frontières is congruent with the museum's intention to favour an interdisciplinary approach to develop thematic exhibitions, which intertwine scientific topics and contemporary societal issues. Frontiers and the related subject of immigration (legal and illegal) are topical in France, the public debate oscillating between exclusion, assimilation, and integration.

I was inspired by the geographer-curator's mantra that permeates the exhibition: "There is no inside without the outside" and realized that the effect of the exhibition is to create a vision of the world infused by European sensitivity. Indeed, by mobilizing French photographers, journalists and scientists to structure the exhibition, the performance situates the French nation in relation to the world. But unlike exhibitions of past centuries inspired by an imperialist agenda, *Frontières* is a reflexive exercise that acknowledges some of the negative consequences of nations' desires to divide and control territories and people. Moreover, the exhibit texts implicate France, the European Community, and the "Sanctuaries" (or rich countries around the world) in both the historical and current descriptions of these conflicted frontiers. The introductory text, for example, refers to Britain, France, Spain and Germany as having traced during colonial expansion more than 50% of the frontiers of developing countries or what used to be referred as the "Third World." Maps locating refugee camps in France and acts of violence perpetrated against the Roms throughout Europe are reminders that access to full citizenship in rich countries is not a right but a privilege. Consequently, the French visitor, in particular, is implicated. The ricochet effect begs the question: "Could we (the French, European Community) be who we are if it weren't for the frontiers, barriers, walls?" This idea is supported by the visitors' accounts and press commentaries that deplore social inequalities in France and Europe, express shame, support the critical aspect and a

desire to discuss the issue and understand it³. Visitor comments such as: “These could be our neighbours...”, “This is vicious . . . !” The proximity of refugees’ camps shocked me. . . !” are expressions of grasping at a redefinition of collective identity.⁴ The exhibition, therefore, defines, however partially, contours of French/European identity by examining its outside -- the eight conflicted frontiers.

Frontières’ program is not about promoting a specific vision of the collective, but rather about provoking discussions on the politics of territorialisation. In a discussion on the challenges faced by contemporary museums to generate meaningful debates on the notion of national identities, Sharon Macdonald (2005) described features that made earlier museums privileged sites for the identity formation of the nation-state:

- 1) Having a culture legitimizes a collective. Museum objects and museum exhibitions were considered expressions of cultural identity;
- 2) Possession of artefacts from other cultures demonstrated the capacity to display and to govern, as well as signaled that the nation played a role on the global stage. It also became an effective way of representing the idea of cultural differences;
- 3) Museum’s capacity to articulate two temporal narratives. The national trajectory, and the successes of the nation in attaining progress;
- 4) Emphasis on material property. Possessing played a central role in the Western conception of identity; and
- 5) Particular ways of seeing that entailed a detachment by the viewer. This vision *objectified* reality and constituted schemata and topologies of the world, such as gender and racial differences.

These characteristics, evocative of Bennett’s concept of the *exhibitionary complex* (1995) promoted the image of an ordered community that visitors were part of, and conveyed a sense of both national stability and progress. Macdonald mentioned that even if not all museums were national, this identity model articulated by the nation played into local identities (municipal, regional). The question is now, how does *Frontières* adhere to but disrupt the features that shaped the early national museums, and shape many contemporary ones?

Cultural identity in *Frontières* was not expressed through “collection” but the nature of the questioning that was inherent in the exhibition. As visitor studies demonstrate, the exhibition was well attended and visitors were receptive to the theme, the museum’s critical stance and forms of presentation. These facts expose particular sensitivities and interests of the community that produced it. The ephemeral quality of this temporary exhibition and the currency of the frontier issues propose, I would argue, *defining moments* for the collective rather than definitive and monolithic expressions of national identity. *Frontières* did not display *objects* from other cultures. The photographs were artefacts originating from Western media culture, created by French photographers exploring the notion of “frontier as social phenomena.” The exhibition’s function was not to examine the individuals and cultures as objects of study but rather to observe *relationships* between Western and non-western nations, the privileged and less-privileged frontiers. In doing so, it positioned the “Sanctuaries” on the global stage not as master but as self-protected geo-political zones evolving interdependently with the most vulnerable nations. *Frontières* did not attempt to express celebratory temporal

3 Newspaper headings such as “In Lyon, the art examine the walls that separate men” *Le Monde Francais* 19/20 November 2006 or “The finger on the wounds of the world” *Le Progres Francais*, Oct4, 2006 are evocative of this appreciation for the museum’s critical engagement with the topic.

4 These are shorter versions of the visitor comments in LeMarec, 2006.

narratives of the collective; instead, it was interested in debating socio-political problems defining the nations of the world. It was purposefully non-exhaustive, zooming in on the singular and the local. The reproducible quality of its main artefacts, the photographs, disrupted the cult of authentic objects associated with traditional models of museums, and aligned the museum with other media of contemporary culture, visitors' response converge toward this statement. *Frontières'* discourse rejected objective and evolutionary narratives by explicitly co-authoring the exhibition with multiple actors whose critical perspectives of the conflicted frontiers was largely achieved by subverting traditional ethnographic and cartographic practices.

This shift in presenting and shaping collective identity echoes the work of philosopher Bernard Deloche (2007). In his essay *La Nouvelle Culture*, he discusses how societal transformation, formed by new media technology, affects cultural institutions like museums. Deloche's "angle of attack" comprehends the many challenges shaping the current development of museums by insisting on the profound repercussions that new media have on social relations and on the process of knowledge legitimation. Deloche argues that the emergence of new media, although it did not initiate what he calls the *social mutations*, is partly responsible for the massive rejection of institutional frameworks, whether religious, moral or judicial. Instead, contemporary cultures seem to invent themselves away from established codes. The author sets the stage by identifying social mutations contesting Western values: the dislocation of the family, the transformation of language, the shattered sense of citizenship, and the collapse of axiological references (Greco-Roman/ Judeo-Christian axis). He suggests that the social transformation was able to proliferate through the media of communication. Television and newer forms of media technology are considered not only a vehicle to introduce these changes on a massive scale but to produce culture and generate social practices. Aware of some of the negative aspects of media consumption, Deloche is more interested in establishing how new media provoke change in the way people create and relate to each other.

The museum's initial structure was superimposed on the Enlightenment's models of knowledge production endorsed successively by the Church and the School. These two institutions had the monopoly on image production and distribution. The new media, on the other hand, have produced a new cultural model not by creating new images, but rather by the disorganized and non-structured way in which images (as representations of ideas) are presented and connected to other images. It is a definition of new cultural dynamics, reminiscent of Derrida and Guattari's concept of the rhizome that promotes, the notion of non-linearity, heterogeneity, multiplicity, ruptures and discontinuities (G. Deleuze, F. Guattari., 1994). Deloche demonstrates how new media fulfils many of the museum's functions such as preserving, displaying and educating. In that sense, the new media already compete with and surpass the museum. But the real competition, he argues, is that contemporary culture, is now receptive to *non-linear* ways of thinking and perceiving the world, while traditional museum productions are based on linear rationales. Deloche describes how, in order to compete and remain relevant, the museum had to invent a new function: that of *critic*. By engaging critically with key social phenomena, the museum is promoting a new relationship with its public: it is facilitating/supporting ways for collectives to adapt, understand and critically engage with dramatic social transformations shaping their lives. Deloche sketches what he conceives are potentially fruitful directions for the museum to contribute to contemporary culture. The directions are (a) a new recognition of other cultures, (b) the rejection of object fetishism, and (c) the prevalence of interrogation rather than the transmission of value. *Frontières* meets Deloche's proposal in many ways.

Institutional Identity: Charting New Trajectories

The interpretive apparatus deployed in the creation of *Frontières* signals that the institution is committed to a new type of knowledge production; it is impressive in its originality and it is risk taking. The braiding of disciplines, the blurring of genres, the preference of topical issues over collection displays, and the criticality of the comments are symptomatic of new ways of staging knowledge in the museum in line with Deloche's proposition. It has rejected neutrality and has insisted on the de-centering of authority by sharing the interpretation of frontiers between an imposing cast of actors well established in their fields: journalists, photographers, researchers and museum staff; reaffirming a conviction that meaning is plural and negotiable.

The process of multiplying perspectives to enrich and add nuance to the interpretation does not however include, in significant terms, the insights of the "frontier-people." Although they occupy centre-stage with regard to their visual presence, they (or representatives who can speak of these cultural realities) had limited input in the interpretive process. The perspective of representatives coming from these realities is limited to two social scientists who offer their insights/or sensitivity on the Mexican and Israeli frontiers. There is also the incorporation of frontier-peoples' voices by means of recorded testimonies of new immigrants describing their experience⁵. However, these individuals have not taken an active part in the interpretive process of the frontiers. It is interesting to note that what I perceive as a perplexing absence or a lack of representation is not mentioned in any of the staff's or visitors' accounts or press coverage.

Admittedly, I am conditioned to conceive of exhibit production in certain terms. In the Canadian museological context, it is difficult and perhaps impossible to interpret the reality of the Other without the participation" of the represented collectivities. I refer here to individuals and groups who do not belong to the dominant gender, class, sexual orientation and ethnicity or, should I say, who do not belong to the privileged community of White heterosexual middle-class fe/males. In situations where it is impossible to work with the individuals, we work with elected representatives. The increasingly culturally diverse nature of contemporary Western societies and the tension between new immigrants and the majority populations are preoccupations, not only in Canada, but also in most rich countries.

Without going into detail, I would like to place this Canadian bias towards collaboration at the intersection of three phenomena⁶:

1. The late '60s, early '70s historiographic trends of social and public history that established a new agency for actors who had previously been marginalized in grand narratives (Seixas, 1998; Willinsky, 1998)
2. Issues of sovereignty and the self-representation of Aboriginal communities in Canada directly affected the ways First Nations' artifacts and stories were staged in museums (Ames, 1992; Karp, 1991; Mackey, 2002)
3. The 1970s government policies and the subsequent multicultural policies promoted differences rather than similarities between the cultural and ethnic communities in Canada (Bissoondath, 1993; Mackey, 2002).

5 I do not wish to address the public programs designed to complement or offset lacks in exhibitions. I wish to focus on the exhibition experience itself.

6 Some distinctions could be made between English Canada and Quebec's sensitivity around issues of cultural representations. Nevertheless, the impact of First Nations' territorial and governance claims as well as the multicultural policies do affect the two museum communities in similar ways. Electronic correspondence 25-26 November, 2007 with Dr. Philippe Dube, Universite Laval, director of LAMIC.

The collaborative practices can be gratifying. They may even profoundly affect the way museums address certain topics and interact with different social groups. However, these practices can also be problematic. The nature of consultation between museums and groups can be superficial and merely repeat patterns of domination and control. The notion of inclusive and enriched interpretation then becomes compromised (Ames, 1992; Bennett, 2006; Hage, 1998, Shelton, 2001). Alternatively, the participation of multiple groups with conflicting interests and overlapping veto powers may threaten to bring design decisions to a standstill.

If the Musée des Confluences does not subscribe to the same interpretive practices as those observed in Canadian museums, nevertheless it still shares the same intellectual foundation, the ideals of the Enlightenment and a colonial past, as well as a commitment to move beyond that foundation. While recognizing this inheritance, I will now study the re-location of the photo-reportage in the museum.

Going back to the initial context of production, the work of the photographers and journalists consists in reporting international events by bringing images home to inform, satisfy curiosity and create awareness. The same images, once transposed to the museum, take on a new significance (Davallon, 1986; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Schiele, 2002). Keeping in mind the premise that photographs are objects, i.e., images crafted by the photographer, a “slipperiness of meaning” takes place when these *photo-reportages* are repositioned in *Frontières*: I would argue that their ethnographic/ethnocentric quality emerges as the forefront. Once re-positioned in this institution, does the *photo-reportages* (largely represented through a scientific discourse that does not include the perspective of the more vulnerable frontier-peoples) echo the objectifying ethnographic collections of the traditional museum?

Does the exhibition exacerbate the asymmetry in power relations (e.g., the power and freedom to represent oneself) between the observer and the observed? Or perhaps the asymmetry, all too real between rich and poor frontiers, is made *more* obvious than when considered in the initial context of consumption. Indeed, the discourse demands a different type of engagement from the visitors than when seen in a journalistic context. The longer exposure, more intimate encounter with the images, and enhanced credibility of photo-reportage once re-located in the museum context may provoke a more critical encounter with the subject.

The *photo-reportages* are artefacts of Western media culture, created by Western photographers. The “tension” is not about cultural appropriation but about a layering of representations (the museum’s and photographer’s) that may or may not be successful in provoking new ways of thinking about frontiers and the “frontier-peoples.” These images emanate engagement, solidarity, concern and respect for the people photographed. Yet, are they not reproducing patterns of knowledge production that favour the dominant group’s sensitivity in order to explain the realities of the non-dominant groups? *If the aim was to interrogate the complexity of geo-political frontiers, shouldn’t the inclusion of contrasting views and cultural sensitivities be part of the project?* The fact that visitors were responsive and yet not surprised by the content may indicate that the content reiterates what they already know, i.e., extending their knowledge without shaking their perceptions and assumptions.

As a critic, I need to avoid sounding prescriptive. This project is fascinating and captures the possibilities of the exhibition’s ability to stage contemporary culture, both literally and conceptually. The perceived tension in this exhibition exemplifies the “conceptual knots”⁷ defining museum practices today.

7 The perceived “conceptual knot” i.e. the absence of “frontier-people” voices (in the person of expert, photographer, or witness) is not a perspective shared with members of the *Frontières* team who insist that

Conclusion

Could it be that the many ruptures with museological traditions (emphasis on non-linearity and subjectivity, multiple perspectives, the selection of topical and sensitive topics, pluridisciplinarity and the *metissage* of museographic genres) act as a counterpoint with the reductive vision of the Other still common in our relationships with more vulnerable societies? Does it allow us to see the narratives of the frontier peoples more as “human experience” than the Other’s experience? I would argue that there is a real tension between the reification of the ethnographic gaze, the desire to define one’s culture by interpreting other societies, and the desire to enter in a conversation with others. I am not convinced that the latter, the more dialogical relationship, is achieved.

Nevertheless, *Frontières* has stimulated fresh discussion about the museum’s role in shaping collective identities by inviting visitors-as-citizens to explore other realities (the periphery, the margins, the physically and/or culturally remote), and their interrelations with their own lives.

By confronting contemporary and sensitive social issues using semiotic resources that are not part of the classical museography, the museum is involved in the process of producing culture rather than simply reproducing it. The animated discussions the exhibition stimulated among groups of visitors, the large number of visiting high school students, and the extensive media coverage lead us to think that museums can be what Bennett (Museum Frictions, 2006) calls “people movers”, by participating in the ongoing elaboration of social relations and perceptions of difference.

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To Be or Not to Be: New Branding Strategies of UK National Museums in the Global Village

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How does a national museum occupy the visitor's mind in the global era? Facing increasing competition all over the world, 'branding' has played a more important role in strategic planning for museum marketing. In the UK, five out of eighteen national museums have changed their names during the last few decades and some are still planning to change the names of their branches to build a stronger brand name and identity. However, some are persistent with their established brand names. What kind of motivation makes this difference? What new branding strategies are adopted to face more competition in the global village? Three national museums have been selected as case studies to understand their strategic thinking by conducting in-depth interviews. As a result, it is the branding strategy that decides these national museums' 'to be or not to be'.

Keywords: branding, national museum, museum marketing, British Museum, National Museums Liverpool, National Museums Scotland

Introduction

In modern society, a brand name means everything and nothing. McDonald's, IKEA, IBM, Google, Ford, to name but a few, all give consumers immediate recognition of what their product is and should be like. On the other hand, some local shops with brand names such as Glass House, West Port, and Keracher's give no indication of what the business is about and what standard they hold unless in their local area with frequent customers. When a consumer decides to buy a product or service, with a wide range of choice, what is the key factor in affecting the process? Is it the quality and packaging of the product? Or could it be the price? Or is it maybe distributing channels? After all, the brand is always the key element when it involves in the process (McLean 1996). Brand image is a shortcut to attracting attention and building familiarity and trust (Kotler & Kotler 1998: 219-220). People seem to trust those brands that they have heard before and know what they can get from the companies. They might be willing to spend more money on the same product because of the brand image and name. It is the power of branding that matters. In brief, the power of brand name means recognition, reliability and value.

Photo 1. One of the most recognisable global brands-McDonald's



In the era of competition, the brand name has gained a great niche not only in the commercial world, but also in the non-profit sector (Wallace 2006: 177-180). Non-profit organisations compete for attention from the visitors, for the sponsor, from the donors, for the support from the government and for resources from the society (Kotler & Andreasen 1991: 99-105). For example, the Red Cross tends to attract more resources than the Save Children Fund because it has a reputation and wide awareness among the general public. In the museum sector, the

same situation has been similar after the museum boom in the later twentieth century. Any museum needs to plan a better branding in order to raise its profile before attracting more support from different sources. It is without doubt that the British Museum is able to find more sponsors for its capital projects than a local authority museum such as the St Andrews Museum, or even any other national museum in the UK. The National Gallery, Tate, the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts and the Guggenheim Museum are among the museum names best known in the world. What is the value of the brand name of a museum? Why do museums want to change their names? How do visitors react to these changes?

There are three aims in this research:

1. To understand the role that branding plays in the national museums in the UK through a historical review;
2. To investigate the practical in using branding in these British national museums by conducting in-depth interviews;
3. To find out the effect of branding of case studies and propose a possibility to increase their competitiveness.

What Is Branding?

‘Branding’ is a common term in the commercial world. It is particularly popular in marketing as well as in public relations. What is a brand? It is defined as ‘a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition’ (Kotler & Armstrong 1991: 260). It is regarded as one of the basic features of product design and covers various aspects of a product, including the brand name, the brand mark, the trade mark and the copyright. In its broad sense, it is the same as the corporate identity in its intention to gain an instant recognition and should be built to be long-lasting (McLean 1997: 142-144; Museums & Galleries Commission 1994: 27-30). In the non-profit sectors, a brand is helpful in market segmentation and creating a customer loyalty (Hannagan 1992: 116-117). For cultural enterprises, the name of a well-known company conjures up image in the mind of the consumer, who associates a particular product with that name (Colbert 2001: 32). In the museums and heritage sector, it has its value and mainly includes the brand name as well as its intellectual property right. As in the private sector, it is a way of differentiating similar products, particularly in the competitive market (Ruyard & French 1999: 159-161). A brand could be also a distinctive identity that engenders loyalty. Hence, branding ‘consists of creating and maintaining a body of programmes and attitudes that convey a clear promise, encourage familiarity, and generate ongoing support’ (Wallace 2006: 1-4). It is an important part of realising the aims of museums, as it assists a museum to articulate its identity and project its images to consumers (Hede 2007: 154-158). In summary, museum branding is a marketing tool to fulfill its mission, build its identity and establish a long term relationship with the public.

Museum branding begins with shaping an internal common sense by defining its mission and designing brand name and image. It then reaches out to a wide range of external stakeholders, such as visitors, the government, the donors, the community and even sponsors in order to build loyalty and support from these stakeholders. It is sometimes regarded as part of corporation identity (CI) or corporation identity system (CIS). In many examples, visual elements are used to reinforce the impression of the public, for instance, the name, logo, uniform, signage and building (Museums & Galleries Commission 1994: 27-30). In other cases, museum branding covers more intangible factors such as the exhibition content, education programmes, information provided either by its publication or on its website (Wallace 2006: 9-16). In fact, a good museum branding requires a combination of both visual

and intangible elements to assist its sustainability. It is the first impression received by visitors and lasts longer in visitor experience. It helps greatly for any museum to gain a position in the much more competitive global village (Scott 2007: 169).

McLuhan said 'the media is the message'. The brand of a museum has the most direct effect on public perception; therefore, a good branding strategy tends to not only reinforce the museum's reputation but also encourage visitors to come to the museum. In modern society, museums need also to consider which media they use to convey a clear message (Adams 1983: 90-91). Different media has its own advantage: word of mouth provides long lasting loyalty effects, visual design develops a consistency of image and gives the first impression, the internet and website expands the limits of time and space. These communication and promotional tools normally work together to attract consumer's attraction (Kotler & Kotler 1998: 210-220). Good reputation and strong branding will distinguish a museum from the others and attract attentions from stakeholders. It is a key player in positioning and segmentation of a museum.

Branding helps the museum to find its niche in the competitive global market. For example, the name of British Museum is so powerful that it would be folly to change it, at least for the next few decades. Take the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside as another example, it was too difficult for anyone to remember, not to mention the ambiguity of Merseyside that might have confused people's perception. As a result, a shorter and more comprehensive name, National Museums Liverpool, was adopted in 2003. Another example is the National Museums Scotland. Its branding strategy has transformed along with the political environment and national identity. The use of 'National Museum' in each of its branch museums recently has symbolised the strong identity after political devolution in the country. Hence, the brand name of a national museum should be impressive and also easy to remember, just like a new product that is able to echo among the public. For example, the Louvre is so powerful that nobody has to ask where it is or what it is famous for, even without adding any information such as national or museum of arts or fine art into its name. However, not every museum is lucky enough to have this prestige and this is why branding is becoming more and more important nowadays.

Research Design

The design of this research is mainly a qualitative study, using a historical review and in-depth interviews for data collecting. It first reviewed the historical development of national museums and their branding strategies and then chose three of eighteen national museums as case studies.

The historical review intends to provide a brief evolution of national museums in the UK and an insight into the branding and the relationship between national museums and their environments, particularly the political, social and economic aspects. The 'product life cycle' from marketing is adopted to analyse their existence. Elements were to be found for the explanation of their branding strategies. Establishing branches of these national museums has also been investigated as it reinforces the power of museum brand.

By utilising in-depth interviews, it aimed to find out the reasons for the changing of museums' brand names, or decision in not to change their names. This would reflect the practical situation in national museums and increase the understanding of their strategies in branding. Several issues raised in interviews include the strength of their brand names, the process of decision making, the influence from the external environment, the shaping of their identity and the response from the public. Based on the representativeness of historical background, geographical distribution and branding strategies, there are three cases chosen for in-depth interviews. They are the British Museum, the National Museums Liverpool and the National Museums Scotland.

National Museums and Their Branding Strategies in the UK (Historical Review)

National museums in the UK have experienced different stages in their history. It has the oldest national museum in the world: the British Museum, established in London in 1753 (Wilson 2002). It also has a very young member of the national museum family: the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool established in 2007. Through a historical review, it is the aim of this research to understand the role that branding plays in their development and how it reflects the characters of these national museums.

A ‘national museum’ is defined in the report of The National Museums: the National Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom with four basic characteristics. These are: the collections of national importance, vested in Trustees on the nation’s behalf, mainly funded by the Government; answering the call from the Government for expert advice (Museums and Galleries Commission 1988: 3-4). After more than 250 years of development, new museums were established, local authority museums were upgraded to gain national status and some existing museums were amalgamated. All have seen branding changes through history. The number of national museums in the UK is eighteen in 2008, as shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1. List of National Museum Organisation in the UK

The Report of National Museums	Year (Foundation)	Year (New Branding)
Royal Armouries	1680	1680
British Museum	1753	1753
National Museums Scotland	1854	1985 (2007)
National Gallery	1824	1824
National Galleries of Scotland	1850	1906
Victoria & Albert Museum	1852	1899
National Portrait Gallery	1856	1856
National Museums of Science and Industry	1857	1999
Natural History Museum	1881	1992
Wallace Collection	1897	1897
Tate	1897	2000
National Museum Wales (Amgueddfa Cymru)	1907	1995
Imperial War Museum	1917	1917
National Maritime Museum	1934	1934
National Army Museum	1960	1960
Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland	1958, 1961	1998
Royal Air Force Museum	1963	1963
National Museums Liverpool	1986	2003
There are eighteen organisations in total.		

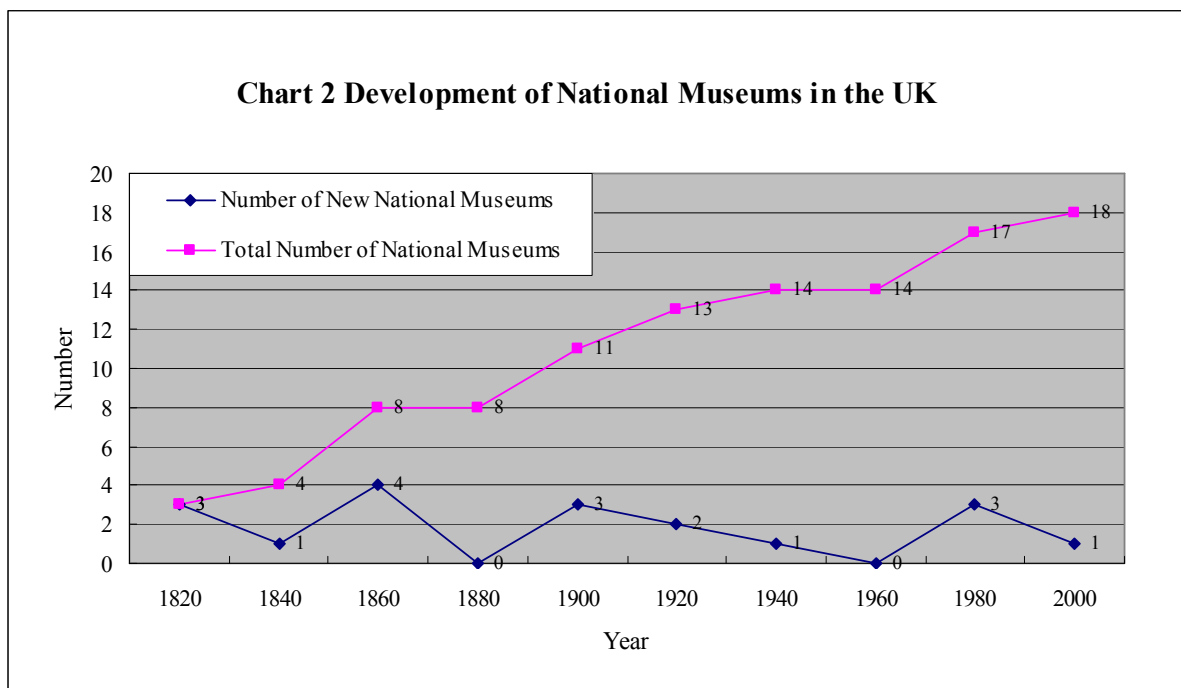
The evolution of national museums began with the foundation of the British Museum in 1753, even though the Royal Armouries was founded earlier but it was the Royal collection and did not open to the public until a later period. Since then, national museums and galleries have been developed for various reasons: to preserve the collections of national significance, to present the cultural and natural legacy of the nation, to diffuse knowledge and skills for the public and to protect the history of the nation. From the eighteenth century until the present day, development and growth can be divided into several periods by using the product life cycle (PLC) from a marketing concept, as shown in Chart 2.

Three periods of growth can be identified: 1840-1860, 1880-1990 and 1960-1980. It is partly because of social and political influence; hence includes the Great Exhibition in 1851,

private bequest collections to the nation and the preservation of military legacy in the UK (Tzeng 2005:2-5).

A chronological list of national museums in the UK is shown as the Appendix I, with the foundation of each national museum and their branches and name changes. It also reflects social, political, economic and cultural contexts: the British Empire and its expansion, the enlightenment and dissemination of knowledge, free trade and economic power, the two World Wars, industrialisation and urbanisation, the preservation of industrial heritage and the political devolution, to name but a few. Tracing the branding strategies in national museums therefore provides some food for thought in understanding the interaction between them and their environments. This section intends to give a brief summary of major branding factors in affecting British national museums.

Chart 2. Development of National Museums in the UK



The glory of British Empire: Many of these national museums do not adopt the term ‘national’ in their brand name. Two main reasons seem to provide an explanation for this phenomenon. One is to emphasise the glory of the British Empire while the other is in the memory of legacy of industrial tycoons. The British Museum should be the best example for the first explanation. It is the first national museum in the world, founded in 1753, and represents the rise of British power. Most of its important collections are from all over the world to amplify its status in the international political arena. It is a museum of the world, based in Britain; therefore the name of ‘British’ can not be more proper (more details will be provided in the case study). The Royal Armouries, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Imperial War Museum and the Royal Air Force Museum all have the same situation without bothering to put the term ‘national’ into their brand name. Even though they are all national museums. However, this does not mean that there is no argument regarding their brand name. Recently, many people started to debate if the Victoria and Albert Museum should change its name to the National Museum of Art and Design, which would give visitors a better understanding of museum and its contents. Another museum, in order to position itself in a more comprehensive way, has chosen to change its name from the British Museum (Natural History) to Natural History Museum in 1992.

The influence of industrialisation: The influence of industrialisation, particular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries creates another type of branding strategy. The Great Exhibition in London in 1851 helped to establish several national museums around the country, including the South Kensington Museum (now split into the Victoria and Albert Museum and Science Museum), the British Museum (Natural History, now the Natural History Museum) and the Industrial Museum of Scotland (later renamed as the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art, and now part of the National Museums of Scotland, more details will be provided in the case study). It also had influence on many local authority museums in big cities, such as in Glasgow, Birmingham and Manchester. They also have some features in common, especially in their concept and buildings. Education for the science and art played an important role in the foundation of these institutions (Royal Scottish Museum 1986: 13-15). Their buildings used the element of Crystal Palace and incorporated plenty of industrial materials.

The economic power and private donation: In the late nineteenth century, it was the apex of the British economic power. Several donations were made to the nation at that time. The Wallace Collection and Tate (originally named the National Gallery of British Art) were the most important two of them, both opened to the public in 1897. The Wallace Collection was bequeathed by Lady Wallace with the collections collected by her husband and father-in-law. Tate collection was based on the donation of Henry Tate to the nation. These two national museums still keep the names of donors in their brand in the remembrance of their contribution. The economic power of Britain in the second half of the twentieth century enabled several national museums to set up branches. For example, the Science Museum, later renamed the National Museum of Science and Industry, has branches in York, Bradford and Swindon. Tate has four branches in three cities in England: Tate Britain and Tate Modern in London, Tate Liverpool and Tate St Ives (Searing, 2004).

The preservation of the collections of national significance: With 'national' in their brand name, the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, the National Maritime Museum, the National Army Museum were created to preserve the important collections for the nation, either of art works or on a specific subject. The National Gallery in London, founded in 1824, is now the equivalent to the Louvre in Paris. Many people consider it as a live open book of art history. Similarly, the National Portrait Gallery, located next to the National Gallery in London, provides an in-depth comprehension of the artworks focusing on British portraiture. The National Maritime Museum and the National Army Museum, one the other hand, were founded to protect and present a live history of the British maritime and army empire.

National pride and political devolution: All the national museums outside London are under the influence of national pride and political devolution. These include two in Scotland, one in Northern Ireland, one in Wales and still another one in Liverpool. The National Galleries of Scotland and the National Museums in Scotland exemplify the strong desire to have national museums in Scotland. Political influence in Liverpool lifts the original local authority museum to a national status. Another influence was the amalgamation of different museums into a national museum organisation, such as the National Museums of Scotland in 1985 and the Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland in 1998. Into the 1980s and 1990s, political devolution increases the pace in these places. As a result, almost all of them adopted new branding strategies to have either a new name or new branches. The National Museums Liverpool was named the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside before 2003. The National Museum Wales was called the National Museum of Wales before 1995 and later changed its name as the National Museums and Galleries of Wales until 2006. The last re-branding was the National Museums Scotland in 2007; it was previously called the National Museums of Scotland. It reflects the intention of these national museums to shape a stronger national pride and identity.

Three Case Studies

As aforementioned, three cases were selected as the focus for further exploration by conducting in-depth interviews. These cases are the British Museum, the National Museums Liverpool and the National Museums Scotland. Information gathered from interviews is depicted as follows:

The British Museum regarded itself as a museum of the world. Its long history and outstanding scholarship represent its reputation. The core competence of the museum is its collections and expertise in research. Therefore, the term 'national' seems to be unnecessary in its branding as most visitors come to the museum to see world culture. It is actually a universal museum and plays the role of landmark in the museum sector all over the world. The location of the museum in the capital city, London, benefits from attracting tourists and resources. In general, the museum presents more identity of 'other' culture than 'British' culture. However, facing global competition, the museum also seeks for more participation from the international representatives. As a result, it has begun to build partnership not only in the UK but also from abroad. The branding strategy of the British Museum is to continue its long tradition without changing its brand name. In the meantime, it has also started to use its brand as a valuable asset to generate income and to attract more visitors. For example, the accomplishment of the Great Court in 2000 provides a great opportunity for visitor services, from a museum shop and café to information desks and rest area. As for the branch museum, it does not consider this as an important issue. Its recent focus is on building partnership all over the UK and in the international market. In 2007, it has a successful touring exhibition around South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Much of the audience going to this touring exhibition were attracted by its brand name.

The second case-study is the National Museums Liverpool. It is the only national museum not located in a capital city. It was upgraded from a local authority museum to the national status because of political and economic turmoil in the 1970s and 1980s. When it gained national museum status, it was named the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside. The name has been changed into the National Museums Liverpool in 2003 because both the director and its board of trustees considered the name was a better choice. One very important reason is because the new brand name is easier to remember and more comprehensive. The old name caused some confusion as many visitors did not have a clue of where Merseyside is. Its branding strategy was to match each of its sites with a better and proper name. For example, the name of Museum of Liverpool has been replaced by the Museum of the World reopened because the interviewee mentioned that its exhibitions and collections are not about Liverpool but the world culture. There are eight museum sites under the organisation of the National Museums Liverpool. The interviewee strongly expressed objection to use of term 'branch museum' to refer these sites. As a national museum in the region, it aims to build close connection and partnership with both the local and national institutions. It has a complex identity mixed with universal and local. For example, it opened the Museum of the World in 2005 and the International Slavery Museum in 2007 but at the same time plans a new museum called the Museum of Liverpool estimated to open in 2010. Another branding strategy is to expand its scale to impress the public and to attract more visitors and resources. The latest development of its branding is to participate in the planning process of the European Capital of Culture in 2008 and to play a central role in this international event.

Photo 2. The British Museum: cultivating its existing brand



Photo 3. The National Museums Liverpool: expanding its brand



Photo 4. National Museums Scotland: shaping its brand as a new national identity



National Museums Scotland, mainly located in Edinburgh, is the third case-study. It was an amalgamation of two national museums in 1985, as a result of a report conducted in the early 1980s (Williams 1981). With the new name of National Museums of Scotland to replace the Royal Scottish Museum and National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, it reflects the identity of the nation; however, it changed the name again in 2007. It later set up a new building to house and to display its Scottish collections, with the name of Museum of Scotland (now called the National Museum of Scotland). During the last decade, political devolution has a great effect hugely in Scotland. Both the Scottish Parliament and the Museum of Scotland become the symbol of shaping its Scottishness (McKean 2000). Although it still keeps its collections from all over the world exhibited in the Royal Museum (now part of the National Museum of Scotland); some people see the name 'Royal Museum' with doubt. As a result, it began a new branding process in 2007 (Heywood 2007). All its museum sites (again, the interviewee did not agree with the term 'branch museum' and insisted they are sites of the museum) adapted new names, shown as Chart 3. It is noticeable that all new names of its branches have 'national' in them, which stresses the importance of Scotland as a nation. It gives the public the impression that Scotland has all its own national museums in different sites and subjects. However, its branches are actually incorporated due to historical influence and decided by the central government, mentioned by the interviewee. Its new branding strategy creates an opportunity for the museum to be a focus of shaping the national identity and pride. It helps the museum to attract more visitors and resources from the society.

Chart 3. The brand name changes in the National Museums Scotland

Period	Before the new branding	After the new branding (2007)
Site	National Museums of Scotland	National Museums Scotland
Headquarter	National Museum of Scotland	National Museum of Scotland
Museum site	Royal Museum	
Museum site	National War Museum of Scotland	National War Museum
Museum site	Museum of Flight	National Museum of Flight
Museum site	The Museum of Scottish Country Life	National Museum of Rural Life
Museum site	Shambellie House Museum of Costume	National Museum of Costume
Museum site	Granton Centre	National Museums Collection Centre

Findings and Future Prospect: Three Dilemmas

From the historical review and in-depth interviews, there are some findings concluded in this research. The branding strategy of national museums in the UK contains three dilemmas that demonstrate how difficult a national museum experiences during the branding process.

To change or not to change the name. The first dilemma is whether to keep or to change their names. A name is actually an intangible property of an institution. If the name is changed, it might damage the reputation of the institution and it might take a long time before the public is able to remember the new name.

The universal or local identity. The second difficulty is to find the balance of identity between universality and locality. In some cases national museums are getting more involved in the local community while in others they enjoy universal status to attract visitors and resources from all over the world.

To present ‘our’ or ‘the other’ culture? The third impasse is the struggle of presentation of ‘our’ or ‘the other’ culture. There was some confusion between ‘our’ and ‘the other’ culture in the branding of some national museums due to political turmoil and historical incorrectness. However, a good branding can help to clarify a museum’s missions.

Consequently, all national museums are searching for a stronger branding strategy nowadays to reinforce their identity because branding can raise the profile of their museums and reinforce their images in visitor’s mind. They might regard themselves as a universal or national institution in order to reach out to their audience. A good branding strategy will benefit the picture in public perception and help to attract more resources as reputation is considered a priceless asset in the modern world. At the same time, branding actually increases competitiveness of national museums in the global market when they have faced more competition from various sources in the new millennium. It also relates to their presentation of ‘our’ culture or ‘other’s’ culture as a powerful tool in shaping the identity of the nation and establish a sense of community. Only when they have a good branding strategy can they build up their strength in the future development, for instance, to establish partnership and international exchange programmes.

To sum up, a good branding should define a museum’s mission and root in the organisational culture. It should be a comprehensive and easy to remember name, such as the British Museum or the National Gallery. It also needs to build a systematic branding strategy in all its programmes, from the exhibition, educational activities to all merchandise products. Good examples include the British Museum and Tate. More and more efforts have been devoted to branding as it brings in audience, revenue generation and resources. What even more important is that branding also helps build visitor’s loyalty. This research has found out that the branding process for the last few decades actually provides a good opportunity for national museums in the UK to rethink their marketing strategy and to seek for a better chance

toward a more competitive global market in the future. Branding will be the key for a national museum to decide 'to be or not to be'.

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