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National Museums and the Legacies of Exclusion. Issues and Challenges Around Change in the 21st Century

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The perpetual crisis of national museums is directly related to the character of the nation that has been considered – since the latter half of the 20th century – as elusive, fluid, constructed and difficult to grasp. How have national museums reacted, supported, resisted or rejected political changes of the nation? What were the privileged representations of the Nation-state? And what are the ways in which these institutions are trying to come to grips with multicultural and multiethnic societies? In an attempt to shed light on these questions, this essay is constructed around the tensions and challenges that face national museums as they aim to represent both a fragmented and united community with the pressures to overcompensate past exclusions.

In order to look at how national museums have responded to their contexts, and the role they are playing today, the paper will examine the case of the Museo Nacional de Colombia. This Latin American country has, in the last fifteen years, advanced greatly in terms of developing a legislation that recognizes the existence of multiple ethnicities and cultures in opposition of the well-known project of homogenization that characterized the Nation-state. Nevertheless, the reality of the communities is complex and though symbolically the 1991 Constitution has had great impact, there has been a backlash in terms of overcoming discrimination, poverty and improvement of the living conditions of marginalized groups. What then, is the role of the museum in this changed setting?

Introduction

If a nation is discourse, narrative, or, in other words, a form of representing a cultural community, then national museums are on a second level of representation tied to the imperatives of the societies they aim to interpret. In this sense, museums can act as micro-mirrors of a macro-reality. The perpetual crisis of national museums is directly related to the character of the nation, a concept that has been considered – since the latter half of the 20th century – elusive, fluid, constructed and difficult to grasp. According to Hobsbawn, individuals give meaning to the nation through discourse and, because discourse can change (González 2007), a nation as a historical product is a process that is never truly finished (Gómez 2004: 97)1. If we consider this particularity of the nation, the museum that aims to represent it is never truly completed either. These theories are relatively new, as they reject "essentialist" or "primordialist" accounts that view nations as objective, durable phenomena, the origins of which typically can be traced back to remote antiquity" (Kohl 1998: 225).

The reshaping of what is considered *national* has yielded a pluralist space of a series of overlapping "imagined communities" (Hall 1999: 41) following the theory proposed by Benedict Anderson in the 1980s. This new conception stands in opposition to the unitary program that intended to legitimize the nation-state of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Culture in the nation-state communicates the idea of a homogeneous imagined community and creates a political identity that distracts from contradictions and fractures (Bolívar 2002). The nation-state is thought to exclude because the action of one principal group tends to organize common life for all other groups to reflect its own history and culture. This single identity propagates itself by both imposing and creating consensus around its own image through the use of the discourse of patriotism, festivities, education and symbols (Walzer 1997).

In the context of the nation-state, national museums were seen as a means of spreading the cultural ideals of unity and homogeneity. Their role in the creation of a collective memory makes them essential in the definition of both individual and communal identities. Museums, therefore, were, and still are, an integral part of the process of nation-making. The problem arises when shared cultural meanings are partial: there are those who cannot see themselves as part of a shared heritage and who feel excluded from the national narrative (Hall 2005).

In this setting, how have national museums responded to new conceptions of *nation*? How are they coping with new groups that are sometimes seen as "threatening" national identity or old exclusions that demand compensation? These questions are the basis for this essay, which is constructed around the tensions and challenges that face national museums as they aim to represent both a fragmented and united community while feeling the pressures of compensating past exclusions. The juxtaposition between representing universalism and the particular is one of the problems that Dean and Rider describe when they list the pressures that are placed on museums today: "to uplift and not to offend, to offer a vision of unity while respecting diversity and to entertain and educate simultaneously bears with it a host of management challenges any one of which can plunge the museum into hot water" (2005: 44).

The questions and objectives outlined above will be discussed by means of examining the case of the Museo Nacional de Colombia. In this case study we can determine that there have been great advancements in legislature that have moved the country away from the nation-state model into a multicultural and pluriethnic nation. Nevertheless, the reality of the communities is complex and although legislation has had great impact symbolically, there has been a backlash against the government in terms of not overcoming discrimination or poverty

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1   The author has translated all texts in Spanish. The number of the page has been kept when relevant.

and in failing to improve the living conditions of marginalized groups. The specificity of the case will unveil the problems that arise not only when trying to overcome exclusions but also when the interests of diverse groups (including the museum itself) have to be negotiated. This emphasis in legislation is by no means the only possible framework in which to operate, but it has been chosen in the particular case of Colombia as a way to measure the stakes that the museum faces[2].

In order to map out the problems and possibilities of the Museo's representation of the Colombian nation, the first part of the essay will present the political context of the appearance, strengthening and demise of the nation-state and the major change implemented by the Constitution of 1991 in Colombia. Also of importance are the unfinished ideals that the new Constitution has left, especially in the particular case of the Afrodescendant communities.[3] This context will set the stage for the Museo Nacional as the second part of the essay presents the current dilemmas faced by the institution as active pieces in the national puzzle. The third part of the essay will bring the local issues into the international scene to look at challenges and questions that remain unanswered around topics such as inclusion, disruption of grand narratives, the territory of the nation in the space of the museum, creating positive difference, and the dangers of fixing identities. In the final part of the essay, the focus will be on suggesting possible solutions to local problems that might also prove useful to the wider museum community.

Colombia. The Mestizo Nation

The Mestizo Project

In Latin America, the major project imagined for nations that gained their independence from the Spanish or Portuguese empires in the 19th century was based on the concept of miscegenation or the mixing of races. The project was patriarchic and elitist and excluded not only women but indigenous peoples, Blacks, enslaved people, illiterates, and in most cases, people without property (Achugar 2002: 78). In Colombia, such a project followed, more or less, the same lines with an additional ingredient: regional fragmentation due to a difficult geography.

In retrospect, the particular moment of Independence can be seen as a promising moment in the history of Colombia because it was a chance to give form to a wider democratic project. But analysts show that the exclusionary nature of political representation is an integral part of the founding narrations of the national (Martín-Barbero 2002b). The white Creoles formed their identity by excluding and "othering" different social groups. The possible exploitation of rich natural resources became one of the elements to invigorate that particular group identity (González 2007: 23). A *citizen* was then the person who adhered to their ideological project and a means to exclude any reference to ethnicity (Melo 1992) and citizenship was tied to national identity. Merging contradictory memories was necessary to create an official memory, because recognizing contesting memories would constitute a threat to the survival of the young and frail nation (Roldán 2000:104).

Black and indigenous populations, principally, were considered barbaric; with miscegenation it was thought possible to improve these "lower" races (Arocha & Moreno 2007: 596). Those of mixed origin (mestizos, mulattos and zambos) were still inferior to whites but superior to Blacks and indigenous people (Helg 2004: 24). So "uncomfortable"

was race in the 19th century that the Constitutional texts created inclusions and exclusions either by not mentioning race or by creating "special" legislation for indigenous and enslaved people, many times to their detriment (Helg 2004: 27).

Miscegenation appears as the discourse of democratization that produces one class of citizens (Arocha & Moreno 2007: 597) but in reality wishes to eradicate or hide difference, diverse ethnicities, and the realities of the population. The myth of the mestizo contributed to hide the historical and cultural specificities of the Afrocolombians and in legacy the present continues to support the negation of their ethnic rights, as contemplated in international legislation (Arocha 2004: 165). For some historians, miscegenation permitted a more flexible social structure that allowed upward social mobility. Melo gives a realistic account and characterizes Colombian culture as mestiza, for better or worse, differentiated regionally (1992: 124).

The Multicultural and Pluriethnic Nation

As a result of the process of homogenization, what emerged well into the 20th century was an apparent sense of a uniform society but also a deep conflict with those considered different, outside the margins of the nation (i.e. the "uncivilized masses"). The situation changed due to a multiplicity of factors. Globalization, adherence to neoliberalism, the democratic imperative, and the rise of indigenous organizations as alternative forms of development start breaking the spectrum of homogeneity. Economic treaties and "deals" with multilateral institutions are not solely about commerce but include exigencies of political and social compromises, human rights and political legitimacy. This relationship with the rest of the world both debilitates the homogeneous State and gives it a new geography.

During the 1990s, several countries in Latin America acknowledged in their constitutions their multiethnic and pluricultural character (Gros 2004: 205). The end of the mestizo nation in Colombia, at least on paper, would be signed by the drafting of a new constitution in 1991. For the first time in the history of Colombia, voters chose the composition of the Assembly that would rewrite the country's Constitution. The 74 members were representative not only of the traditional parties (that by now included women), but also most notoriously – and perhaps symbolically – of indigenous people, former guerrilla members, evangelicals and leftist parties. Groups of women and Afrocolombians participated in processes of discussion prior to the Assembly (Wills 2000: 399–400).

Not only was the process an interesting case of exercising citizenship and participation, but also the content of the document changed the terms by which the nation was described. In its 7th article, the Constitution declares: "The State recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian Nation." Recognition of diversity meant the end of the Catholic religion as the country's official religion, as well as of Spanish as the sole recognized official language. The Constitution and laws that stemmed from it permitted the construction of a new national imaginary that acknowledges a sociological reality not contemplated before (Gros 2000: 353). For Zambrano, the Constitution constructs a model not of an existing society but of one to be built (2006: 62) and its effects on redefining the national have not been measured. For Wills (2000), the Constitution of 1991 represented a real rupture of democratic significance; even though the changes were of importance, she characterizes Colombia as culturally heterogeneous and socially unequal, the former seen as desirable and the latter as unjust, both causing fear and fragmentation.

Marginalization Continues… The case of Afrocolombians

The 1991 rewriting of the Constitution did not automatically result in the recognition of past exclusions or in the improvement in the situation of marginalized sectors of the population. Multiculturalism has not improved the quality of life of the indigenous and Black

communities nor has it really changed the political representation of these communities on a national level (Almario 2007: 200) in general, though, it was a big step in recognizing a diverse nation.

Colombia has the third largest Afrodescendant population in the Americas (Lao-Montes 2007), but the group's presence is poor in the text of the Constitution. The 55th article provides that a law should be sanctioned in the following 2 years, as it was in 1993 (Law 70, 1993). Some academics have interpreted this as the continuation of certain forms of discrimination. Helg (2004), for instance, criticizes the definitions of Black communities in this law, as it homogenizes their culture, excludes zambos, mulattos and populations of certain regions, as well as Black urban communities, and makes no mention of the African Diaspora.

In comparison with the prerogatives that indigenous communities have (81 indigenous groups with judicial jurisdiction, administrative autonomy, ownership of land, self-government and seats in the Senate by special circumscription), the Black communities have won ground but are still behind. They are also the populations most affected by the country's internal conflict and by economic liberalization. The right to hold land collectively was legalized in the 1990s and has had a sinister result, as legal and illegal armed groups entered the scene to dispute the control of their territories (Arocha & Moreno 2007: 593).

Amid an internal conflict, the concept of reparations has become problematic, aggravated by the historical circumstances that touch the Black communities. For Almario, there is a need to revisit the past in order to see how the damages to the communities in the present are a result of the repression of former events (2007). He agrees with the idea that a lack of acknowledgment and hiding the memories of slavery cause continuities of inequality, exploitation and discrimination generated by the politics of imperialism (Ibid). The claims for historical reparations have become more widespread since the Durban Conference in South Africa declared the transatlantic slave trade a crime against humanity in 2001. A group of activist-scholars demands that public institutions rewrite the history of a Black presence (Mosquera, Barcelos & Arévalo 2007: 16). Their invitation is meant for those Blacks who perceive themselves as integrated into the nation, to remember the pain of the past, and to see how slavery has had repercussions on the inequalities of the present as a constitutive determinant of a social identity. The principal fight is against racism and discrimination, seen through the lens of history to find its original causes.

This movement is not isolated. Around the globe, there are other groups that claim reparations and actions that are visible in the public sphere. "Colonialism, slavery, and racial injustice have been prominent in these attempts to bring the past into the present" (Schwarz 2005: 225). Schwarz argues that history and heritage institutions have to explore the continuation of past mentalities into the present. To recognize the wrongs done in the past has consequences that are judicial, therapeutic and historical, but he states that history can be in conflict with the way these events are remembered. There is no formula and there are no predictable positive results, but recognition of the past is a way to make visible the undesirable forms of the former times that continue to exist in the present.

Representing the Colombian Nation in the National Museum

Origins and Current Narrative

The thread that sews the argument of this essay is that the Museo Nacional is a micro-stage that serves to look at the Colombian nation. What follows is a description of the origins of the Museo and a brief explanation of the Museo's present script, which will show the criticisms, the challenges and the pressures that are presently placed on the institution.

Shortly after Independence, the new government founded the Museo Nacional de Colombia (1823) in an effort to contribute to the nation-making process and as a means of breaking with the colonial past. It responded to a belief in progress and in the advantages of science in a region that was considered rich in natural resources but poorly administered by the Spanish crown. A French commission of scientists was hired to found and install a school, which developed into what is now the Museo. The school's first director was a Peruvian man educated in Europe. Shortly after his stay in Colombia, he returned to Perú to found a museum there. Originally, the Museo was meant to complement a school of mineralogy where lessons concerning geology, chemistry, anatomy, zoology, entomology, botany, drawing, and other sciences would be held (Segura 1995).

Natural science museums were instrumental in creating a national identity in other Latin American countries as well. One such country is Brazil (Sepúlveda dos Santos 2003). For Sepúlveda dos Santos, while European museums constructed a narrative that included ancient civilizations, Brazil created its nationhood based on nature. She states: "Museums of natural history had served as instruments for nation-states as they gathered and classified samples of the entire world. Later they served their nations by ordering objects from the past to the present, from antiquity to modernity, from indigenous populations to civilized ones, and from fossils to skeletons of the human species, and presenting them to an increasing and massive public" (Ibid.: 195).

Along these lines of thought, one finds that the collections of the Museo Nacional rapidly became very diverse. It was foreign travelers in Colombia who chronicled the early presence of paintings in the Museo. Visitors would find minerals, weapons, ethnographic objects of the Indigenous communities, archaeological artifacts, religious paintings, testimonial objects, and trophies from independence in the same space. Ironically, the present-day collections divided into art, history, and archaeology and ethnography hold little evidence that can attest to the origins of the institution, except for the instruments brought by the French Scientific Mission and a meteorite that was bought as the school's first piece.

The story of the collections is not only one of constant increase; it is also one of fragmentation and loss. The fact that the Museo only had a definite site when it moved into a 19th century prison building in 1948 attests to the difficulty of maintaining the collections. In the middle of the 20th century, the natural history collections were moved to other museums in the National University; objects that belonged to Simón Bolívar were used to found a historic house museum in 1925; objects from the colonial period were used to create the Museo de Arte Colonial in 1942; in 1960, a museum dedicated to Independence was also born of the Museo´s collections. For Sánchez, "The fragmented memory of the Museo may reflect the memory of the Colombian nation, and this museum might be one in spite of itself (as is the nation) and the Colombian State" (2000: 27).

Presently, the Museo´s script has a chronological narration that encompasses the four collections it holds. The first floor starts with the vestiges of early human presence in the Colombian territory and the script ends in the third floor with the death in 1948 of the Liberal Presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, which spurred acts of violence and contributed to a national crisis known as The Violence (1946–1957). The 17 permanent exhibition galleries also hold small spaces for temporary shows and galleries that do not strictly follow the chronology. There are differences in the language employed across the floors due to their varying "ownership." The first floor is "dominated" by the Curatorship of Ethnography and Archaeology and the second and third by the Curatorship of Art and History. Temporary exhibitions are usually held in their own gallery located close to the entrance of the Museo.

The present narrative was initiated and developed almost single-handedly by the artist and art historian Beatriz González, who headed the Curatorship of Art and History from 1989 to 2004. Since replacing González at that point, I have introduced changes that have not

modified the basic structure of that narrative. González´s intention was to have a script that would have a unifying concept and that would include the contemporary period. For the most part, history in the Museo had not covered periods after Independence. Therefore, the intention was to create a sense of the history of culture that would involve scientists, writers, artists, and the most relevant political events.

Criticizing the narrative, Sánchez notes that "The Museo gives objects-document-monuments an imagined unity: a national narrative…The museum-nation is a *mise-en-scène* of a memory that defines who the great men are; what the great events are; what is valued: talent, fortune, heroism; what is privileged: the artistic, the scientific or the political. It is the tension between a museum-gallery and a museum-society" (2000: 28). The narrative was developed out of the collections. But what did the collections hold? In essence, it is what Achugar describes as "poems, visual images, anthems, currency, prints, and monuments [that] made part of the labor of constructing a series of symbols necessary to establish this 'ritual order' that operated as one of the central elements in the foundational effort to constitute a national imaginary that would, in time, end up being the object of remembrance and be objectified in the official national memory" (2002: 79). These symbols of identity-for the most part- obeyed the logic of an elitist minority.

We can safely say that the discourse of nation that has predominated in the Museo has privileged the victorious, the political and economical elites, and (predominantly) heterosexual white men. Notwithstanding some exceptions, museum exhibitions privilege hegemonic memories. Until now, our excuse for absences and silences has been the lack of objects with which to represent other communities and other realities. In this sense, the Museo still reflects the traditional notion of identity and the fact of Colombia as the nation-state. Our weakness is precisely the difficulty of rescuing from the past the testimonial objects belonging to subaltern groups. The story of the museum is not heterogeneous and several directors made efforts to represent the country's various regions, for instance, but in reality the collections are not truly representative of the richness of the people who comprise the nation.

With these limitations in mind, the Museo initiated a series of discussion panels at the end of the 1990s that challenged its mission and took into consideration the Constitution of 1991. The results were documented and implemented in a *Strategic Plan 2001–2010. A Foundation for the Museo Nacional of the Future*. A general diagnosis and a critical view of the collections state: "the collections and permanent exhibition galleries register enormous voids in happenings, social processes and other key themes of the history of Colombian culture and are distant from reflecting the multiethnic and pluricultural character of the nation…" To remedy the situation, the Plan stipulated the creation of working projects that would follow an area of "Construction of multiple narratives of the history of cultural processes." In theory, the process welcomes the participation of different sectors of society and regions and tries to build bridges between the Museo and the academic community. In practice, the Plan does not take into account the Museo´s lack of human resources, budget, infrastructure and negotiation with communities, a situation that slows down reaching such goals.

Criticizing discourse

The suggestions and questions raised by the academic community can be added to a series of criticisms that appear in theses or analyses developed by students. Concerning the subordinate population, Ana María Calderón, a history student, analyzed the discourse the museum builds as it relates to Afrocolombians. She criticizes what she sees as a reproduction of stereotypes related to the slave trade, music, and exotic instruments and the conformation of rebellious groups in search of liberty. For her, these elements give a sense of picturesque, servile and exotic beings. She supports a deeper regard that includes aspects that permit a better understanding of the African past and how it survives in the present.

These critical views on the representation of the Colombian population have been reaffirmed by the results of visitor studies the museum has held in its permanent exhibition galleries. A general survey has been conducted in all of the galleries and more specialized ones were held in 2005 in two rooms. The first was held in the gallery "Emancipation and Republic" (1810–1830) and the second was held in "New Kingdom of Granada," the gallery that covers the colonial period (1554–1810). One hundred polls were taken in each room. In addition, selected semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted. In both studies, people were asked to select from a series of categories, themes that they though should be included in the galleries. For "Emancipation and Republic," 34% of the visitors polled chose "arts (music and literature)," 16% "participation of minorities," and 13% "quotidian life (celebrations and labour)." Other visitors chose multiple categories. In the second study, when asked about the themes that visitors wanted the museum to enhance, 26% answered positively in the category of "participation of minorities," 10% "quotidian life," and 46% combined both topics. The profile of visitors had its higher rate in young students (less than 25 years of age). Interviews suggest that there is an interest in seeing how common people participated in their country's history and in exploring other aspects of cultural and quotidian life.

The results contrast with the vast majority of comments left by people in the "Book of visitors," where reactions attest to a pride and gratitude for the way the museum preserves national identity. Visitors to the museum can be characterized by a higher percentage of students from the middle class, roughly divided in half between men and women. There is also a high number of private and public schools that attend both temporary and permanent exhibitions. The vast number of students that visit the Museo to do their homework attests to the fact that the institution is seen as a complement to formal education. The results do not show a significant presence amongst visitors of Indigenous or Afrocolombian origins, as well as people from other regions who seldom visit the institution. In short, the museum caters to an audience that excludes the lower (and upper) classes as well as ethnic minorities. Presently, the institution is working on a project of accessibility that involves making the museum available to people with physical disabilities and incorporating their views to the plan the museum is developing.

Afrocolombians

In 2005 actions were taken to contact Jaime Arocha, a scholar who has worked and dedicated the last 30 years to the Afrocolombian communities. He had previously been in touch with the Ministry of Culture and in the company of Claudia Mosquera advocated the need for the Museo Nacional to have a separate pavilion for Afro communities, and called for the inclusion of Afro communities in the Museo´s narration. These demands are put forward as part of the claim for reparation from the State. Claudia Mosquera argues: "Why not demand the State to rewrite the history of the Black presence in the country since the transatlantic slave trade?"(Mosquera, Barcelos & Arévalo 2007: 16). Mosquera directly refers to the urgent need for institutions such as the Museo Nacional de Colombia to rewrite the narrative of the contributions that diverse Afro communities have made to the construction of the nation. The strength of this claim is supported by the subrepresentation of these communities both in the collections and in the permanent exhibitions.

The members of the museum team, including myself, are hesitant of the results of creating a separate space as a means of reparation. Won't this solution create further alienation? The pros and cons of both integration and separation will be looked at in detail in the next section. In the meantime, we shall mention that at a recent two-day meeting (September 13 and 14, 2007) with 13 representatives of different Afro communities, the idea of a separate space was much supported. In an earlier meeting held with 13 academics on the issue of representation of the Afro communities on February 22 and 23, 2007, two positions were held. The more

radical stance, supported by Mosquera and Arocha, supports the necessity for a pavilion, while the other expresses its adherence to a temporary exhibition room that would explore both issues concerning the Afro communities and the relationship between them and other groups. Both academics and community representatives were appalled by the absence and misrepresentation of Afro communities and made claims that directly checkmate the current narrative structure.

Apart from these two groups that consigned highly critical views of the museum in ways that can only be transformed in the long term, we have begun to work on a short- term action. As Arocha has written in the current joint project, the working group reached a consensus: to reach the principal goal – i.e. the pavilion for the scholars, the representation of Afro communities in the collections and exhibitions for the museum team – it is necessary to take intermediate steps, such as a temporary exhibition. In this sense, the professors emphasized that the cult to the ancestors constitutes a fundamental axis for both Afrocolombian cultures as well as the cultures in West and Central Africa. In consequence, the Museum and the Ministry have developed a permanent team of Afrocolombian intellectuals, as well as members of the communities that will be represented in the exhibition, who have been invited to participate in the process of the researching and representing of funerary rituals of Afro communities in San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina islands in the Caribbean that have a distinct history from the other Afrocommunities-, Palenque de San Basilio, a site of early resistance, Norte del Cauca, Chocó, and Nariño.

Exclusionary Narrative

The diagnosis is clear. Without having consulted additional misrepresented groups, we can apply the words of Uberoi to the narrative of the *national* currently supported by the Museo. He states: "national identities that possess elements repugnant to certain minority groups are also likely to only reflect the values, traditions and history of the cultural majority. The national identity will still be unable to foster security or belonging amongst many of the individuals and groups that comprise the polity because it is still not a reflection of the diverse cultural groups that comprise the polity as a whole" (2007: 149). With the absence of the representation of cultural or ethnic groups such as the Afrocolombian communities, there can be no place for the recognition of the self, individual or collective, in the construction of the polity.

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

Several participants in the two meetings held on the topic of representation of Afrocommunities in the Museum expressed that the Museo is just as excluding as the nation is. Why expect the museum to be different to the reality of the communities? However, the museum not only mirrors a reality but, when it invokes a reality of the national, it is actually producing it as such (Bolívar 2002: 27). The Constitution challenges the script of the Museo by promoting diversity, political participation, inclusion, but it does not make explicit how to make these objectives possible. The Museo´s task involves not only these changes but confronting the maladies that taking on this task would entail because the national script is well embedded in society. Roldán suggests that in rewriting the Museo´s own script it might

risk discovering that its own disappearance or radical change in power structure might be the price to pay in the exercise of re-imagining the nation (2000: 114).

Exclusion does not only entail Afrocolombian groups. Representation of the third major group that comprises Colombian identity, the indigenous population, is reduced almost exclusively to archaeology. This is problematic because as Kohl has stated, "archaeological cultures and ethnic groups are not synonymous, and modern constructivist perspectives on ethnicity and nationality preclude the possibility of a perfect correlation between material remains and ethnicity" (Kohl 1998: 239). In this list, we might include as well the history of women, children, youth, groups of migrants, disabled people, popular sectors, and the elderly. In light of these exclusions we can ask whether the rights of one group impose on the others. Should each group have its own pavilion or does the right of reparation only belong to the Afrodescendent community?

We cannot say that the Museo has stood still in light of these results. Measures have been taken to collect research around themes such as the abolition of slavery, women's political rights, and the displacement of communities, but these investigations have not made their way into the permanent exhibition galleries or transformed the collections. The changes that have been put into place in the galleries were unnoticed or misinterpreted by participants of both meetings described above, which certainly problematizes our views of "solutions." The Afro community has placed great expectative on the future museum. Confronting these dreams with reality is one of the challenges.

To summarize, the problems of overcoming a vastly excluding narrative have to be added to the challenge of including diversity without creating a homogenous identity and responding to claims of historical reparation. The solution to these problems also has to embrace a narrative that is in tune with postmodern and post colonial transformations. The main concern here is the path to approach the conformation of a public sphere, a space of dialogue, and a space where differences can coexist. The specific demand, until now, of a separate pavilion for the Afrocolombian population imposes further requirements that the Museo has been asked to respond to in the short term. Consultation with other groups such as the indigenous populations will also create a new scenario that will either reinforce or challenge what the Afrocolombian representatives have demanded.

National Museums, Representing Unity and Difference

Abandoning Grand Narratives and Inclusion

We could venture the hypothesis that the all-encompassing nation-state has had its equivalence in the permanent exhibitions that aim to create a grand narrative with an authoritative voice that homogenizes representations. If national museums are micro-cosms of a macro-reality, what are the necessary changes in the narrative that will allow an articulation of an inclusive script? "Grand narrative" exhibitions have, as is the case of the Museo Nacional, the tendency to claim universalism and totalizing accounts, but in this attempt to create a notion of a cohesive community they leave out the diverse expressions and histories of the subcommunities that make up the national. There is a parallel that can be drawn with the way history, as a discipline, has been challenged from micro-instances in order to take into account the local and the regional.

To break down these totalizing account, one should be able to place the question, in the words of Hall: "Where, one asks, is this deeply ruptured and fractured history, with its interweaving of stability and conflict, in the Heritage´s version of the dominant national narrative?" (2005: 27). The purpose of abandoning the ambitious grand narrative is to give way to the different experiences of the national and open up the possibilities of diversifying readings of the collections to tell unheard stories. This point is made clear in Hooper-

Greenhill's account of the resignification of paintings and decorative art objects set in the context of the story of the slave-servant Ignatious Sancho (2000). She theorizes, "In the post-museum, histories that have been hidden away are being brought to light, and in this, modernist master narratives are being challenged" (Ibid: 145).

In the process of acknowledging particular microcosms, the institution becomes accessible for "sharing private memories and stories – a multiplicity of versions of history offered in the public sphere with the intent of community building" (Ashley 2005: 11). This openness is used, in the case of Northern Ireland, to build exhibits with those stories as a point of departure. In this scenario, taking distance from the grand narrative is also a way to avoid touching "'the troubles' and conflicting imaginings of Northern Ireland's history," as Crooke has established (Ashley 2005). Crooke also points to the transition museums have made between being the space of the state to being the space of the communities: museums are inviting groups previously excluded and groups themselves are self-representing. For Crooke (2005) museums are now at the intersection between the national, the personal and the local.

Gardner also advocates for a broad history that allows a multiplicity of stories told from many points of view: "We should see difference and contest as a strength, not something to be plastered over with an idealized story of shared values and goals" (2004: 17). Referring to the National Museum of American History (Smithsonian), he adds, "Different voices give us a fuller picture of American history, each story telling us something about all the others. We have a responsibility to help our visitors understand that our history is diverse –we have an obligation to interpret history, not present the past as we wish it had been" (Ibid). Nevertheless, Ashley and Gardner point to the complexities of opening up the process and diversifying representation. Ashley asks "[w]hether non-white minorities will be invited to share this space…" (2005: 11). She also makes her ideas about participation more complex by signaling that

Some critics see the abandonment of the grand narrative and its replacement by multiple narratives of minorities or populist representations of ordinary people as another form of tyranny. Instead of the public depicted as uniform citizens, it becomes individuals and communities of difference that are isolated, depoliticized and made digestible for mass consumption (Hodgins, 2004). Others voice the danger that in favouring new or minority perspectives museums might trade 'one set of exclusionary practices for another' (Phillips, 2003:165), as old audiences and practitioners are cut out of the process of communication in an effort to overcompensate for past domination (Ibid.: 14).

Gardner, on the other hand, synthesizes in his concerns the bulk of the issue that this paper attempts to grapple with, i.e., how to create narratives that include voices but that are not exclusionary:

> But what is the right mix of exhibits to explore the diversity of the American experience? The political reality is that every group wants visibility and wants and deserves an exhibit. But even as big a museum as NMAH has limited space and can´t accommodate every group. How do we set priorities? And in any case, do we really want to deal with difference by setting apart, segregating those who are different? At NMAH, our priority is integrating diverse experiences throughout the museum. But is that really the right way to go? […] How do we avoid dividing the museum up by racial or ethnic group and yet not end up with only tokenism? And how do you explore difference in a broader sense- not just race and ethnicity but age, abilities (and disabilities), class, gender, language, nativity, religion, sexuality? (2004: 17).

The theme that Gardner and Ashley point to is the difficulty of embracing inclusion without creating a pastiche of uniformed voices, but especially without creating a new form of keeping communities at a distance. In this respect, Stevens asks whether "In satisfying

demands for recognition on the part of minority groups do museums contribute to social cohesion or do they generate competition between groups that may heighten existing tensions?" (2007: 29). What we can conclude from these arguments is that the space of the museum is part of the battlefield of memories that are in competition.

Museum as Contact Zone or Zone of Conflict?

The possibility of thinking about the museum as a democratic space where different voices, narratives, and communities can meet and can be heard is best understood under the conception of "contact zone" developed by James Clifford. He uses the notion to explain how people traditionally separated by conditions of conflict, inequality, coercion, and asymmetrical relations of power come into contact in a "safe," democratic space. In contact zones there is a continuous negotiation of borders and centers where interaction takes place. Clifford explains: "…the multiplication of contexts becomes less about discovery and more about negotiation, less a matter of creative curators having good ideas, doing research, consulting indigenous experts, and more a matter of responding to actual pressures and calls for representation in a culturally complex civil society" (1999: 450). If museums are able to become such spaces, the notion of education changes and, instead, museums will be grappling with issues such as dialogue, alliances, inequality, and translation (Ibid).

This notion feeds the perspective of creating a forum out of a national museum, where exchange occurs. In this scenario the museum works to undermine fragmentation, though it is not interested in creating unity but rather something such as a market for ideas. Though the "contact zone" has been widely embraced, Dibley (2005) has questioned Clifford´s arguments. His critique is centered on the notion of redeeming the museum from its exclusionary practices. For this author, dialogue and participation of communities "is insufficiently acute to the ways in which prior techniques subjectivized those that are now the loci of resistance to, and reform by, museological operations" (2005: 7). How this plays out in this argument is that the museum does not have a natural democratic ethos, especially as it pertains to the legacies of colonialism. It is clear that not all subjects have access to the egalitarian ideal that the museum-as-democracy suggests. For Dibley, "relations of reciprocity look more like those in which the marginal and dispossessed are to be reconciled to the historical structures of their marginalization and dispossession" (Ibid: 17).

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

Realistically, the action of embracing and inclusion can never be all-encompassing. The museum as democracy, in the words of Dibley, "creates a space of representation that, at least in principle, has been democratized in that the occupancy of the position of Man – based on 'his' universality – is openly and freely available to all. But it also creates an insatiable politics in which any museum display can always be held accountable for representational inadequacies on the grounds of any particular social exclusion – be it gendered, classed, racial or some other pattern of marginalization – and thus in need of supplementation" (2005: 11).

Indeed, national museums have to deal with their own limitations. In this sense, though the institution may strive to be more democratic and representative, an ideal state of affairs is utopian. But perhaps, this is the strength of such institutions. The museum is a field in which to play out the soundness and the inadequacies of the public sphere. In this sense, Littler recognizes that "consensus will always be provisional and conflictual" (2005: 18) in a space where disagreeing experiences are brought together, and, I might add, a space that is never truly finished.

The Nation as Territory, the Museum as Space

How might the museum as a democratic and including space play out physically? And what might be the value of place in "promot[ing] equality through the combating of prejudices, the reversal process of othering and the engendering of pluralist, democratic values"? (Sandell 2005: 185). In order to approach possible strategies, we will first briefly recognize how space has been used to develop barriers of "othering." Clifford acknowledges that there are insiders and outsiders in the representation of the nation that might be read in terms of symbolic but also real space. He states: "The message of identity is directed differently to members and to outsiders –the former invited to share in the symbolic wealth, the latter maintained as onlookers, or partially integrated, whether connoisseurs or tourists" (1999: 454).

Museums in general developed classificatory systems –especially in the 19th century- to promote a division of labour, which produced exclusion. This division of space according to disciplines (art vs. ethnography, for instance, or history vs. archaeology) helps to accentuate the difference between the cultures on display and visitors, promoting exoticism (Sandell 2005). Space and collections organized in different disciplines "represent power/knowledge relations through the delineation of familiar hierarchies and exclusions: men over women, European over non-European, modern over pre-modern, high art over traditional crafts" (Dyson 2005: 119). These separations naturalized or objectified the way national identities were perceived. For Macdonald, the creation of racial or gendered differences were a means to invite "people to conceptualise a sense of national or racial difference from others; and to experience their own worlds as relatively and reassuringly governed ones […] They helped to think identities as bounded and coherent" (2003: 4).

Sandell describes three ways by which space can be used to promote inequality. First, "differentiated spaces (dioramas, exhibition cases or entire galleries) that separate, demarcate and distinguish between different groups" (2005: 188). These spaces described by Sandell are characterized by the exaggeration of difference and may lead to the opposition of an apparent superiority of a group over another. The second strategy he explains is "displaying cultural difference within physically shared spaces but within an interpretative framework that reproduces and reinforces (rather than challenges) social inequalities" (Ibid: 188). The third strategy is marked by the absence of representation of certain groups from museum space and narratives.

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

Different necessities might require a combination of integration and differentiation, as is the case described by Sandell in the St Mungo´s Museum of Religious life and Art where each

of the six most practiced religions has a space, and where there is also a space where they are compared to emphasize shared themes. The intention defines the spatial tactic utilized. What we might describe as a "second version" of the pluralist display that has been demanded by a sector of the Afrocolombian community is a place within the national narrative but also a differentiated space, completely separate from others, where what they perceive, as a distinct identity, can be on display. The "possession" of their own space has been defined in terms of historical reparation, as was described earlier in this essay. The questions that this separatist option raises have already been highlighted by Gardner and Stevens above and will be discussed below. Recent national museums have opted for different strategies for creating not only inclusion, but also difference. For instance, the National Museum of Australia integrated Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories, while the Canadian Museum of Civilization opted to keep them separate (Dean & Rider 2005).

Creating Positive Difference

Another possibility of creating an including space is to take the opposite road: i.e., instead of putting identities in a space of dialogue, creating a separate space for each so that there is recognition of their intrinsic value. This strategy we might call "positive discrimination," which has had a visible and debatable place in education quotas and in assigning budgets.

In the context of the specific case study, the Colombian Constitution makes the State responsible for promoting access and distribution in equality of opportunities for the population. But the State must also guarantee ethnic and linguistic groups, Black and indigenous communities, the right to preserve, enrich, and diffuse their identity and cultural patrimony. What becomes problematic is the situation where both communities and individuals hold rights, because there is no consensus of what to privilege and where the line divides the right to difference and the regulations that apply to the majority (Wills 2000). Diversity, participation, and symmetry have to be articulated in what Wills calls *cultural equality*: "the effort to create, amongst groups and individuals that recognize themselves as distinct symmetric relationships of power" (2000: 402).

Nowadays, there are communities throughout the world that want to be recognized because of their dissimilarities. Such is the case of the Afrocolombian groups that have been mentioned. In favour of their claim, we can ask: "Does the preference for projects which address easily visible, apparently bounded and unified communities play on a particular binary, with the state representing all that is best about the liberal tradition and the `ethnic community´ representing a manifestation of `traditional culture´?" (Naidoo 2005: 44). As put forth by Pieterse, a pluralist view does not necessary acknowledge underlying inequalities. Creating a more egalitarian narrative would not necessarily address the original asymmetries of power, as was explained by Dibley, and we might end up exhibiting ethnicity to uphold a specter of diversity.

The eagerness to create an embracing script might neglect the particular contributions of specific communities. We have to take into account the notion of different communities that are not "saturated by tradition; they are actively involved with every aspect of life around them, without the illusion of assimilation and identity. This is a new kind of difference – the difference which is not binary (either-or) but whose `differances´ will not be erased, or traded" (Hall 2005: 30). In the previous passage, Hall is writing about communities referred to as "minorities" in the U.K. that have been shaped by traditions different from the Judeo-Christian, western culture. Though the comparison cannot be strictly made, Afrocolombian (and indigenous) communities have also been shaped by their relationship with very distinct non-western civilizations and this peculiarity is what cannot be "erased or traded".

Disregarding how we can make a community more like ours can also allow the development of an in-depth view of a particular group. Recognizing diversity amongst the Black population would avoid essentialisms and the recognition of different historical

experiences and cultural particularities of the different sub-communities (Lozano & Peñaranda 2007). This might also lead to the recognition that on the inside there are also discriminations or subordination like that of women (Ibid.). Narratives centered on particular communities prevent homogenization that in turn allows us to understand that the museum is limited in representing a whole community.

Fixing Identities

The question of how national museums give way to previously excluded identities entails dangers of closing these up. Gros outlines the issue for indigenous communities that ultimately applies to other groups:

That the indigenous communities lock themselves up in their own communities, entrenched in an obsessive identity that refuses the other and excludes it. These communities have to open themselves up if the want to subsist and avoid internal fractures between those that appeal to tradition as an unquestionable order and those who want to take their place as individuals in a wider society.

That the states, with the pretext of recognizing difference, adhere to cultural relativism that negates the possibility of organizing the nation with central and universal values, i.e. shared by all- values without which it is impossible for citizenship and democracy to be prosperous. These values cannot come from only one side. In order to make this possible, two variables have to be taken into account: a will to be a part of a wider community, the nation, and second, imagination, because everyone has to change to create a new public sphere (2000: 361).

Further dangers in isolating identities are signaled by Macdonald (2003). She points to the unwanted result of fixing identities, something that, as we have seen, goes against the current in the way identities are conceived off as fluid and multiple. Macdonald points to the need of exploring cultural difference in depth so that oversimplifications are avoided. Static notions of culture also serve to create essentialist and purist views. For Pieterse inert notions of multiculturalism can lead to a coexistence of communities that are "a form of `pillarization´, a series of cohabiting ghettoes, in fact, a form of neo-apartheid" (1997: 128). In fact, multiculturalism cannot be viewed as a collection of communities, but rather under an interculturalist model that allows new identities to be formed as well (Ibid.).

Martín-Barbero makes his case for having to choose between integration or isolation and defends a politics that extends universal rights and values to all those sectors of the population which have previously lived outside the application of those rights, be they women or ethnic minorities, evangelists or homosexuals. Michel Wiewiorka (1997) thus refuses to have to choose between the universalism inherited from the Enlightenment, which excludes whole sectors of the population, and the tribal differentiation affirmed in racist, xenophobic segregation – a choice that is fatal for democracy (2002b: 629).

Are we fastened to having to choose between universalism and the particularities of individuals or communities? Leaving a radical position behind would mean the negotiation of formulas that incorporate both similarities and difference in an effort to both overcome and take advantage of fragmentation. Discussing the Parekh Report, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, McGuigan proposes a "community of communities" based on pluralism. He defends the idea that it is mistaken to portray ethnic groups as separate, "Instead, they interact quite routinely in various ways, setting up channels of mutuality as well as hostility. There is a constant play of similarity and difference" (2005: 188).

Conclusions

The purpose of this final section is to draw from the preceding text possible implications for national museums. The intention is to look at possible steps to be taken into account in matters of inclusion, equity, and respect for difference.

National museums have been called to take a stand in nation-making processes of newly independent States or as symbols of reconciliation in spite of, or perhaps *because of* the fact that there has been a demise in the belief that the nation still stands as a way of organizing a political and cultural community – or communities –. In 2001, Australia opened its National Museum, 10 years after the creation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (Sculthorpe 2001). The role of museums in historical reparation is key for groups that demand that the State take an active role in reformulating historical narratives. Accepting that challenge is much more complicated than showing the "happy" and harmonic side of diversity that governments so often find appealing. Sculthorpe shows, in the case of Australia, that Aboriginal art exhibits are very popular to take abroad, "yet accepting past treatment of Indigenous Australians as part of Australian history remains problematic for many" (2001: 81).

To the notion of reparation we must add the complex task national museums have in post-colonial, post nation-state and even post-museum times in articulating their narratives around collective projects of nation based on multicultural models. The nation then becomes something that is not so easily mapped as it transcends its own frontiers and creates new ones inside its political limits. A nation that is thus hard to grasp does not lead us to an easily defined national identity. We argue against the desirability of having one mould that all citizens have to conform to and defend the notion of different ways of belonging to the nation. For Thompson (2001), national identity is not a given. Not all people can locate themselves comfortably in a national identity and many even have difficulties in finding a sense of belonging. Also, not everyone defines their relationship to the nation in the same way, nor understands the nation in the same manner. For the author, it is important to take into account how individuals, and communities, make national identities. Following a more flexible model of identity can be a way for national museums to include the diversity of their constituencies.

The need for inclusion was argued using the case of the Museo Nacional de Colombia and the country's Afrodescendant communities. The absences of representation of cultural or ethnic groups automatically "disqualify" them as members of the polity. The lack of representation was interpreted by members of the Afrocolombian communities as yet another sign of the way the nation has excluded them from acknowledging their contributions to the nation-making processes. An additional consequence of this invisibility is that the museum is also hiding these communities from other groups that make up the nation, perhaps contributing in an indirect way to pervasive forms of discrimination. But we also noted how other groups are missing. The many absences further complicate solutions as many groups might end up competing for their separate enclaves inside the museum. The responsibilities placed on Colombian cultural institutions by the Constitution of 1991 clearly reflect the situation of other countries worldwide that are facing legislation that obliges them to incorporate the discourse of the multicultural nation.

Diversity and multiculturalism create challenges that the Museo can come to grips with in many ways, but it will never be a finished product; the necessities and the communities represented will multiply. Once the door is open to participation and inclusion, there is no set limit to reach; rather, the institution is responsible for deciding and negotiating with communities how far it can go. Littler points to the "ethical commitment to social change for a more equal society [that] has to be accompanied by a strategic sense of what is possible to be done and when" (2005: 13). The wishes and ideas of the communities – for instance a separate pavilion for the culture of Afrodescendents in Colombia – will inevitably crash with

the reality of the institution – lack of collections or research, budgets, and acceptance of the idea of creating a separate gallery. A sense of realism is important to be able to make promises that can be kept. Hall recognizes the complexity of such an enterprise:

> No single program or agenda could adequately represent [Britain´s] cultural complexity, especially the `impossible´ desire to be treated and represented with justice (that is, as `the same´) simultaneously with the demand for the recognitions of `difference´. The agenda will itself have to be open and diverse, representing a situation which is already cross-cut by new and old lateral connections and reciprocal global influences and which refuses to stand still or stabilize (Hall 2005: 31).

The enterprise of this agenda has to keep in mind the negotiation with the communities represented. Groups of participants in meetings held in February and September of 2007 on the issue of representation of Afrodescendant communities in the Museo Nacional were merciless about their critiques but were also eager to elaborate a bilateral policy on inclusion with plans, tasks and goals. The Museo's first step, which was listening to participants and accepting their criticism of the Museo (whether rightfully earned or not), was taken very positively and participants expressed gratitude and relief that they had been invited to be heard, though it had taken the institution far too long to ask them to participate. Recognition of past and present exclusions starts with listening carefully to the people that have been left out of historical discourse and its representation in museums.

Allowing groups that have previously been excluded to have their own space responds positively to what Jordan and Weedon have highlighted as aspects of the cultural politics of marginalized groups that need attention: "1) the need for recognition; 2) the need for cultural agency" (1995: 551). The first includes both the need to speak and the need to be heard as empowering exercises, and the second recognizes that racism and sexism constrain the possibilities of creating new representations. For Sandell (2007), representation of difference in museums is both determined and generative. Framing this claim in the present study means that inclusion in discourses of the national is a significant contribution to the political agency of groups; in the case of Colombia, it might lead to the combat of racism and discrimination. For Sandell equality of rights does not mean obliging groups to integrate to a definite model. He states "…I contend that museums can offer understandings of difference that are complex and nuanced, which attempt to establish an expanded view of rights, one which incorporated the right for groups to assert and maintain their cultural specificity" (2007: 183).

Can museums redefine consensus on difference? (Sandell 2007). The requirement to emphasize difference must be met with the obligation to create dialogue. Jesús Martín-Barbero (2002: 17) has made a special emphasis on the need to overcome the fragmented character of the Colombian nation. For him, it is necessary to construct a national narrative with common memory woven into it. The conflictive elements of this memory would not be silenced but ultimately it would be a memory that binds the nation together. For him it is necessary that institutions in Colombia transcend the multicultural and construct interculturality because if we only affirm differences and diversity in a time when society is being torn apart and intolerance reigns, we can end up promoting ghettoes, new selfishness, and other divisions (2002: 27). What we need is to affirm divergence but also assert reciprocity and solidarity.

We have a responsibility to avoid further fragmentation by balancing the stories of individuals and excluded communities with the contributions of other groups and also by looking at identities cross-culturally. How to utilize mini-narratives of individual groups and communities as building blocks in a broader story of nation? Naidoo reinforces the place of particular heritage in the broader story as he points to positive experiences of "uncovering" Black heritage in a way that destabilizes our notions of national heritage (2005: 46). The

stories of minorities are the stories of the nation (Ibid). In the particular case of the Afrocolombian communities, looking at their heritage will allow us to incorporate the legacies of African culture that survived the Diaspora and were transformed in America, into the discourse of nation. But microcosms do not exist in a vacuum. Identities always exist in relation to others. The question here becomes: can Black communities tell their story without the presence of White and mestizo, or mixed-race, communities?

A combination of strategies has to be articulated. Hall describes basic elements of changing representations: first, it involves the re-writing of the narratives in an inclusive manner, in ways that permit us to see how the stories of the "others" intersect with ours in the national narrative. The second step is to acknowledge and support creative output of minority groups; the third, a recording of the Black Diaspora and its documentation; fourth, an overcoming of the representation "of minority communities as immured in their `ethnicity´ or differentiated into another species altogether by their `racialised difference´" (2005: 33). Fifth and last is the recognition of hybrid artistic forms that feed on multiple cultural traditions. The change in paradigm might also mean not only a support of processes of creation but also a broadening of what gets funded as Khan points out in the case of Britain in the 1980s.

There is an underlying need to support research processes undertaken by communities themselves and to open up possibilities for training. In this manner we might widen the group responsible for history-making. Crooke points out how in order to make collections and exhibitions more representative, museums are coming in contact with local stories (Crooke 2005: 73). One possible initiative is to support local groups that undertake collecting oral histories: "Public display, in books, exhibitions and monuments is not limited to the official academic, museum or heritage sectors" (Crooke 2005: 80). In the case of the Afrocolombian communities, various participants expressed concern about losing valuable knowledge with the death of several wise elders. Budgets can become available to secure the recovery and documentation of tradition in order for new generations to appropriate it.

By incorporating different communities we are not only widening the groups included in a national memory but also incorporating collectivities in a project of reparation of the past. Sánchez (2000) notes how this enterprise is not only the business of the museum, but that the museum has to be reconstructed by the whole of society. In this manner the museum may work on a policy of inclusion drafted by the institution with the communities it wishes to address in a reciprocal relationship. Museums are already required to have collections, conservation, and exhibition policies, but very few have policies on inclusion.

These steps can lead museums in the direction of creating equity in representation. Nevertheless, there can never be a truly balanced representation in any national museum, because there is a different starting point for each different group that makes up a nation. The fact that no objects survive, in Colombia, to tell the story of enslaved people can never be undone. In a recent visit by the representatives of Colombian Afrocommunities, they were displeased to see that a mulatto leader in the country's independence was represented by including his biography inside a picture frame, rather than by his (non-existent) portrait. Lowenthal points to this difficulty when he describes representation of elites of whom objects and inventories survive while no material testimonials of slaves in Colonial Williamsburg were available and replicas had to be constructed. He explains that "The elite appear in actual, contextual, explicit detail; the faceless, unprovenanced slaves are generalized and undifferentiated. The former come across to visitors as memorably authentic individuals, the latter as depersonalized simulacra in counterfeit (because reconstructed rather than `genuine´) milieus" (2001: 166).

The questions a national museum might ask itself are whether it is taking cultures seriously and understanding them in their context; acknowledging asymmetries of power; taking into account the need to have differentiated spaces but also the need to promote equality and

inclusion; whether it is ready to negotiate and take some blows from potentially numerous fronts; whether it wants to be a space to reaffirm uncontested notions of identity or whether it is apt for becoming a space for dialogue and debate. Additional questions that remain open are how to make explicit the limits, the constructed character of nation, and identity and narration so that visitors also change the responsibilities attributed to the museum. How to metamorphize the image of the museum from the temple of national identity to the place where there are inevitable conflicting stories and no "true" answers?

Finally, we return to the first image that I suggested in this text: the national museum as the micro-mirror of a macro-reality. In the following excerpt by Martín-Barbero I suggest the exercise of replacing the word "democracy" for the word "national museum(s)":

The impossibility of conceiving of a totally conflict-free human order makes the most crucial challenge facing democracy today one of how to transform itself into a 'pluralist democracy': it must be capable of taking on the us/them distinction so that 'they' are also recognized as legitimate. This, in turn, implies that the passions are not relegated to the private sphere but rather kept in play through argument: that is, by struggles which do not seek to annihilate the other, since the other also has a right to recognition and, therefore, to life. When democracy requires us to maintain the tension between our identity as individuals and as citizens it becomes the site of emancipation, since only out of this tension will it be possible to sustain collectively the other tension between difference and equivalence (equality). And then we will abandon the illusory search for the reabsorption of otherness in a unified totality. Just as otherness is irreducible, so must 'pluralist democracy' regard itself as an 'impossible good' – a regulative idea that exists only insofar as it cannot be perfectly realized (2002b: 630).

If the challenges of democracy are the challenges of national museums, then the democratic ethos of the museum is an "impossible good" but something to aspire to.

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