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Coloniality and museums: architecture, curatorship,
management, and the perpetuation of colonialist
structures

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Abstract

Coloniality is a system born from colonialism that to these days affects several individuals subjected to oppression through racism, sexism, and classism. These tools were developed or enforced during colonization and are still present in the structures commonly used in museums. In this text, we address this issue and examine its origins and repercussions in museums. We pay particular attention to the German context and we analyze the case of a museum in the Thuringia region. Finally, we propose some alternatives aiming at decoloniality.

Keywords: decoloniality; museums; Germany; colonialism.

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Coloniality and museums: architecture, curatorship, management and the perpetuation of colonialist structures.

1. Introduction

European museums are one of the oldest institutions in the cultural and artistic fields. Since the Renaissance, wealthy families or individuals set up a container to display the enormous collections they have assembled through power. Composed of art pieces from the finest artists and objects from exotic and remote lands, these venues are nowadays praised for their contribution to a so-called universal culture. But most of these collections were formed with pieces originally obtained as spoils of war, ransacking, or enforced "gifting" from the "third world", where European empires imposed their presence. The British Museum, for example, surged from the personal collection of Hans Sloane, a physician and collector who donated his 71,000-item collection to the British Government. As Bennet explains: *their central message [of museums] was to materialize the power of the ruling classes (through the collections of imperialist plunder which found their way [...] in the interest of promoting a general acceptance of ruling-class cultural authority* (Bennett, 1988: 64).

The museum's role has unfolded throughout history, from being seen as a simple container or cabinet of wonders to shifting into a legitimizing institution that —via texts, research, and diverse academic resources— provides theoretical significance to its objects and collections with both communicative and educational purposes. This development was not immediate and was built up —amongst other purposes that escape the scope of this work— to legitimize former empires' actions, pretending to forge an identity as a nation-state. This is particularly linked to history, anthropology, cultures and ethnography museums, where the aforementioned spoils of war were exhibited to the public,

both as a form of validating looting for educational, academic and cultural reasons, and to inculcate the public into certain forms of nationalistic pride. Bennet affirms that:

...the institutions comprising "the exhibitionary complex" [...] were involved in the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains in which they had previously been displayed (but to a restricted public) into progressively more open and public arenas where, through the representations to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power (but of a different type) throughout society (Bennet, 1988: 74).

In this work, we will speak about the different ways a museum displays structures of power and submission, specifically those related to colonialism and hence supporting coloniality. For this purpose, three primary aspects have been identified inside the museum: architecture, curatorship, and management.

Furthermore, we will explain how European museums and collections acted as repositories of colonialism. Colonialism is an economic and political system exploited for hundreds of years by many European countries. It was a natural consequence of their imperialism. Starn and Spence defined colonialism as: *the process by which European powers (including the United States) reached a position of economic, military, political and cultural domination in much of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Starn and Spence, 1983: 315)*. Coloniality surged from colonialism and it is defined as: *the control of labour and subjectivity, the practices and policies of genocide and enslavement, the pillage of life and land, and the denials and destruction of knowledge, humanity, spirituality, and cosmo-existence (Mignolo, 2018: 16)*. By invading remote territories, empires appropriated a considerable part of the cultural manifestations of these lands, both symbolically and physically. They took away items such as tombs, vessels, sculptures, ornaments, jewelry, furniture and placed them inside the museum box, decontextualizing them. McEvelley says of galleries that they are:

a transitional device that attempted to bleach out the past and at the same time control the future by appealing supposedly transcendental modes of presence and power. But the problem with transcendental principles is that by definition they speak of another world, not this one. It is the other world, or the access to it, that the white cube represents (McEvilley, 1976: 11).

Through museums, Europeans could access a world far away from them, in the colonies. But the vision and approach to this world were provided by the exploiters, always telling the conquerors' part of history with a biased vision.

Although there are many positions about this matter, in this work the museum will be critically approached under the premise that it is necessary for cultural institutions to take a stand. We also affirm that, even when a museum chooses not to address social issues or when it claims neutrality, it is taking a political position. Lumley points out that: *bias is also built into the structure and funding of museum and gallery services. Museum collections tend to reflect the taste, wealth, and concerns of the upper classes (Lumley, 1988: 97).* Janes (2009: 59) describes this phenomenon as the "fallacy of authoritative neutrality". The examples presented here will not merely talk about how certain economic powers but the whole coloniality system, endorsed by the nation-state, influence a museum in the three aforementioned aspects (architecture, curatorship, management).

Diverse cases will be presented but there will be a special focus on a case study to identify the elements of coloniality that lay in collections with pieces from former colonies. In this analysis, we will also acknowledge the complications that decoloniality represents for museum workers. The selected institution is the Herzogliches Museum in the city of Gotha, Germany. This selection responds first to a matter of proximity since this text is being written in the same region, but also to the particular characteristics of the museum and country. The Herzogliches Museum has a collection of pieces from Egypt—a former British colony— displayed in their rooms and amassed by Duke Ernst II

of Saxony-Gotha-Altenburg, great-grandfather of Duke Ernst II of Saxony-Coburg-Gotha, who built the museum and was brother of Prince Albert, wed to prominent Queen Victoria of United Kingdom, hence favoring a close relationship between these two royal lineages.

Furthermore, Germany as a nation-state has a colonial past. The country invaded many African countries and held territories as "protectorates" in China and the Pacific Ocean. This imperialist impetus only ended with the beginning of the First European War and its later conclusion with the Treaty of Versailles, which obliged Germany to renounce to its colonial territories. This treaty didn't signify by any means sovereignty for the African countries as these were just assigned to the "winner" European nations such as France, the United Kingdom, and Portugal. In sum, through the Herzogliches Museum and its collection we can trace a history of imperialism and colonization suitable for analyzing how the museum presents itself to a contemporary audience, and if it is —perhaps unwillingly— bolstering coloniality.

Research about coloniality in cultural management is important for several reasons. From a personal point of view, as an immigrant from a former colony, I agree with the different "third-world" scholars, artists, and cultural mediators established in Europe who have expressed their concern for the violence they feel within the whole migration system, violence that permeates to the art and cultural institutions. In her conference "The Culture of Coloniality", Peruvian-born Barcelona-established artist Daniela Ortiz explains the arduous process that non-European migrants have to go through to become Spanish citizens (Ortiz, 2015: 97-103). This process is equally exhausting even to get a 6-month study visa, and it is mainly accessible only to upper-class Latin Americans, Africans or Asians since it requires an enormous quantity of money, time, and effort.

The immigration structure is rougher in Germany, in times of Middle East wars, asylum seekers, and thousands of displaced humans. With these complicated

impositions for foreigners to live inside the European Union, the control that began with imperialism still reflects in the many mirrors that compose the colonial system. It is time to analyze and dismantle them. In this work, besides identifying coloniality in museums, solutions or alternatives for cultural managers will also be sought and proposed with the aim to open a conversation in this matter. It also seeks to challenge the idea of the museum as a one-sided institution with the role of "educating" the masses. Instead, critical dialogue between the two parts —the users and the museum— will be the target.

Structural violence is also perceived in the display of one's own culture as a "curiosity", a concept that still remains in many ethnology museums, treasure cameras, or historical archives. It is a duty for cultural managers to actively act as agents against the perpetuation of colonialist speeches expressed in many ways. As Janes says, museums are institutions that can do what other entities can't since: *governments are not equipped to do this, business is committed to homogenization and efficiency in the name of profit, and most universities are still grappling with their real and perceived separation from their communities* (Janes, 2009: 18). Museums have now an opportunity to defy their original purpose as symbols of the upper classes and white identities, acting against exploitation and towards inclusivity.

2. Methodology

In this research, we will carry out first a general historical exploration of colonialism. To understand how the colonial structures persist we need first to understand how these were originally imposed, mainly those effectuated by the European empires since the end of the 15th century. Being a broadly researched topic, this work will focus on the characteristics of colonialism that are nowadays emulated in museums. In order to contextualize the study framework, special attention will be given to the German imperialist past,

distinct in diverse ways to that from Britain or Spain, to mention some colonizer nations.

It will be essential to unfold the distinction between the terms colonialism and coloniality, the latter mainly defined through Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano's work. These concepts will be brought to modern and contemporary examples through different cases of real situations in museums around Europe. This stage of the analysis will also clear up the notions ascribed to colonialism, such as third-world or primitive. Since one purpose of this work is to confront the replication of colonialist discourses and being Eurocentrism one of its manifestations, a considerable number of the authors that were selected for this extent come from former colony countries, such as Argentina, Peru, India, or Palestine.

After the framework of the colonial system in Europe and Germany has been outlined, we will examine the museum's position in the presence of colonial abuses and its oppressive forms. Savoy and Sarr point out in their 2018 Restitution Report that: *destruction and collection are two sides of the same coin. The great museums of Europe are at once the conservationists of incredible human creativity and the receptacles of what often amounts to a violent dynamic of appropriation that is still largely poorly understood* (Savoy and Sarr, 2018: 14-15). Many authors concur with the idea that the museum has been shaped in the past centuries to be a control and indoctrination device, comparable to the Foucaultian panopticon. In front of this affirmation, we will analyze how museums have reacted to it and if they can remain "neutral".

After settling this position, it is necessary to ascertain how and when colonialist expressions are embedded in the museum, as only with a diagnosis it is possible to implement remedial actions. For this purpose, this section of the work will be broken down into three parts:

- a) Architecture: We will study how museums are built to showcase objects hierarchically, understanding that a non-linear classification in rooms divided and labeled with names such as "primitive art" is establishing superiority by those who conceived the museum structure. This also relates to the previously mentioned panopticon. Museums are commonly located in the city center, mainly as a display of power and control, in areas where people can see and be seen, therefore being part of a sort of "Crystal Palace" (Bennet, 1988: 78). These elements contribute to the usage of museums as domination mechanisms.
- b) Curatorship: This concept refers to the way the pieces with colonial origin are selected, assembled and showcased, including the texts that accompany them. Labels are prone to adopt a supremacist language. These also disregard the information on how the pieces were seized or why they have not been returned to their people of origin.
- c) Management: Museums may vary the curatorial program introduced above depending on administrative and economic conditions. These include if they are private or publicly handled, who are the members of the board that take decisions, or how the museum is financed. This handful of individuals are several times the fundamental reason a piece is not restituted or why a white European is appointed to handle a collection of African pieces. Museum workers may not have the power to take substantial management decisions, such as to shift the approach of introduction texts in the rooms or won't control the resources that could be used to hire an Indian lecturer for a conference on this country's culture. This factor is central to how a museum approaches coloniality and will be addressed in this section.

For a deeper analysis of the museum institution, a specific case was studied—the Herzogliches Museum—in Gotha, Germany. Being a Ducal Museum, its initial purpose is profoundly connected to imperialism. The Herzogliches is also home to a vast collection of Egyptian pieces, composed of mummies,

sculptures, pieces of statues, parts of tombs, vessels, ornaments, amongst others, most of them taken in expeditions funded by the Ducal family. An initial approach was made visiting the museum and examining the texts that accompany the Egyptian items. The main concern for this part of the exhibition is centered on the display of the pieces. What does the introduction text reflect? Is it possibly reproducing colonial ways of thinking? Here, the author's perception as a non-European observer contributes to getting a reflection that won't condone white supremacy or Eurocentrism. This also follows Mignolo's approach to the importance of personal experiences for postcolonial researchers (Mignolo, 1995: 7), himself being Argentinian.

Moreover, it is also fundamental to acknowledge the view of museum workers, since they have an inside approach and information on what and why is happening in the core of the institution. We approached the museum through its scientific consultation service and they promptly answered the questions provided. The full questionnaire and its answers are available in Annex 1 of this work. It is important here to point out that the museum didn't show itself open to the possibility of personal one-on-one interviews, therefore there was no opportunity of immediate dialogue.

Finally, after all this information was gathered and studied, alternatives on how to dismantle coloniality are offered. This last section does not pretend to serve as a manual, at least not at this early stage of the research. It seeks, on the other side, to open a conversation amongst cultural managers on how we develop our role and if it is contributing to society in a respectful and intersectional way. As Janes points out: *museums [have] the obligation to probe our humanness and, in assuming this responsibility, museums are unique and valuable social institutions that have no suitable replacement. In short, museums are dissimilar to all of the institutions [...] and therein lies their great worth* (Janes, 2009: 18).

In the same way, museums are an archetypal element of Western society and "civilization", the colonial structure is displayed all around the world. Coloniality produces, either in Germany or in Mexico, a system where white or white-passing people hold most of the privilege. This text seeks to reflect on why cultural managers comply with these conceptions and how we can turn it over and search for better and more inclusive horizons.

3. Modernity, colonialism, and capitalism

Europe has a long history of imperialism and power disputes. Different tales of strength display and domination have unraveled for centuries, changing the politics, geography, culture, and languages of the territories. But there is a special period of European expansion that completely altered the development of the continent. This era began in the 15th century, along with Modernism (Dussel, 2007: 195-214) and was characterized by the arrival of European forces and settlers to the American continent in 1492. The European intrusion signified many alterations for the native peoples of what it is called Abya Yala—the original name given to America by the Kuna people of Panama—by several post-colonial researchers since the name America was imposed by European theorists who came up with the term "in honor" to Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci. For this reason, in this work, America will also be addressed as Abya Yala.

This stage of European expansion to Abya Yala is when colonialism started one of its most furious and brutal eras. We cannot equal this colonization process with the wars within the joint continents (mainly Europe and Asia), since these responded to distinct mechanisms of domination, such as religion. We can take the Muslim invasion of Spain as an example, when Islamic forces ruled Spain for almost 800 years. This domain concluded with the efforts of Queen Isabel la Católica and her allies to gain full control of this territory. As Galeano points out: *this was a holy war, a Christian war against Islam; and it was no accident*

that, in that same year of 1492, 150,000 Jews were expelled from the country. Spain achieved unity and reality as a nation wielding swords with the Sign of the Cross on their hilts (Galeano, 1973: 12). During this period there was an indisputable blend of styles and cultures with the adoption of Arabic words in the Spanish peninsula languages, or Moorish architectural styles in the Southern provinces of Spain. Still, after this long-term dominance, Spain and Spanish monarchs were never converted to Islam. Castilian and other native languages —such as Catalan or Euskera— are still official and widely spoken in the country.

The domination purposes and mechanisms inside the European, Asian, and Arab territories are hardly comparable to those employed in the European conquer of Abya Yala. As Coope establishes: *conversion to Christianity was imposed on everyone in the [conquered] region as part of a negotiated surrender, and thus lacked the element of personal conviction that modern ideas about religious faith would require [...]. In premodern Islamic thought, [...] conversion to Islam, however, was not an immediate goal of conquest* (Coope, 2017: 32). Coope points out how many urban-area men in the Spanish lands converted in order to obtain benefits such as social acceptance or to pay fewer taxes. The same way of thinking applied to the Arabic language. It was spoken by the Arab rulers, but the native languages were used for administrative issues and there was never an imposition of Arabic since it was seen as a more elevated language that commoners wouldn't need to understand (Coope, 2017: 46-50).

This illustrates how European wars and invasions are distinct from the colonization of Abya Yala. This process that started in the 15th century with the arrival of Christopher Columbus to what he thought was Asia and afterward denominated as America, can also be divided into different periods according to the characteristics and countries that led the expeditions to foreign regions. For Dussel (2007: 195), this was also the beginning of the modern era. We will

take into his analysis and division of modernity, as established in his work *Materiales para una política de la liberación* (2007). The first phase is Early Modernity, which began with the deployment of forces and resources by the Spanish and Portuguese reigns in 1492. Modernity, colonialism, and capitalism were born and thrived parallelly thanks to the introduction of a new and unknown territory that exceeded any expectations with its abundance of natural resources and human labor.

The invention of Latin America was the first demonstration of colonialism. Thousands of natives were annihilated, not only through explicit violence and murder, but also by all the new diseases, exhaustion due to the extreme working conditions they were submitted, enslavement, and even suicide to evade exploitation (Galeano, 1973: 15). Dussel calls this form of colonization the *World-Empire* (Dussel, 2007: 201), characterized by military presence; migration from Europeans to the colonies; and religion, culture and language imposition. The effects of this first stage of Early Modernity were decisive for the adoption of a capitalist system and also for the creation of Eurocentrism, since this new entry of resources to the European empires turned them into the most powerful competitors against other markets, such as the Indostan one. The surplus of silver and commodities such as coffee, sugar, or spices in colonies like Mexico, Bolivia, and Indonesia, induced a crisis for the African and Asian traders, therefore incrementing the sale of Black slaves who ended up mainly in Brazil and the Caribbean Islands.

Portugal and Spain, mainly the latter, maintained the hegemony for over 100 years until the Spanish Netherlands got rid of the Iberian mandate and Holland, now established as an autonomous state, started its own deployment to Abya Yala, Asia, and Africa. This corresponds to the second stage of Early Modernity—developed between 1630 and 1688—, it is important since it tore the Spanish ideal of an empire as a new power opponent raised, the Dutch being navy experts. For Dussel (2007: 196-198), this is the beginning of the *World-System*,

characterized by a fierce mercantile competition, where since other empires were also trying to gain profits from the commercialization of goods, Spain lost power and interest in acting as a State and starting behaving more as an enterprise. At this point in Early Modernity, France and Britain took also part in the colonization of Abya Yala. When Holland was unable to maintain power because of its lack of population and resources, these two countries began to manage the whole colonial system, leaving Spain and Portugal left behind. This is the third and last stage of Early Modernity.

Mature Modernity is correspondent to the Industrial Revolution. According to Dussel:

China could not free peasants to integrate into production of merchandise according to the criteria of the Industrial Revolution, at the end of the 18th century. England and other significant points in Europe, with the existence of coal and low-cost food (brought from the English colonies of North America), was able to free farmers who were subsumed in the production process as workers employees. Due to possible non-structural factors, Europe was able to carry out the Industrial Revolution, and not China (nor India). The "great divergence" had produced (Dussel, 2007: 203).

For Dussel, that in Europe —mainly in Britain— the Industrial Revolution took place, was a sequence of circumstantial factors that colluded in the same place and time, as it could have resulted in China, its inhabitants also being skilled merchants and explorers (Dussel, 2007: 203). This approach contributes to confronting Eurocentrism and European supremacy as an undeniable truth, a theory mainly built up by German philosophers such as Weber and Hegel.

The Industrial Revolution arose from colonialism, as the British gathered an immense capital from the territories in North America, impulsing the settlement of factories, investment by external ventures, or the foundation of banks (Dussel, 2007: 195-198). This was all thanks to the plundering of original communities' resources. This hegemony not only didn't allow the colonies to

produce capitalist systems at the same level, but it also shot down non-European competitors in Africa and Asia, hence favoring the expansion of British, French, German, Danish, Swedish, etc. invasions, and weakening older empires such as the Ottoman.

This shift on the way of thinking of colonizer nations that didn't want necessarily to accomplish any spiritual conquer anymore, but only to be economical powers, began a series of revolutionary movements that concluded in the recognition of several territories as independent nations. The USA, most of the Latin American countries, and India, to mention some, started a period of self-government, where their particular stories drifted apart. This does not mean that colonialism is not present in there anymore. By the time this document is being written, in 2019-20, many countries in Abya Yala, Asia, and Africa are still under European control with legal figures such as "overseas departments" or "territorial collectivities". France, for example, is partly controlling nations such as French Guiana, Guadeloupe, and Martinique, or the French Polynesia. Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom is the Head of State of the Commonwealth countries, most of them "former" British colonies, such as Canada, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Australia or Bangladesh. Even if this is a supposed symbolic and voluntary union, it remains as a sign that Britain keeps colonialist structures in the territories it once invaded. Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, their citizens speak Dutch and Creole. Ceuta, Melilla, and the Canary Islands in Northern Africa remain Spanish Spanish-speaking provinces with walls raised against African migrants. These are only some examples.

During this period of Mature Modernity —built between 1815 and 1945—, the Industrial Revolution boosted the growth of the bourgeoisie, which produced, with the free time the work of the lower classes provided to them, several new waves of knowledge in the arts, science, and philosophy fields. Germany had a prosperous time at the beginning of this period, not only displaying its military

power occupying its first territories in Africa, but also with the development and expansion of its cultural capital, that ended up being an emblem of Eurocentrism (e.g. Goethe, Schiller, Nietzsche, Kant, the aforementioned Hegel and Weber, and even the socialist thinkers Marx and Engels). This explosion of both academic and economic resources facilitated the expansion of European dominance. The emergence of the train and railways favored the sped up of exploitation of natural and human resources. By the beginning of the 20th century, the immense gap between Europe and the former colonies was already settled and practically impossible to narrow. Most of the regions followed the capitalist system developed during this modern stage. Some of them tried to establish new forms of capitalism to turn into competitors, but these efforts were shut down by the old (i.e. the U.K.) and new (i.e. the USA) powers.

The last stage of modernity according to Dussel is Late Modernity, it began in 1945 with the ending of the Second European War and is still ongoing. After this event, many other colonies in Asia and Africa started their own decolonization process. It also set the ascent of the USA as the classic case of capitalism, marked by the Cold War and the eventual dissolution of the USSR. This was a turning point for the expansion of private companies in the periphery of the hegemonies when they placed the source of capital and assets in their outskirts. This provoked the impoverishment and underdevelopment of the population of these regions and the dreadful ecological and natural resources crisis that it is right now being addressed by so many activists.

3.1 Germany: late colonizer

Germany has a relatively short past of colonialism—at least compared to other European countries such as Spain, Britain, and France—. Its contemporary history has been marked by very significant events such as the Nazi Holocaust or the division of the country between communist and capitalist

forces —to simplify it— that ended up with the fall of the Berlin Wall. In this light, general society may not think instantly of Germany as a colonizer. Furthermore, the German authorities since the end of the Second European War had been keen to acknowledge their war errors, pay tribute to the victims of totalitarianism and perform a facelift of their reputation. In terms of culture, this includes the creation of several memorials to, for example, the Jews killed in the Holocaust, in an earnest admission of the damage done. This has hardly happened for the crimes and horrors committed during colonial time.

One could say that Germany became a colonizer in 1884 when it established its first German protectorates in the African continent: German New Guinea and Cameroon. Africa was formally divided and its territories assigned to different European empires through the Berlin Conference in 1884-85, as an official and “legal” —for that time— way to securing the territories that European countries had already acquired or invaded. Over several years, Germany held “protectorates” on what is now Burundi, Cameroon, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Togo. Additionally, they held German New Guinea (northeast part of the island), several islands in the Bismarck Archipelago, actual Micronesia, the German Solomon Islands, the Mariana Islands, and the Marshall Islands in the Pacific Ocean.

It may seem that Germany was isolated from colonialist ideas previous to this point, nonetheless, colonialism existed there way before it established the protectorates. Coloniality was present all around Europe since Spain and Portugal started their deployments in Abya Yala. Several Germans fled to North America and dreamed of South America, where they could not emigrate until the next century since Spain was very protective of non-national immigration there. Germany began to build a quiet colonial structure, among other things, through the acquisition of several pieces from the British and French colonies, Egypt one of the most meaningful, that ended up in princes’ and dukes’ collections in castles and treasure cameras.

A notable example of the colonial system lying around all Europe is the case of Giuseppe Ferlini, an Italian doctor who was part of the troops deployed in Egypt and got interested in the treasures of those lands. Ferlini performed excavations and even detonations in the pyramids of Meroë, plundering an enormous treasure of jewelry. This discovery was apparently falsely reported by him to be found on the top of a pyramid, generating an outburst of treasure hunters decapitating pyramids along all Egypt (Markowitz and Lacovara, 1996). King Ludwig I of Bavaria acquired part of his booty, and these pieces remain still nowadays in the State Museum of Egyptian Art of Munich and the Egyptian Museum of Berlin. German aristocrats and princes not only got pieces from the colonies but also financed the expeditions for explorers to come back with precious objects, this is the case of the Egyptian collection at the Gotha Museum that will be analyzed in the later segments of the work.

These dreams of exotic lands and commodities were a constant of the German imagery for centuries, but their own troubles didn't allow them to fund actual colonialism until 1884. As Naranch points out: *The obsession with the rising number of Germans leaving their homelands in search of better living conditions overseas fed German colonial discourse. Here, the German national body —not the non-European native body— was the source of intense cultural anxiety* (Naranch, 2005: 25). Germany held the Märzrevolution in 1848-49, where the members of the bourgeoisie wanted the settlement of a Parliament and the working class demanded better living conditions. The revolution did not reach its purposes and several liberals —known as the Forty-Eighters— had to leave the country to escape the conservatives, settling themselves in the USA and other Abya Yala countries.

After the revolutionary failure, aristocracy was established anew. A pivotal point for German colonialist history is the designation of Otto von Bismarck as Minister-President of Prussia in 1862. He was also responsible for the political unification of Germany decades later. Diverse sources point out that Bismarck

was not an advocate of colonialism and that he had several reluctant discussions with its promoters until he finally started the colonial missions (Saré, 2011: 161) that ended in the colonization of the territories listed before. There are plenty of issues that can be researched relative to German colonialism, but since the scope of this work is limited to culture, we will now concentrate on how art, museums and other cultural means were used as devices to maintain and reinforce colonialism in Germany.

3.1.1 The German identity through its cultural products

As noted earlier, even if Germany established its colonies almost 400 years after Spain, the first European colonizer of big magnitude, the colonialist mindset already existed in the nation. The colonization processes were different in every period and depending on the empire that carried them out (Dussel, 2007: 195-213). Spain, for example, who colonized during the earliest stages, began a complete miscegenation of the native population and the colonizers (even though there are many theories that claim that miscegenation is a misleading concept, we can affirm that the process of colonization was way deeper in Latin America than in other colonies, since it was expected to fulfill an entire immersion of the Spaniards in the new territories). Several Spaniards migrated to Abya Yala and started forced families with the natives. Also enforcing religion and language through different methods, from massacres to syncretism.

Britain, who took part in the second stage of colonization, provided the lower classes an "opportunity" to be part of the colonial world with emigration facilities, mainly to what is nowadays the United States of America. In the UK, free access to "culture" was also provided, even when it took some time for the upper classes to acknowledge that granting free entry to the working class to museums was a very useful control and indoctrination tool (Bennett, 1988). The state museum system is still free in the UK.

In Germany, lower classes and women were not handed over such a deep chance of being part of the central colonial structure. With no opportunity of going to the German colonies —they had to move to North America, a British colony—, and even though propaganda was directed to them, they could not access either the tropical products such as tea or cocoa nor the colonial clubs where the entrance fee was expensive, therefore only possible for high-class members. The German propaganda for colonization aimed to promote the benefits of having colonies for the State, but citizens could not move or visit these territories, could not purchase their products, and the cultural materials given to them were mostly neither all German nor from the colonies, they came mainly from other European countries, as Short describes: *impresarios of ethnographic shows might be English, most colonial films were French, and nearly all European colonial postcards were made in Germany* (Short, 2012: 82). In Germany, some colonial exhibitions were treated more like a show—including "freak-shows": a known precedent in Europe is the Venus Hottentot— than as a cultural or educational experience.

It is interesting to analyze how the two cases cited before —Spain and Britain— are today countries that still have a monarchy —with their own political limitations— while Germany had a dictatorship and led one of the most violent chapters of European history, the Holocaust. This is again a sign of how different colonialism was propagated inside each country. In Germany's case, the segregation between classes and its support of colonization accordingly was very clear. As mentioned above, colonial clubs were only accessible for the high elites of the big cities, but they tried to spread the message to the working-class. One of the main propaganda tools was the panorama which is still very popular (although showing other topics) in Germany. Panoramas are immense round rooms covered with huge images of another place, such as the colonies, where one can position itself at the center of the room and observe a 360 degrees area. Panoramas are very similar to the panopticon figure.

In the late 19th century they were not as sophisticated as nowadays but they performed a similar purpose: to teach about other place or era, to immerse the public in a situation. Panoramic exhibitions were set all around Germany, as well as plenty of itinerant part-magic, part-science shows with pieces from the colonies, and even real-life representations of the African countries with real Black "actors"/slaves performing enactments of their rituals for the white population. These exhibitions were part of a huge propaganda system that also included newspapers, movies, and advertising promoting the goods and benefits of having colonies. The general discontent of the working class mainly caused this avid endorsement of colonialism by the bourgeoisie, desperately seeking approval of the colonialist actions. As Short points out: *rhetorics and techniques of empirical, objective and scientific authority shaped and sustained colonialism as the exuberance of the 1880s faded to boredom and indifference, or incomprehension, or was challenged by deep pessimism or vitriolic socialist critique* (Short, 2012: 11).

As previously stated, not even Otto von Bismarck was thrilled about having to administrate distant provinces, but he succumbed in face of the pressure of the bourgeoisie, who was not satisfied with the aristocracy. He had to implement actions to keep them satisfied with the aristocracy's way of managing the country, as he was now part of it. When German colonialism started, it was the bourgeoisie then who needed to convince the whole society about the advantages of the colonization project, an ambition that was wanted mainly to show that Germany, now as a unified country, was also part of the dominant hegemonies and could play in the "big leagues".

Entrepreneurs traveled around the country with their panoramas, dioramas, exhibitions, and representations. Museums and colonial houses for exhibitions, meetings, and discussions about the colonies were opened. Posters and postcards portraying all the products that came from the colonies were distributed. The higher classes always intended to educate the lower ones,

patronizing them and failing to create an integration project as other empires did. Short explains that: *bourgeois colonialists complained of increasingly vulgar lower-class audiences who, with their ill-disciplined voyeurism, transformed respectable ethnographic shows into sensationalized spectacles* (Short, 2012: 97). The same phenomenon had already happened in Britain when authorities of the British Museum were afraid of mobs breaking into the spaces and rioting inside them. Bennett explains about the British Museum that:

This fear of the crowd haunted debates on the museum's policy for over a century. Acknowledged as one of the first public museums, its conception of the public was a limited one. Visitors were admitted only in groups of fifteen and were obliged to submit their credentials for inspection prior to admission which was granted only if they were found to be "not exceptionable" (Bennett, 1988: 83).

One of the biggest fears of the museum's administration was that the audience members would be drunk and destroy the pieces. This is the portrait of the working class that museum managers had. When the South Kensington Museum —now the Victoria & Albert— was opened for the public in 1857, it proved to be a massive success amongst the working class. Consequently, the British Museum opened its doors to the public in 1883. These actions may seem as simple acts of kindness or marketing if analyzed superficially, but deeper reasons can be found since the aperture of these institutions also acted as a path for the *formation of a rational public culture* (Bennett, 1988: 84) as stated by Henry Cole, first director of the South Kensington Museum. Rational in these terms meant calm and willing to acknowledge the "wisdom" provided by the higher ruling classes. It was and still is an outstanding tool for colonialism and its acceptance amongst a whole country's population.

3.2 What is coloniality?

For the purposes of this work, it is necessary to distinguish between the terms *colonialism* and *coloniality* and explore their significance. It is also fundamental to appoint that, even if many authors label this current era as "post-colonial", in this text we will talk about coloniality without the "post" prefix since it would mean we are in a period beyond coloniality and, in this work, we affirm that colonial structures still exist and affect the everyday lives of millions of people. Thus, it will be considered that the term "post" cannot be used until society has overcome coloniality.

The concepts *colonialism* and *coloniality* will be particularly defined according to Argentinian author Walter D. Mignolo and Peruvian writer Aníbal Quijano, both having long researched this topic¹. It is significant to point out that Mignolo and Quijano, being Latin American, have focused their works to that specific region and form of colonization, but they have also explored the processes of Asia and Africa and how these differences have affected the present reality of these continents. Their work is convenient to recognize the current situation in all the former colonies (Quijano, 2014: 786-789).

Having settled this, we will define the concept of colonialism as the systematic mechanisms of control where European empires forced themselves into other lands through invasion. This included —it varies depending on the colonizer and the colony— massacres of native peoples, compelled miscegenation, imposing religion and language, exploitation of natural and human resources, forced labor, enslavement, rape, plundering, appropriation and annihilation of the native peoples' cosmologies, amongst others. Colonialism started in 1492 with the arrival of Christopher Columbus to Abya Yala. Perhaps colonialism existed in some form before this event, but this topic is extensive and outside the scope

¹ For reference consult Mignolo's *Globalization and the decolonial option* (2010), *On Decoloniality* (2018) and Quijano's *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality* (2010); *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America* (2014). Further bibliography can be found in section 9 of this text.

of this work. Nevertheless, since it is also important to understand the many ways of colonialism, we will here refer the reader to Aníbal Quijano's text *Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina* (2014) where he draws a deeper exploration on the difference between colonialism and wars, or feudalism in Europe and the servant system in Latin America.

Colonialism ended in different stages of history when the colonies started diverse types of revolution to get their independence of the empires that submitted them. They pursued auto-governance, democracy, and autonomy, even though real independence was possible only for a few nations such as the USA or Australia. This is related to the type of colonialism every country held within and with the capitalism, racism, and Eurocentrism that emerged during the colonialist centuries and still dominant. As pointed out in section 3 of this text, not every territory passed through the same process of colonization, so some nations remained "whiter" than others.

The USA case is notable as it is one of the few former colonies that has assimilated completely the capitalist system and even overtaken old empires in terms of political and economic dominance. This is a repercussion of the exclusion of native indigenous people at the beginning of colonization when settlers from Britain and other European nations established themselves in a small portion of land, where the natives were not involved with the occupation. Eventually, with the expansion of the colonizers to further territories, they were practically annihilated. The forming nation, therefore, remained "white" and started a democratic process that distributed the land equitably amongst the colonizers, following the belief that only Europeans or its descendants were entitled to own any piece of land.

It is fundamental to explain how the category "white" emerged, developing to be necessary for the outgrowth of countries. Quijano explains how, before colonization started, the term "race" was virtually unknown for Europeans (Quijano, 2014: 778-780). People were mainly identified for its region of origin.

Europeans had previously contacted Asians and North Africans and had economic relations with them. This categorization changed with Europeans arriving in Abya Yala and the discovery of people with not only different phenotypic characteristics, but also many other ways to act, express, and organize, with never-seen products such as cacao and corn, and with lands filled with resources they considered valuable, such as precious metals and minerals. Since then, the world's population has been classified in Indigenous, Black, afterward in Yellow and Olivaceous, and White. These divisions had been constructed as "race". This performs as a tool for Western Europeans to identify themselves as white and to proclaim that white is a superior race that is enabled to more benefits and privileges than the others.

Race, as a classification produced in colonialism, still exists and is used to subjugate. Here is where coloniality appears. Coloniality is a system derived from colonialism and it is fed by the oppression mechanisms created and/or perpetuated in that era. These are racism, visible in Eurocentrism. Capitalism and its main oppression tool, classism. And patriarchy and its corresponding subjugation, sexism. In sum, we can say that colonialism is a system that was imposed in many territories outside Europe, by European empires, that began in 1492 and concluded with the political independence of said territories.

On the other hand, coloniality was born in this period and is a control tool that is still used by the groups that form part of the "higher" categories established in colonialism, hence the most privileged group are the rich white European males. Coloniality is also a term that originated from "outsider" authors from the "third-world" countries, as Mignolo explains: *is not a concept that emerged in Europe to account for issues of European concern—its economy, sensibility, and history—but a concept created in the Third World, responding to needs prompted by local histories of coloniality at the very historical moment when the Three World division was collapsing* (Mignolo, 2018: 112).

Mignolo divided coloniality into four main spheres: 1. Racism and sexism, supported by the white/male supremacy conception; 2. Political and economic imperialism; 3. Knowledge and understanding, backed by the notion of a “universal” philosophy centered in Europe; and 4. Life in all its aspects, controlled by the holders of power as established in the aforementioned categories: white, male, European (Mignolo, 2018: 126-127). We can affirm that coloniality has not been overcome through many contemporary examples. We can take the case of salaries and job opportunities. Quijano says:

The racial classification of the population and the early association of the new racial identities of the colonized with the forms of unpaid labour control, developed among Europeans or whites the specific perception that paid work was the privilege of whites. The racial inferiority of the colonized implied that they were not worthy of salary payment. They were naturally forced to work for the benefit of their masters (Quijano, 2014: 785).

Goldsmith (2007) published a study of the wages earned by different subjects in the USA. He analyzed about 9,000 American households with working men that shared similar characteristics such as age group, holding a bachelor’s diploma, and having worked with the same employer for around 6 years. He concluded that: *Mean hourly wages [...] rise as skin tone lightens, moving from \$11.72 [USD] for dark-skinned Blacks to \$13.23 for Blacks with medium skin shade. Light-skinned Blacks report hourly pay of \$14.72 and the average white respondent reports earning \$15.94 per hour (Goldsmith, 2007: 707).* The study also shows that added to the wage difference, whites also have fewer dependents and live in areas with a lower crime rate. All of this contributes to whites having an overall healthier and more comfortable lifestyle than their dark-skinned counterparts.

Lack of employment opportunities and low salaries are also part of the art and culture world. Museums are constantly involved in scandals that evidence colonialist structures inside institutions. For example, in 2018, the Brooklyn

Museum appointed a white woman as chief curator of the museum's African collection, causing outrage within the decolonial art movements, especially Brooklyn itself being a very diverse borough of New York. The American collective "Decolonize This Place", defined by themselves as an *action-oriented movement centering around Indigenous struggle, Black liberation, free Palestine, global wage workers and de-gentrification* (Decolonize This Place, 2019), wrote an open letter to the museum where they pointed out the flaws not only of this decision, but also of the general governance of the institution, and suggesting immediate actions:

This decolonization process would have a time-frame, starting with the acknowledgement that the buildings sit on stolen indigenous land, that they contain thousands of objects expropriated from people of colour around the world, and that the institution is governed by a group of majority-white members of the 1% actively involved in the dynamics of racialized dispossession and displacement in Brooklyn (Decolonize This Place, 2018).

The museum ignored the letter and many other reactions. And this is only one specific demonstration. A study on museum workers of American museums made in 2018 by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) unveiled that only 4% of the curators were African-American. For the higher positions, such as CEO or director, Blacks hold 12% of the job positions. 73% of staff in intellectual positions were White; 10% Black; 6% Asian; and 5% Hispanic (AAMD, 2019). This suggests an alarming lack of representation in museum staff. It is especially concerning in a country where 14.4% of the total population are immigrants² (UN, 2015) and with a solid past of migration, not only after the colonization decades but also in the next years, when the USA gave asylum to millions of migrants of both the European Wars. USA museums are also filled with collections of pieces

² Taking into account only the "legal immigrants" who have a green card.

coming from spoils, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is one of the most famous.

Management is also involved in the selection of works that the museum acquires or exhibits. A mostly white administration will choose white artists to be in expositions. A study done in 2018 by students of the Williams College in Massachusetts reveals that 75% of the artists in USA museum collections are white and male (Topaz, 2018).

Europe's panorama is not better. In 2016, the art collective Guerrilla Girls conducted a major survey in European museums to collect data for their exhibition "It's even worse in Europe"³. They delivered a questionnaire to 383 art institutions where they asked directly about the representation numbers in their art collections. Only a quarter of the museums responded, and the results confirmed that there is a lack of representation of minorities in both race and gender (Dama, 2017). There is no recent study or survey about management boards and personnel statistics and race in European museums, but a quick search for the directors of the most known museums will easily show a white majority, even in those institutions that handle collections full of colonial pieces.

Germany doesn't lack cases of white supremacy and inadequacy of acknowledgment of the colonial past either. The imminent opening of the Humboldt Forum is an outstanding case to analyze. The Forum, which apparently will open in 2020, is a 660€ million reconstruction of a Prussian palace that will host a cultural center and several exhibitions about both Germany's and Berlin's history. These exhibitions are naturally also formed by pieces looted from the German and other former colonies. The desire to emulate an imperial palace and the reluctance of immediately investigate the provenance of the pieces has sparked controversy.

³ <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/querrilla-girls/>

The Humboldt Forum is abundant on coloniality, starting by its name. Besides the fact that Alexander von Humboldt himself stole several pieces of the native peoples while doing his expeditions for Spain during the colonial era (Deutsche Welle, 2019), the collection that is supposed to be exhibited in the institution is stocked with looted objects. The Benin Bronzes are a notable example. Taken away in 1867 during a British attack, the bronzes are now distributed all around Europe. After different activists brought the issue to the spotlight, representatives from several European museums gathered in what they called the Benin Dialogue Group (BDG) to discuss restitution. The conclusion was that the objects would be long-term loaned for the new Benin Royal Museum in Benin City, Nigeria. Loaning, though, is still a patronizing decision. Museums and countries argue that the complete returning of the pieces goes against their local or national laws, but the conversation stops there and it opens a consequent urgent need for changing the law that has not been addressed.

French historian Bénédicte Savoy left the advisory board of the Humboldt Forum because of their lack of transparency about the colonial objects' provenance and called for complete restitution of the pieces (Bowley, 2018). The board is led by Hermann Parzinger, president of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, German art historian Horst Bredekamp, and Neil MacGregor, former director of the British Museum⁴, another institution that has not yet acknowledged the cruel past of their collections' provenance, as we will observe in this text in different given examples. Even though the board members have tried to justify the way the Forum is acting, many questions remain unanswered. Even if they assure being concerned about the issues raised by the activist groups and involved academics, they are still part of a project that spent millions of euros in the reconstruction of an old imperial palace in the center of one of the most diverse cities of Germany. the Humboldt Forum will exhibit objects from African countries instead of investing those resources —both human and monetary— on research plans that would identify

⁴ <https://www.humboldtforum.org/en/pages/founding-directors> [accessed Jan 15 2020]

the provenance of the pieces and deliver a sustained and easier plan to reconstitute them.

The Humboldt Forum discussion also exposed the insufficient attention that the German institutions give to the country's colonial past. Germany has only focused on acknowledging its anti-Semitic past—even though Nazism was built up during the colonialist era of Germany— perpetuating a racist speech, where white lives of Jews matter and are regrettable but black lives of Africans don't. Coloniality is still very present in the lives of everyone, from Europe to Egypt.

3.2.1 The language of coloniality

It is vital for this work to detail some concepts that are used by coloniality since these are also frequently applied in the exhibition or research of former-colony topics. The word imperialism is commonly used freely as a synonym of an administration that comprises a series of territories. Imperialism, though, is the main system that fueled colonialism. The constant competition amongst European forces impelled them to seek for new commercial routes, products, and control of territories. Edward Said says: *the term "imperialism" means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; "colonialism", which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory* (Said, 1994: 9).

As an example of how this term and its related concepts have been addressed, we can bring out the case of the Amsterdam Museum in the Netherlands. They chose in 2019 to avoid using the term "Golden Age" that refers to a time of the country's history where they had a flourishing economy and several artistic and cultural advances. The works of 17th-century artists were displayed in the museum under this "positive-perceived" name, even if this development was only achievable thanks to the exploitation of other cultures. Curator Tom van der Molen explains: *positive associations with the term such as prosperity,*

peace, opulence and innocence do not cover the charge of historical reality in this period. The term ignores the many negative sides of the 17th century such as poverty, war, forced labour and human trafficking (Boffey, 2019). This is a demonstration of how an institution can acknowledge the colonial past and work towards a better understanding of how the misuse of language can affect minority groups.

Another common label given to the art and objects from the old colonies is the term "primitive". When Europeans arrived in the new territories, they divided the world into a dual classification: old and new, magic or pagan and scientific, irrational and rational, primitive and civilized, etc. Everything that did not serve a practical purpose was part of the "Other". This strange world was also designed as inferior. Quijano explains: *only inferior races [were] capable of producing inferior cultures [...]. In other words, the pattern of power founded on coloniality also implied a cognitive pattern, a new perspective of knowledge within which the non-European was the past and thus inferior, always primitive* (Quijano, 2014: 25). This classification is naturally related to the race one where white is superior, while the rest are of a barbaric nature. It was a helpful tool to justify all the bloodbaths and the stealing of the indigenous and native peoples. As Said also outlines:

...the notions about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples, the disturbingly familiar ideas about flogging or death extended punishment being required when "they" misbehaved or became rebellious, because "they" mainly understood force or violence best; "they" were not like "us", and for that reason deserved to be ruled (Said, 1994: XI).

To put it briefly, primitive is a label born to justify violence, and thus it should be avoided completely when speaking about non-European art and artifacts. This principle applies to every categorization that lessens the production of all that comes from outside Europe. This leads to the term "third-world" to denominate countries that either has no direct relation —such as Switzerland or

Iceland— or are not part of the European Union and that normally is attributed to “developing countries”. The term was originally born in the Cold War to designate the countries that were not officially ascribed to a capitalist or communist side, but they were “developing” into it. This would mean that a country has not reached the acceptable political, economic or cultural characteristics to be considered dominant or important. As De Sousa Santos explains:

The theories of the social contract of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are as important for what they say as for what they silence. What they say is that the modern individuals [...] enter the social contract in order to abandon the state of nature to form the civil society. What they don't say is that a massive region of state of nature is thereby being created, a state of nature to which millions of human beings are condemned and left out without any possibility of escaping via the creation of a civil society (De Sousa Santos, 2007: 7).

In essence, colonialism and the European former empires created a world of capitalism, racism, and classism and forced all their former colonies to be part of it, not only without giving them the tools to survive on it, but also taking away the resources that may have allowed them to integrate, or to keep living their own realities. This is what Starn and Spence also explain:

Third World refers to the historical victims of this process -to the colonized, neo-colonized, or de-colonized nations of the world whose economic and political structures have been shaped and deformed within the colonial process. The colonial relation has to do with structural domination rather than with just crude economic (the poor), racial (the non-white), cultural (the backward), or geographical categories (Starn and Spence, 1983: 2).

Third-world, therefore, evidences the whole structure built by Europe that oppresses the "Other". It is a pejorative and patronizing term, as well as primitive, diversity, multicultural, and several other words that have been

produced to incorporate the Otherness in the terms that are the most convenient for the white dominant race. As Godoy Vega explains:

The creation of the European Economic Community in the eighties perpetuated the European geopolitical myth based on the fence that marks the physical boundaries of the European bunker. Using multicultural policies to tone down the conflict in regard to that "fourth world" that was already living in Europe, the community protected itself from the "new" racialized "Other" who tries to enter by means of death (Godoy Vega, 2015: 106).

As we can note, the cultural dominant institutions have also created words such as "multiculturalism" to whitewash their image and avoid being seen as oppressors. It is crucial to understand, as cultural managers, where and why all the main concepts related to colonialism and the "Other" were formulated and if they are reinforcing coloniality, in order to make a more informed decision rather than keep using them.

4. Museum neutrality

Neutrality is a term used to describe an entity, country, or institution that has chosen not to take part in some issues, such as wars, social movements, or political elections, as well as Jennings points out: *in the context of disagreement or opposing views it connotes non-involvement, non-endorsement of any single view (Jennings, 2017)*. Comparing artworks with books, we cite García and Spencer who analyzed the possibility of a neutral librarian: *"no politics, no religion, no morals," an idea suggesting that the nation's book stewards should focus on providing information services to their patrons without regards to their own personal beliefs (García and Spencer, 2016: 40)*. To achieve absolute neutrality, as per this definition, museums should host all ideas, voices, and opinions, but neutrality enthusiasts have interpreted it as providing knowledge with only "facts", a defender of neutrality says: *Neutral museums do not censor themselves. Neutral museums do not pick sides. We tell the truth, and when battle ensues we allow the truth to*

"defend itself". Usually with a bibliography (Brenham Heritage Museum). García and Spencer track this conception back to Western thinkers: *Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn, two philosophers who believed that the scientific approach could be applied to human society, heavily influenced librarians towards this line of thinking* (García and Spencer, 2016: 41).

The issue with the neutral side of the discussion García and Spencer call "neutrals versus radicals" (García and Spencer, 2016: 40-67) is that the bibliography and facts that the author from the article "Museums have never been neutral, but they should be", posted on the website of the Brenham Heritage Museum in Texas, mentions, comes mainly from the dominant groups of white, male, and bourgeois subjects, as well as the actual idea of neutrality, for example, Popper and Kuhn were born in Austria and the USA correspondingly. This is one of the main reasons the terms we have explored in the last section -third-world, primitive, multicultural- are being used repeatedly, without stopping to analyze its real origin and significance. These words were not neutral from their conception, and they can't be if they still affect the lives of "minorities" —those that represent more than half of the population—. Its use is as well highly correlated with the fact that the administration of museums is still held by people corresponding to the same white, male, and bourgeois groups as we previously observed. In claiming neutrality, museum managers are reproducing colonial structures.

Moreover, the concept of *museum* itself is loaded with overtones about controlling and patronizing its visitors, from the way it places and discloses the pieces to the disposition of the rooms. O'Doherty compares gallery spaces to churches and says: *We give up our humanness and become the cardboard spectator with the disembodied eye. For the sake of the intensity of the separate and autonomous activity of the Eye, we accept a reduced level of life and self* (O'Doherty, 1976: 10). Galleries are built to disconnect themselves from the outside world, context is given to the objects from within. Even if

these artworks are contained in an old chamber that was built for other purposes, the significance given by the curators and managers of the museum takes the artwork away from the outside world, there is no given outside context, it is just the piece and what the directives of the museum think of it. There is no place for dialogue, discussion, or debate around the piece. It is a unilateral conversation where only the museum educators are speaking.

Bennett has compared the museum as well, but with the penitentiary system, in what he calls "the exhibitionary complex" (Bennett, 1988: 73-102). He points out:

the exhibitionary disciplines of history, art history, archaeology, anthropology, and natural history were deployed in the new open setting of the public museum where they worked through mechanisms of pedagogy and entertainment to recruit the support of extended citizenries for the bourgeois democratic, economic, social, and political order (Bennett, 2015: 4).

In his first work about the exhibitionary complex, Bennett links the museum with the panopticon defined by Michel Foucault, as it will: *induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power* (Foucault, 1977: 201). We can observe here how the museum has been defined by many authors as something that is not naturally neutral, in the sense that even when it tries to just present facts, the presence of oppression tools, such as coloniality, will influence those facts. Furthermore, facts can also be misleading, partially selected or influenced by the viewers' perspective.

Museums are having a hard time adapting to current needs. New migration waves are common and minorities have access to the museums and their actions through the internet and means of criticism in social media. Members of emblematic institutions such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM) have not been able to agree on a new definition for the word *museum*, as

public, academics, and activists demand a democratic public space. ICOM defined the museum for the last time in 2007 as *a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment* (ICOM, 2007). Members are calling for an update that reflects the awareness required for the contemporary needs of institutions, the most popular proposal to be voted until September 2019 was:

Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.

Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing (ICOM, 2019).

This change of meaning would imply for the first time that museums are not only the holders of knowledge but also dialogue boosters. Therefore, the idea of neutrality that only answers to hard historical facts would crumble, as museums are fed by its visitors, exchanging with them and being held accountable when they are not responding to the needs of the community that supports them. This conversation is already happening in many cultural institutions, but big museums with a colonial past have failed to deliver.

When the general director and the director of collections of the previously mentioned Humboldt Forum were asked if the institution would follow the steps of France —as its president Emmanuel Macron declared they would start returning looted pieces— they responded: *we cannot simply dissolve entire*

museums. And this is not something our colleagues around the world expect of us, as well as:

National Socialism was the central focus of past decades. That was the right decision, even if it meant that Germany's other crimes, such as the genocide against the Herero and Nama in former German South West Africa, now Namibia, were overshadowed. [...] The problem is that the further back in history you go, the more difficult it becomes to work with today's categories of guilt and responsibility. My grasp of things is different for the history of National Socialism where I'm dealing with individual victims and perpetrators, than it is of the Spanish colonization of America (Mangold, 2018).

Even if the German government has emitted guidelines for the restitution of colonial art, and also a "contact point for collections from colonial contexts" where citizens can approach and ask or give information about colonial artifacts, these quotes are indicators of how German and many other European institutions act towards war and totalitarianism repercussions. On the one hand, art looted during the times of National Socialism in Germany has a series of guidelines for restitution. The Washington principles, issued in 1998, establish that the pieces should be identified and returned to its legitimate owners and the archives related to it open for researchers. However, European museums are filled with pieces from Africa, Asia, and Abya Yala. Resources are invested in improving how these objects are being exhibited, but not on searching for its origin and giving it back to the communities that produced them.

Tristram Hunt, the current director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, exemplifies this point with an article he wrote for *The Guardian* "Should museums return their colonial artefacts?"⁵, where he argues that it is very difficult to get resources for provenance investigation. At the same time, the V&A threw a major exhibition for the 150th anniversary of the British

⁵ [Should museums return their colonial artefacts? | Tristram Hunt](#)

invasion of Abyssinia where they exhibited what he calls in the article “an exquisite piece”: the crown of Mentewab, an Ethiopian empress. This is a piece that, as he explains in the article, came from the pillage of the imperial Ethiopian palace by the British army. From this bloody episode, the British government has only returned two hair lockets that were taken when the army cut the scalp of Mentewab’s husband, the former emperor.

What these cases say to minorities is, as Sumaya Kassim points out in her letter responding to Hunt’s article: *Like so many white people, he wants our art, our culture, our food. But he does not want us* (Kassim, 2019⁶). Museums and their majority of white workers are profiting from African, Asian, and Latin American collections without giving back to their context and communities. They are taking away from them the opportunity of getting any advantage, such as economic gain for exhibiting these pieces, as well as the possibility to learn their history first-hand. It is not possible to denominate this way of administering a museum as neutral.

As hard as a museum board or individual workers try to be neutral, they will never get rid of their background. In the case of white European workers, they will never get rid of the privilege that imperialism has given to them. Furthermore, even if an institution hosts several activities aiming at decoloniality, this will not be of much use if their collection contradicts completely their didactic agenda. The V&A and the Humboldt Forum are once again perfect examples of this, as they prepare exhibitions about slavery or imperialism—which will be probably attended by a majority of white public—but are not willing to take real actions against coloniality, such as considering restitution. As Ortiz says: *The fact that cultural institutions do not express any resistance to culture being used to reinforce xenophobic and racial segregation practices by means of the discourse of integration makes it impossible to imagine how a process of decolonization could take place simply through*

⁶ Text from an open letter Kassim wrote on response to Hunt, T. Both sources can be found in section 9. Bibliography and references.

exhibitions, debates and talks that regularly appear in their programmes of activities (Ortiz, 2015, p. 99).

5. Where do we see coloniality in museums?

So far, we have distinguished what is coloniality and how it affects the so-called minorities. We have also seen some examples of coloniality showing in museums and established that in this text we will not consider the museum a neutral space. Aided by this theoretical framework, we will then analyze the way museums preserve coloniality in the institution. For this purpose, we have divided the museum into three areas: architecture, curatorship, and management. The categories were chosen after exploring through different cases the many ways a museum is administered —both where a decoloniality process has started and where colonial structures are still denied— and picking up the areas of museums that were analyzed or criticized the most by decolonial authors. There are other aspects that can be analyzed, such as the use of social media, advertising, provenance of fundings, but for the scope of this work, we will frame the research to the three aforementioned.

It is crucial here to point out that, knowing that the modern museum itself was created partially as a colonialist institution of control and indoctrination, it can now repurpose its efforts into constructing a decolonial institution in these three areas, as Mignolo says:

Decoloniality, as I am posing it here, does not imply the absence of coloniality but rather the ongoing serpentine movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living; that is, an otherwise in plural. In this sense, decoloniality is not a condition to be achieved in a linear sense, since coloniality as we know it will probably never disappear (Mignolo, 2018: 81).

5.1 Architecture

This section analysis will comprise both the architecture of the museum itself as well as its surroundings and how the museum is strategically or not emplaced in a city or town. Even though many museum collections are hosted in adapted buildings, it is common for museums exhibiting colonial pieces to have been built for this specific reason. This is related to the exercise and exhibition of power. We will analyze first the location of museums, mainly those considered emblematic for countries or cities, exploring what represented to position them in a specific site and what represents now that they are still located there.

Lewis Mumford cited by Giebelhausen stated that: *the museum represents the most typical institution of the metropolis, as characteristic of its ideal life as the gymnasium was of the Hellenic city or the hospital of the medieval city* (Mumford in Giebelhausen, 2003:4). Museums acted in the 18th and 19th century as landmarks of progress, every capital city had a museum and it contained the results of its colonizer efforts: the British Museum in London, the Weltmuseum in Vienna, the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin are some examples. All of these had its own emplacement built for the particular reason of showcasing "other cultures" as well as the results of anthropological and ethnographic expeditions sponsored by the aristocracy. That they meant progress and the formation of an urban enclave is important as the metropolis was opposed to the "savage" and "primitive" state where the native peoples were found, in this eternal dichotomy elaborated by modernity and Enlightenment.

Additionally to the intentions of displaying the results of imperialism, we can also observe the nineteenth-century mindset in all types of collectionism. The accumulation of artworks as a consequence of the accumulation of wealth was as well a reason to build museums, as O'Doherty points: *The*

nineteenth-century mind was taxonomic, and the nineteenth-century eye recognized hierarchies of genre and the authority of the frame (O'Doherty, 1986: 16). To “frame” these belongings in museums sought to demonstrate different aspects of imperialism such as richness —of a country or an individual— or the “appreciation” of the “old culture” coming from Europe, as it happened in the USA case when they had to build its own culture as the native one was erased. This answers as well to the dichotomy that was created between Europe=old and good against America=new and savage. As Quijano explains:

Europeans generated a new temporal perspective on history and relocated colonized peoples, and their respective histories and cultures, in the past of a historical trajectory whose culmination was Europe. But, remarkably, not in the same line of continuity with Europeans, but in another naturally different category. The colonized peoples were inferior races and —therefore— earlier than the Europeans (Quijano, 2014: 788).

Museums are commonly built in the main squares where all the power institution buildings are also settled: namely the government’s palace and the cathedral, usually accompanied by a colossal statue of an old hero. As an example, we can mention the Altare della Patria (formally called Victor Emmanuel II National Monument) in Rome, which is an immense monument dedicated to the king that unified Italy and a museum itself. It is also surrounded by many catholic emplacements such as churches or cathedrals and other museums. The Hofburg in Vienna, where we can find the Weltmuseum (former Ethnographic Museum), is another outstanding case: in one complex one can find the presidential offices, the imperial chapel, the national library, and the Schatzkammer. Munich’s Glyptothek is located at the Königsplatz (King’s Square) built to commemorate monarchy. As Giebelhausen explains, Leo von Klenze, the architect of the Glyptothek: *proposed a final triad of church, military and culture [that] signalled an important departure. [The museum] proved [to be] the perfect tool for reconfiguring the city and fostering*

the formation of the bourgeois subject (Giebelhausen, 2003: 5). We can observe here how the museum was then created in the metropolis to affirm certain identities, primarily the bourgeois. An identity that was constructed, amongst other things, over the remains of colonized cities and its looted objects.

Nowadays, museums are also built to create hype around them, attract tourism and boost a city, many times leading to gentrification (MacLeod, 2005). Notable examples are the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and the Soumaya and Jumex museums in Mexico City. This process leads poor people to move out to the periphery, while their original homes are appropriated by new owners who want to live close to these centers of social status. This is a reflection in contemporary times of what Bennett says: *Museums were also typically located at the center of cities where they stood as embodiments, both material and symbolic, of a power to "show and tell" which, in being deployed in a newly constituted open and public space, sought rhetorically to incorporate the people within the processes of the state* (Bennett, 1988: 99).

Museums are usually located in central parts of the city, almost inaccessible to the working class. As the periphery of a city develops, the metropolis will become bigger and oblige poor people to move there, where rents are reachable for them. The lack of public transportation after rush hours, the distance between the city center —where museums are usually located—, and the low salaries perceived by the working class are everything but a motivation for them to visit these institutions. Gurian points out:

It seems all too evident that lack of available public transport coupled with inexperience makes it less likely for the non-user population to visit. However, if the motivation is high enough, such as "seeing the doctor" or "going for a job interview", the person will brave the trip if possible. Once public transport is in place and experienced users ride along with the inexperienced, visitation increases to certain places. Yet, there is only

occasional interest in the museum sector to view public transport as an essential ingredient towards enlarged public use (Gurian, 2005: 210)

Even if the commuter can get to the museum door, entrance fares are also an issue when we talk about the possibility of lower-class attendance. For example, the average price for an entrance ticket in Berlin museums is 12€, which represents a bigger percentage of spending for members of the lower classes. For both public and private institutions, it is a challenge to obtain resources to fulfill all their duties, but it is important to take into consideration that in Germany, for example, an average worker earned 31.4€ per hour in 2000, whilst a non-European worker earned as low as 24.5€ euros on average (Lang, 2000: 10), therefore the entry ticket becomes a luxury asset for some.

It is easy here to identify the pivotal point of the accessibility problem. Even in current times, the European bourgeoisie is still getting an easy entrance to museums as it was planned two hundred years ago by the monarchs of old empires. The case of London is also interesting since all of its state-funded museums are free—in some of them, visitors can donate as much as they want but it is not compulsory—. Here perhaps this is done in favor of equality and democracy, but gratuity is only for permanent exhibitions, as the temporary ones are commonly paid. This conducts only partial access to culture for the working class, and it still doesn't diminish the problem of public transportation, accessibility, and the physical exploitation of workers.

This leads to a discussion on how public the museum really is. As we could see in the sections above, the ICOM defines a museum as a public institution, this means that it should be open for everyone. Even if this is true to a certain point, the first barrier is, as pointed out, entrance tickets. There are many reasons a museum has to charge for its entrance, these won't be discussed in this text but we acknowledge them. Further than that, lack of accessibility due to public transportation or low wages it is normally also out of the reach of a common museum worker since these topics are related to city governance and

higher structures of power. It is understandable that an employee cannot simply change this. Nonetheless, the museum itself has internal dynamics that also push the visitor away, especially those from working-class, immigrant, or minority backgrounds. As Bennett states: *Moreover, such lessons consisted not in a display of power which, in seeking to terrorize, positioned the people on the other side of power as its potential recipients but sought rather to place the people — conceived as a nationalized citizenry — on this side of power, both its subject and its beneficiary* (Bennett, 1988: 80). This means, entering a museum may be an enjoyable experience for some, as the museum was created to reinforce their identity—the European bourgeoisie—, but for others, it may represent a disturbing or triggering experience.

We can provide here an example of this with the case of the Victoria and Albert Museum and its director, Tristram Hunt. When asked in a panel about how faith constructs a museum, and furthermore if the institution would provide prayer spaces for Muslim users in its new location in Stratford, an East London neighborhood with a high density of Muslim population, he said: *Whether it's our Jameel gallery of Islamic art or our Raphael gallery of the cartoons of the acts of the apostles Peter and Paul, we could not have that without that religious understanding. But would I be then interested in providing space for the act of prayer within the museum? Probably not* (Kassim, 2019). In sum, the majority of inhabitants of a borough where a new museum is opening will not have a space to reinforce their identity, even if that space is being supported thanks to objects that were created for Muslim prayer, making the V&A in Stratford a “public” space but not inclusionary, as Gurian says: *to become truly inclusionary, a museum must provide services seen by the user as essential, available on demand, timely and personally driven* (Gurian 2005: 205).

In conclusion, it is important that cultural and museum managers take into account all the factors that can diminish the community within which they are building or administering a museum. If a museum is to be constructed, then it

should be adapted for the needs of contemporary times in a way that is not threatening the visitors of any class, race, or gender. When a museum is already built, then the spaces must be adapted in the same path within the real possibilities of the institution. As the community changes and evolves, the museum should too.

5.2 Curatorship

This area comprises one of the most important parts of a museum's purpose. Here we will talk about the exhibitions and its contents, the origins of coloniality in exhibitions, and how it is still present. It is central to talk about curatorship since it is the medium between the institution and the visitor; in here, curators and museum staff choose not only what to showcase, but also how to present it, arrange it, and explain it. Curatorship is the pieces, the text that accompanies them, the provenance of the artworks, as well as the activities programmed to promote an exhibition, all of these are important elements to analyze when exhibiting objects that come from former colonies.

Museums—in particular, ethnological museums—were developed with undeniable colonial logic. The disciplines themselves of anthropology and ethnology have their grounds in coloniality, as Mignolo points out: *"Comparative ethnology" and "ethnographic reason" are two sides of the same coin: they are the rational articulation of cultural differences by a European observer, since in neither case the discursive rationalization of a non-European observer is taken into account* (Mignolo, 2011: 10). Ethnography and its associated disciplines allowed institutions from the colonizer empires to legitimize "scientifically" its classification of the world where race was the main category and the supremacy of the white an indisputable truth (Mitchell, 1998). This affirmation is expressed in exhibitions in many ways.

One of the most remarkable examples is the *Exposition Universelle* of 1885 in Paris, where cultures of many lands were exhibited. The pavilions of the

countries of the Otherness had several traces of coloniality. Mitchell exemplifies it with the memories of an Egyptian delegation visiting Paris on its way to a congress in Sweden. In there, displayed, they found the representation of a Mosque's facade where: *"Its external form was all that there was of the mosque. As for the interior, it had been set up as a coffee house, where Egyptian girls performed dances with young males, and dervishes whirled"* (Mitchell, 1998: 295). The Egyptian delegation also found that every representation of Egyptian scenes was set up as a dirty and neglected place.

This type of exhibition was present all over Europe. Either if they were addressed as scientific, cultural, or entertainment. Short explains:

Exhibitions combined the natural history vitrine with the department store window. Endless series of tropical goods arranged in glass cabinets evoked the scientific, the exotic, and the commercial at the same time. Lists, catalogues, collections, and massed objects insisted on a limitless abundance of valuable tropical commodities (Short, 2012: 41).

Some exhibitions portrayed the "Other" as irrational, unclean and undeveloped; some others ended up worse, such as the aforementioned Venus Hottentot, an African black woman exhibited as an exotic asset who ended up dead at 26 due to the terrible living conditions she had to endure. This is one of the most known stories, but several enslaved people had the same fate after being exploited as exhibitionary objects in Europe.

Another example is the panorama, where the audience could enter a 365-degree world and observe how the "Other" lived. This is important since, as Mirzoeff points out: *The anthropologist Johannes Fabian argues that conventional anthropology, which grew in direct relation to European colonies, was so visually oriented that "the ability to "visualise" a culture or society almost becomes synonymous for understanding it"* (Mirzoeff, 1998: 282). The panoramas did this: they transported the audience to another land where they could be "part of it", but in reality, they weren't. As soon as they came out of

this fake world, they entered their own and went on with their normal lives. The panoramas were problematic both for the people of the colonized countries and for Europeans. First, that Europeans felt they could be part of the colonies and understand their way of living even without being there and receiving only biased information from colonization advocates led to appropriation. De Sousa Santos explains this concept: *In the realm of knowledge, appropriation ranges from the use of locals as guides, and the use of local myths and ceremonies as instruments of conversion, to the pillage of indigenous knowledge of biodiversity* (De Sousa Santos, 2007: 9).

For Europeans, panoramas and exhibitions served as propaganda to promote the support of colonization. In countries such as Germany, this led to a broken society where only some members of the upper classes could access these said benefits or emigrate, but the poor did not get any direct privilege. They obtained the structural privilege of not being black or indigenous, but could not travel or move to the colonies seeking for a “better life”, nor buy the commodities that colonialism was supposed to bring them, leading to tension between the poor and the bourgeois.

Nowadays, coloniality in exhibitions may not be as crystal-clear as in these examples but is still present. For example, the number of objects from sub-Saharan Africa that is owned by European museums exceeds by far the number of pieces in African museums. The British Museum has 69,000 objects from sub-Saharan African origin; the Weltmuseum of Vienna owns 37,000; the Musée Royal de l’Afrique Centrale in Belgium owns 180,000 pieces; the Humboldt Forum of 75,000; the Vatican Museums and Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac own altogether 70,000 pieces, while: *In 2007, Alain Godonou, a specialist of African museums, estimated that in comparison “with certain rare exceptions, the inventories of the national museums in Africa itself hardly ever exceeded 3,000 cultural heritage objects and most of them had little importance or significance”* (Savoy and Sarr, 2018: 15).

If the catalog itself is filled with pieces coming from colonial impositions and looting, it is difficult to form an exhibition that won't showcase coloniality. Here we recognize that restitution has become a matter that surpasses the authority of, to say so, a curator, but then, the organizers of an exhibition have to work with the materials they have at hand to fight coloniality. Displaying these objects and profiting from them, benefits their context and not the context where they were created, therefore museums should aim for—at least—the decolonization of its exhibitions.

In this regard, we will start with the categorization issue. Many museums organize their exhibitions and collections in categories that diminish the Otherness. It is not just about the continent of origin, as in American, Asian or African art. We can observe how these divisions comprise and generalize many cultures that are therefore ignored, as Quijano states: *This also happened with the people forcefully brought from the future Africa as slaves: Ashantis, Yoruba, Zulu, Congos, Bacongos, etc. In the span of 300 years, all of them were nothing but Blacks* (Quijano, 2014: 801). In contrast, European ancient art is fully classified into Greek, Roman, Byzantine, etc. while the African, Asia, and Abya Yala identities are constantly mashed up in one category. Let's take an extract from the digital collection of the British Museum, where Americas and China are categorized next to "Animals":

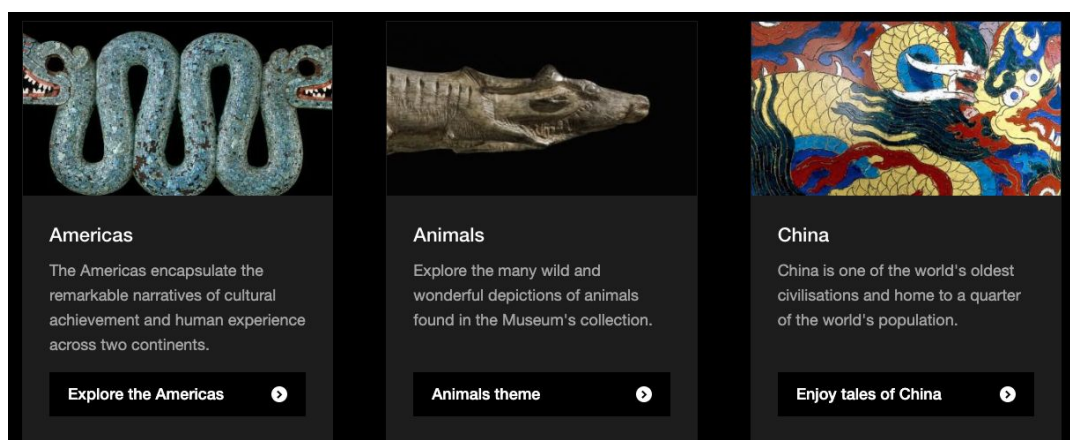


Image 1: British Museum website. Collection.

This division establishes —consciously or not— a hierarchy, and said hierarchy still places Europe and whiteness as the highest race or culture. This issue leads to the problem of provenance. If the pieces are not recognized as part of a certain culture and just thrown away into the category of Black or African, this may also be part of a problem of lack of knowledge about where the piece comes from. Provenance questions are reflected in the categorization, but also in the acknowledgment of colonization in museum labels and catalogs. This is directly related to the information that visitors are receiving since the label is one of the means where the museum is communicating with the user. A label may say a piece comes from the collection of a prince or duke, but it does not go further to where the duke got it. This is “whitewashing” the provenance of the piece as if it was legitimately acquired.

Determining provenance is difficult because these histories were erased or ignored, and the resources in museums are being used for everything except provenance research. As Deliss explains: *In Europe, ethnographic objects were given a date—as if they had been orphaned and needed to be parented anew—founded on when they were acquired, purchased, or even looted, but not when they were originally produced* (Deliss, 2015: 24), confirming again that white history is considered the one that must be taken into account when determining the origin of a piece. We can observe an example of a piece that is exhibited in the Pergamon Museum of Berlin. It is a painted glass flask from Egypt portraying a scene of polo players. This is its technical label:

Title: Flask with Polo Players
Creator: Unknown
Date Created: c. 1300
Location: Syria or Egypt
Physical Dimensions: w19 x h28.5 cm
Type: Flask
Medium: [Glass](#), enamelled and gilded.

The text below the picture of the piece says: *At the end of the nineteenth century it was in the collection of the German diplomat Count Pourtales, and it was acquired for the museum in 1913*⁷. There are no further details on the acquisition of this piece and its possible colonial origins. This type of text about provenance is repeated in several pieces not only from the Pergamon but from various European museums that exhibit looted art.

Labels not only inform about provenance but also about the piece and what the institution that exhibits it thinks about it. The text that accompanies every exhibition confirms these postures. First, many museums still display and use constantly in their didactic materials the main terms of coloniality that were defined in a previous section of this text: primitive, third-world, savage, long-forgotten, and racial categories appear often when talking about Africa, Asia, Abya Yala and indigenous cultures from every continent. The term “primitive” in the search engine of Europeana⁸ throws 3,584 results, most of them with images of African and Mesoamerican pieces. These pictures come from many museums but mainly from the Wellcome Collection in London. This is only what we can see from a quick search in the biggest collection of digitized art of Europe, but there are many examples in various cultural institutions.

Even the names of the exhibitions with plundered objects highlight the Western part of history. For example, the exhibition “Sir Stamford Raffles: collecting in Southeast Asia 1811–1824” which draws attention to the British colonizer⁹. The description of the show says: *This exhibition presents the rich variety of objects from Java and Sumatra collected by Sir Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), the British colonial official who founded modern Singapore. Raffles remains a controversial figure – and has been seen as both a committed imperialist and progressive reformer over the decades.* There is an apparent effort here to put

⁷ <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/flask-with-polo-players/PQErhKQOfTzNUA>

⁸ www.europeana.eu

⁹ [Sir Stamford Raffles collecting in Southeast Asia 1811–1824](#)

on the table the discussion about colonialism, but it is the name of the collector that is in the exhibition's limelight.

The way of promoting exhibitions is also an important task in tackling coloniality. It is crucial to take into account if the speakers of a conference promoting the show come from the background they are talking about. This is essential as Mitchell explains: *As Europe consolidated its colonial power, non-European visitors found themselves continually being placed on exhibit or made the careful object of European curiosity* (Mitchell, 1998: 295). People that come from former colonies are still treated as an Otherness, even if Western culture and systems were already imposed in their nations.

Quijano explains how only China and other Asian cultures are treated as a respectable Otherness, while indigenous people from Abya Yala and Africans are thought to be in magic, irrational state of knowledge (Quijano, 2014: 786-789). This has led —amongst other factors also related to colonialism— to only white people researching and disseminating knowledge about colonized cultures. The idea that indigenous and tribal persons are only made “for the rural work” or perceived as “peasants” have thrown them outside of the academic and research fields. This is oppressive as it turns off the voices and denies access to several spaces for people because of the way they look or the place they come from. This adds to the perception that, outside the West, there is only a “lower” way of thinking.

It is important then to open the museum's spaces for others to profit, not just white people. When giving academic spaces —these being conferences, talks, workshops, or similar— just to white people, coloniality is present. This is even more accurate when those spaces are related to the colonized territories, where there are several academics from those countries, specialized in those topics but with no opportunity to talk publicly about it because of the lack of offerings, resources, and trust for non-whites. It is important to reflect here why is African, Asian, and Abya Yala art exhibited just in ethnology museums? Why do

contemporary art museums won't exhibit contemporary artists from these backgrounds? The answer leads back to the same colonial reasons. The construction of white supremacy and the idea that art and culture coming from the other continents can only be primitive or ancient.

Africans, Asians, people from Abya Yala and indigenous people from all the world exist nowadays with all the problems that colonialism left behind in their territories and based in the before mentioned oppression tools of sexism, racism, and classism. In this light, Bhabha says: *Culture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity — between art and politics, past and present, the public and the private — as its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment or liberation* (Bhabha, 1994: 172). European institutions forget the contemporary culture outside their continent and silence it, taking away the native art and culture from its creators and descendants, putting the decontextualized objects in showcases with sterile lighting and profiting from them.

5.3 Management

Management is probably the most important area of a museum when we talk about fighting coloniality since architecture and curatorship are many times controlled by the administration of the institution. Here, we will talk about museum management boards, personnel, and budget, but also about the image museums build of themselves for promotion, as well as how they handle their collections, comprising the topics of restitution, conservation, and provenance. If in the previous sections we have addressed how curators or other staff may not have the administrative power to change certain aspects such as the construction of a new room in the museum, or the return of an Egyptian piece (even though they do can work towards it, acknowledge its need, and put pressure), management positions have a more immediate access to the possibility of change.

First, it is essential to talk about how management boards are composed in most European museums. As we saw in a previous section of this text, high positions are predominantly filled by white males, even if the museum collection is comprised of African, Asian or Abya Yala art and culture, or if the museum is located in an area with an immigrant, Muslim, Black, Latinx, etc. majority. This is an indicator that, as Janes points out: *Museums have inadvertently arrived at a metaphorical watershed where it is now imperative to ask broader questions about why museums do what they do, to confront a variety of admittedly unruly issues, and to forge some new choices* (Janes, 2009: 20). This means that a museum speaking about minorities or integrating them in some exhibitions related to their own culture is not enough. To go further, institutions must be managed and integrated by many cultural backgrounds and, when hiring a majority of white people, they should always take into account that their privilege is one of the main reasons they are part of the management board or the staff of any institution.

Taking the example of the British Museum when a spokeswoman declared about restitution that: *"We believe the strength of the collection is its breadth and depth which allows millions of visitors an understanding of the cultures of the world and how they interconnect"* (Rea, 2019), we can observe how institutions are reluctant to admit the colonial nature of their collections. Furthermore, they do not accept the racism and classism that is ever-present in museum boards, personnel hiring, and activities. The British Museum also alleged that they had organized a three-day workshop in Ghana about "Building Museum Futures" and that they are part of the aforementioned Benin Dialogue Group on the restitution of the Benin Bronzes. But how a three-day conference series led by whites and the offering of loaning pieces to its original creator it's fighting coloniality within the institution? As Janes appoints:

This reputation for elitism unavoidably leads to further speculation about the role of museums in our increasingly stratified society. It is a matter of record that governments, notably in the West, are increasingly influenced by a

small and powerful corporate elite (multinational oil corporations, pharmaceutical companies, the arms industry, industrial food conglomerates and so forth) with a vested interest in defining and maintaining the status quo (Janes, 2009: 21).

Museums are constantly whitewashing its image to the world, as they affirm, for example, that they exhibit these objects out of admiration for the other cultures. This position is very clear in Tristram Hunt's article or the interview with Hartmut Dorgerloh and Lars-Christian Koch from the Humboldt Forum, where all of them talk about their admiration of the cultures and pieces they are displaying —or will display, in the case of the Humboldt— in their institutions, but yet won't accept the importance of restitution or interculturality. As Clifford explains: *In the West, [...] collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity* and:

[...] the collection and preservation of an authentic domain of identity cannot be natural or innocent. It is tied up with nationalist politics, with restrictive law, and with contested encodings of past and future. Some sort of "gathering" around the self and the group — the assemblage of a material "world," the marking-off of a subjective domain that is not "other" — is probably universal. All such collections embody hierarchies of value, exclusions, rule-governed territories of the self. But the notion that this gathering involves the accumulation of possessions, the idea that identity is a kind of wealth (of objects, knowledge, memories, experience), is surely not universal (Clifford, 1998: 96).

This does not mean that a museum director cannot be a vivid admirer of the Persian or Inca cultures, but this must not be a factor to play with the issues of restitution or decoloniality, as the personal interest of some is affecting the past, present, and future of many. The same goes for the justification of these collections' existence through the excuse that they are useful to educate the museum visitors when at the same time this is denying the same educational opportunities for the people that produced these objects. This means

advocating for the cultivation of their own society on the grounds of the oppression of others, first done through colonialism, and nowadays done via coloniality. Moreover, European museums are full of replicas, —e.g. the Ishtar Gate at the Pergamon Museum— which fulfill the same intention as the original pieces for these educational purposes.

Another defense of European museums with colonial collections argues that they exist to guard and conserve objects, as it states the definition of museums given by ICOM in 2007. In here is important again to appoint the provenance of the objects, since even if European institutions are protecting these objects, they are protecting them from what Europe itself has caused in former colonies. Besides the economic state that these countries have nowadays in comparison with Europe, which plundered not only art but also several resources, the pieces were “guarded” in the first place by Europe from European invasions. The empires sent archeology and other academic experts to its military deployments, knowing that they could take and bring to Europe objects that would be uncovered or left alone after the attacks. As Savoy and Sarr point out:

The type and quantity of the coveted objects, the presence of experts closely attached to certain of the armies, the close attention paid by European museums and libraries, oftentimes far in advance of the movement of the troops, with certain museums already assigned with the housing of specific objects immediately after their acquisition by the armies, show to what extent the targeted and plundered locations had sometimes much more to do with the museums than military plundering stricto sensu (which traditionally simply had its sights set on wealth, weapons, and enemy flags) (Savoy and Sarr, 2018: 10-11).

These quotes from Savoy and Sarr come from a restitution report commissioned by the current French president, Emmanuel Macron, who in 2017 gave a speech about how important restitution was for French and African

institutions to thrive, and committing to return several pieces to Africa in the span of 5 years. To this day, in January 2020, the French government has returned only one object (Rea, 2019). Many factors have contributed to this delay such as the problem with national laws that establish that these objects are France's property. This is the problem dealing with jurisdiction, manuals, and institutional frameworks born from colonialism. Those need to be changed to respond to current needs, from the macro to the specific. A museum director or a cultural manager can contribute to this when, for example, analyzing why it is so important to trace the provenance for white-made art, and not for that coming from other backgrounds. It is unlikely that someone would buy or exhibit a Da Vinci piece without a certificate of authenticity, but the provenance of First Nations or native peoples' objects is passed to a second priority layer since it would reveal its violent and oppressive origin.

Another justification museums argue for both not researching provenance and developing decolonial policies is the lack of financial resources. We cannot contradict here that it is difficult for any cultural institution to get a budget, even if it is a private or state-funded museum. Art and culture institutions don't get as much money as others and the resources are often centralized in the same places and people. The issue with budget and coloniality still being part of art institutions is that money is not being used to create decolonized spaces, nor exhibitions, nor even to hire staff from minorities. As Janes points out: *the time and energy spent in relentlessly seeking more money from the denizens of economic privilege could be more profitably spent in designing a sustainable future for museums* (Janes, 2009: 22). We can observe this partiality in museum budgets, as mentioned before, in cases such as the Humboldt Forum, which is investing 600 million euros in the reproduction of a palace, instead of in the provenance and decoloniality of their collection. There are plenty of examples, Kooiman provides some from the Netherlands:

[In the Netherlands] the subsidies awarded for national commemorations provide further evidence of an intent to create a selective view of the country's history: the memory of the victims of the Second World War is kept alive by some 4.5 million euro every year, while the organisers of the commemoration of slavery by the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and Its Legacy (NiNsee) must reapply for a grant every single year, with no certainty that its application will be honoured (Kooiman, 2015: 50).

She also explains in this conference how, in 2008, when there was a global economic crisis, the Dutch government cut the budget from the cultural sector. This reduction hit the museums that showcase and analyze colonial pasts the most. For her this was not casual, as these museums don't attract many visitors due to its critical nature: *the "success" of museums is determined by the number of visitors they attract. Since critical reflection on the colonial past is hardly a great moneyspinner, these museums tend to fall by the wayside. As such, this would appear to be an example of the economic crisis being used to justify an ideological shift of strategy in the nation's cultural institutions (Kooiman, 2015: 43).*

Budget is limited but it can be directed towards decoloniality, even if it is not directly pointed to provenance research, for example, when hiring personnel. This is something that will imminently happen, and to integrate staff from different backgrounds is a step against colonialist structures since it is providing spaces to minorities also adding their point of view, either in their academic expertise or about the discrimination processes that people of color have to endure just to be part of the Western world. Granting scholarships, funds, or giving jobs to minorities is also not enough. White and dominant classes should also step aside and let minorities construct their own systems of management and direction. Janes reminds us: *It is a matter of record that museums know little or nothing about equal access or opportunity. The majority of the world's museums still cater to society's elite – the most educated and most well off of our citizenry – an obstinate characteristic of museums that continues, albeit*

unfairly at times, to undermine the public perception and value of museums (Janes, 2009: 21). From the last quote, we can conclude that, if museums don't step forward for integration, interculturality, and decoloniality they will become obsolete in front of today's needs.

In the next section, we will analyze a case study in order to see these three described and exemplified aspects in a specific case, and conclude whether if the studied institution is working towards decoloniality or not. This case can also be useful to analyze other museums and easily identify coloniality.

6. Identifying coloniality, a case study: the Herzogliches Museum, Gotha

We have analyzed different cases of coloniality in some of the most well-known museums in Europe and the USA. Now we will scrutinize a specific case to get a closer view of how coloniality performs in these institutions. We have selected the Herzogliches Museum in the city of Gotha, in the state of Thuringia, Germany. This choice responds to different criteria: first, the proximity of the author to the museum made it easier to visit it in person and observe in first instance the collection. Moreover, the museum holds an Egyptian art collection, so we will analyze the display of objects with origin in a former colony. It is likewise vital to analyze a museum not as popular and seen as, for example, the British Museum, so we can understand how coloniality is present in either big or small spaces and how a local museum can affect its surroundings with colonial discourses. In this light, is crucial to note that Thuringia is one of the German states with less percentage of immigration¹⁰. This is significant data taking into consideration that Germany is the country of the European Union with the highest immigration rate (Eurostat, 2019: 2).

The Herzogliches Museum construction started in 1864 and concluded in 1879 when it was opened to the public. The architect Franz von Neumann designed

¹⁰ [Migration and integration Foreign population by Land](#)

the building by the mandate of Duke Ernst II of Saxony-Coburg-Gotha. It is located in front of the Friedenstein Palace and built on its former garden kitchen. Its position close to the city center and the main church —the Margaretenkirche— makes it conveniently accessible through Gotha’s main train station. The museum was erected to home the different Ducal collections that were previously stored at the main palace complex and that had been assembled by Ernst II’s ancestors. Besides the Egyptian collection, it also showcases a painting gallery and a collection of Japanese and Chinese objects, as well as several cork models.



Image 2: View of the Museum’s facade from Schlossplatz.

The museum was widely affected by the second European war since most of its pictorial pieces were moved to the Soviet Union. The building served then —and until 2010— as the Museum of Nature. In 2013, after the modernization of the building and since the artworks had come back, it was reopened again with the original ducal collection and calling itself anew the Herzogliches Museum. Currently, the museum is state-owned and administered by the Friedenstein Schloss Foundation. The Egyptian collection lays in the basement

level of the building. It is constituted by approximately 1,250 pieces, including human and animal mummies, masks, small sculptures, parts of bigger sculptures, and busts.

We will analyze the museum following the same criteria of the sections above: architecture, curatorship, and management. Starting with architecture, it is important to review both the location and the purpose of the building. It is situated in the city center behind the ducal palace, which secures its position as a central building. This demonstrated the general population the power of the ducal family as it imposed an enormous structure and also hid the collection as an elite's treasure. The museum's location, therefore, played a game of apparent accessibility for the working class but buried behind the imposing structure of the palace complex. This matches the aspects we described before regarding the location of museums within the city and how they act not only as a symbol of status but also as a panopticon where the ruling classes can observe and limit the access of the general population.

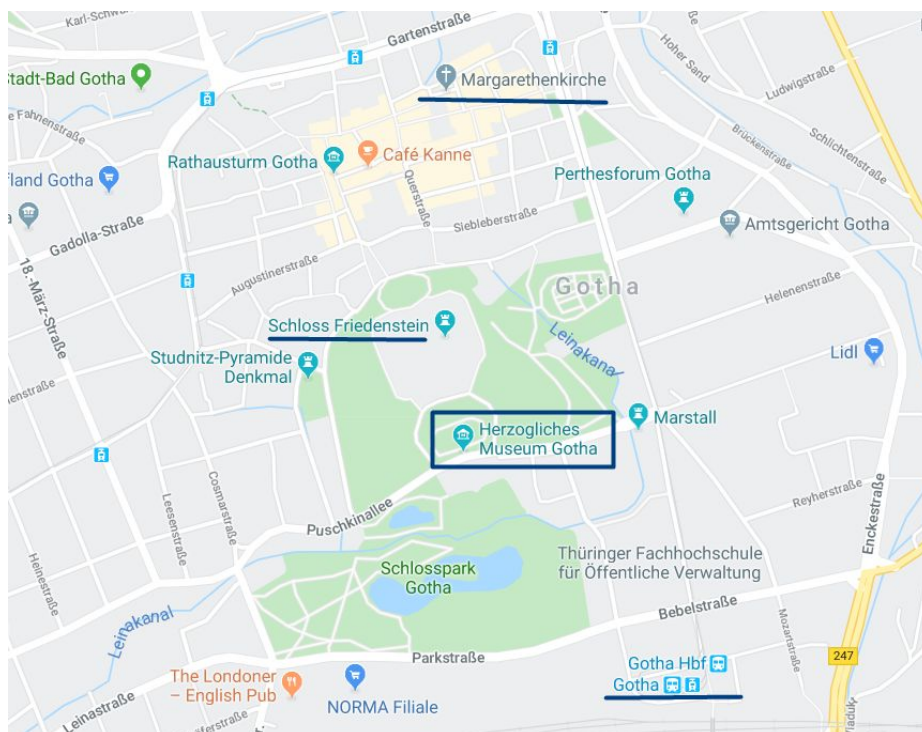


Image 3: Location of the Herzogliches Museum in the city of Gotha.

Furthermore, the Herzogliches was one of the first buildings in Germany developed for the sole purpose of exhibiting an art and ethnology collection. Its construction was partly funded by the parliament, which means it was approved to be part of the state spending and consequently of its public agenda. These factors are also coincident with the colonialist spirit: structures made precisely to display the achievements of colonization and accumulation of resources. These were means to prove white European supremacy and to control both the national and the colonies' populations. This applied even if the colony was not own, as it is exemplified by the Egyptian collection being this country a former British colony. That the Herzogliches museum was built in colonial and classist grounds is clearly not a responsibility of the current workers or visitors of the museum, so we have to go further and analyze what is being exhibited in its rooms and how. First, we will analyze, from the visitor's perspective, the display of the pieces and the texts that come with them.



Image 4: View of the Egyptian Room. Herzogliches Museum.

The Egyptian collection comprises 1,250 objects. Of those, 95 are displayed and the remaining are stored in the Friedenstein Foundation storage facility. It is part of the “first part of the tour”, as provided by the museum sign routes and it consists of one room connected with the “Death in antiquity” room, related to the tombs and death masks that are part of the collection. It also shares the floor with antique vases and sculptures from Greece and Rome, and with the collection of cork models, in which several monuments from antiquity are represented, including Egyptian pyramids.

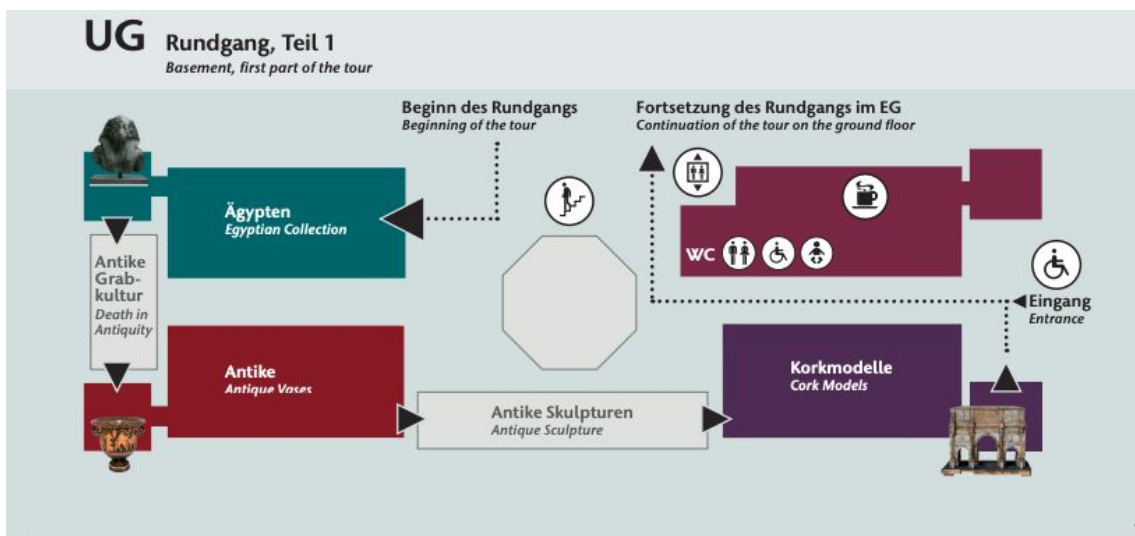


Image 5: Floor plan of 'First part of the tour'.

The text that describes the collection’s origins refers to Duke Ernst II of Saxony-Gotha-Altenburg as the primary collector of these antiquities. He was also fond of minerals and plants. He received the pieces through funding the exploration trips of the German physician Ulrich Jasper Seetzen who traveled across many territories such as the actual countries of Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. He left register of his journeys in several letters sent to Franz Xaver von Zach, Grand Marshal of the Court of Saxe Gotha. The Palestine Association of London compiled and translated them to English.

In his text, we can appreciate he was a man of his time when he is surprised by —as he names the different inhabitants— Arabs, Troglodytes, or Mohammedans being kind to him. In his letters, he shows himself as someone genuinely interested not only in discovering new forms of life but also in sharing his observations with the European world. He also seems more respectful than the aforementioned Giuseppe Ferlini. Seetzen still acted in different ways that today may not be considered legitimate to achieve his exploratory goals, for example, he adapted his identity according to the situation, either as a doctor or as a beggar, as he writes: *the whole of my baggage consisted of [...]; a small provision of medicines, to give credit to my supposed character of physician* (Seetzen, 1819:14). It was usual for European explorers in colonial times to call themselves any other profession to hide their real aim of collecting pieces for their European sponsors. This applied also for explorers added to military missions. The personnel sent to plunder pieces were often given “scientific” positions, which justified the pillages. As Savoy and Sarr explain:

The type and quantity of the coveted objects, the presence of experts closely attached to certain of the armies, the close attention paid by European museums and libraries, often times far in advance of the movement of the troops, with certain museums already assigned with the housing of specific objects immediately after their acquisition by the armies, show to what extent the targeted and plundered locations had sometimes much more to do with the museums than military plundering stricto sensu (which traditionally simply had its sights set on wealth, weapons, and enemy flags) (Savoy and Sarr, 2018: 10-11).

Seetzen used some of these strategies but it is pertinent to say that he had definitely a different approach to collecting as other explorers. As he writes in his missives, he had no interest in treasure-hunting, but into purchasing valuable and notable objects, minerals, and plants:

With respect to myself, persisting in my determination to go to Abîl, I made an agreement with three Mohammedans to conduct me thither. They seemed very willing to accept my offers, as long as they thought I was going there to search for hidden treasure, but as soon as I honestly explained to them, that I understood nothing of treasure-hunting, and that my intention was only to seek for plants, they walked off (Seetzen, 1819: 30).

In his texts, we can observe how he collected the pieces, paid for them, and then carefully sent them to Gotha to be taken by the Grand Marshal. He registered the purchased pieces in a list that included the price paid and a description, as explained by Uta Wallenstein, a worker of the museum, in the interview given for this text (the complete interview can be found in Annex 1). These facts are not explained in the museum texts nor in the pieces' museographic labels.

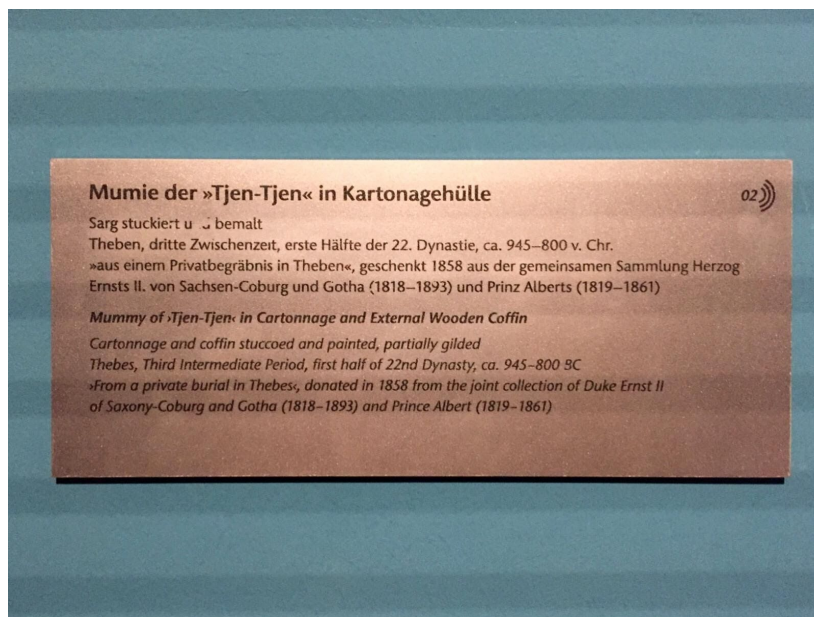


Image 6: Museographic label of a mummy at the Herzogliches Museum.

Regarding provenance, the museum indicated that they know the origin of 95% of their Egyptian collection pieces since Seetzen acquired and registered them in the aforementioned purchase list. We could conclude that the way Seetzen obtained the pieces is not the most brutal that can be found, but it still plays its

part in the colonialist structure. First, because the fascination for the Orient and the "Other" cultures was a product of colonialism and portrayed the "Other" as the opposite of the European: if the Europeans were civilized, they were savages. If the Europeans were clean, they were dirty. And the list goes on. Taking these objects out from their context—in this case—contributed to exoticize the cultures considered as minor. It supplied means to consider them worthy of a display but not of dialogue or an invitation. It is always important to analyze all these duality issues with different glass and to seek empathy. We can start with questioning ourselves, exchanging the roles that are often assumed: were there African explorers that either bought, plundered or stole European sacred or daily-life pieces and exhibited them in African museums? This question, as a starting point, does not provide a clear answer, it mainly provides more challenges. Why were there no African explorers as they were European? Why there are no European ethnology museums in Africa exhibiting the ways of life of the whites?

Assuring that because the pieces were purchased are therefore legitimately acquired may also be part of a colonialist structure. We could not risk thinking every purchase of the Egyptian pieces was forced or illegitimate, but many factors that often are ignored in Western ways of thinking should be taken into account. For instance, the questions: who sold the piece and under which circumstances? Did the seller know the final destination of the object? Which were the circumstances that led the seller to sell the piece? This is vital because knowing the reasons behind any sale of pieces that were an important part of the patrimony of a certain culture may lead to recognizing a colonial imposition. To ask these questions will contribute to understand that the explorers that brought the pieces to Europe could do it in such an easy way mainly because of the great amount of violence that was executed on those populations, causing poverty, famines, and deaths. On the other side, this exploitation also boosted several changes in Europe that led to economic stability and its establishment

as the main economic, political, and cultural reference for the rest of the world. As Savoy and Sarr point out:

In 1975, through a critical re-evaluation regarding the history of his discipline, Claude Lévi-Strauss called anthropology the "daughter born out of an era of violence". Today, in our 21st century capitals, the ethnographic museums as part of those museums deemed to be "universal", which have gathered up the colonial harvests, have thus taken on the role of the "responsible brothers" of this discipline. Destruction and collection are the two sides of the same coin. The great museums of Europe are at once the conservationists of incredible human creativity and the receptacles of what often amounts to a violent dynamic of appropriation that is still largely poorly understood (Savoy and Sarr, 2018: 14-15).

Having established this, there are different hits and misses on the display of the Egyptian collection at the Herzogliches Museum. Fortunately, their misses are not as mindless as those from the British and Victoria & Albert Museums or the Humboldt Forum. On the positive side, the Herzogliches Museum has invested both time and resources to conserve and to track the origin of its pieces. This can also be noted in the museum labels, where the provenance of the object is not only established from the time of arrival to the collection—for example, the year 1858, in Image 6—, but also the year when it was originally created—c. 945-800 BCE—. This acknowledgment provides recognition to the authors of the piece and to its original context.

Furthermore, when asked about restitution and if the museum would give back the pieces if required, Wallenstein answered that they would be willing to do it with a clear proof of provenance from the respective African countries and that there must be a dialogue with the legitimate owners of the works, in case these were taken by force. Since the collection of the Herzogliches was apparently not taken by force but purchased, they don't plan to retribute any piece. That the museum has an open position regarding restitution is a progressive sign. On the other side, with colonialist structures being more scrutinized than ever,

it is time for museums to question themselves about every aspect of their collections coming from former colonies, as we mentioned in the paragraphs above. It is controversial to say that restitution should only be done after getting a clear proof that the piece was acquired illegitimately since the transactions —legal or illegal— were always done in European terms. As an example, Savoy and Sarr point out: *In 1854, Sir Robert Phillimore, the most celebrated English jurist of his time, considered that "all civilized States" should recognize the maxim according to which "the acquisitions of war belong to the State"* (Savoy and Sarr, 2018: 10), this reveals how some actions that were considered legal on those times would probably not been tolerated nowadays. Moreover, how restitution is treated today will be possibly criticized in the future as not progressive, as long as we keep fighting against coloniality.

To conclude with the display, we would encourage the Herzogliches Museum to share with their visitors the information about the pieces' provenance, providing further information about Seetzen's trips. The ideal would be to track every purchase and analyze if it was coerced by the colonialist structure, but this is a very difficult thing to do, mainly because it would involve a great amount of money, which local museums normally lack. But it is important that every museum works towards decoloniality with the resources at their hands. Informing also about the circumstances that allowed the purchase of these pieces may lead the visitors to learn more about the causes and effects of colonialism and to form their own opinion regarding the pertinence of having and exhibiting these objects.

The final aspect to analyze is management. As mentioned before, referring to colonialist structures, the Herzogliches Museum handles its collection better than bigger museums that we have used as examples, but it has yet some work to do. The museum budget depends on the government and from sponsors. The museum renovation from 2010 to 2013 that allowed it to be called again the Herzogliches Museum, for example, was funded by the Federal Republic of

Germany, the Free State of Thuringia and the City of Gotha, all public institutions.

In the interview done with Wallenstein, she commented that mummies are hard to conserve due to their size, so the museum has to apply for funding and rely on sponsorships. This means that coloniality should be, as we have stated, tackled from within the institution, but also through public policies since museums rely on these many times. Furthermore, we think the Herzogliches Museum should play a more active role against decoloniality. It is the biggest and most known museum in Gotha and one of the most important of the region, among other cultural attractions in Thuringia, with the peculiarity that it hosts one of the oldest Egyptian collections in Europe. This is a great opportunity to decolonize the museum and offer more information and guidance to the visitors on the provenance of these pieces.

The collection might not exist without colonization and, as we have analyzed before, the museum itself follows a colonial structure in its construction grounds and the way of exhibiting other cultures as exotic assets, either Egyptian, Japanese, or Chinese. The appreciation for external cultures may not lead today to appropriation or exoticizing, but it did certainly 300 years ago. This appropriation gave several benefits to Europeans and stripped them from their legitimate creators. Acknowledging this as institutions is the first step and the Herzogliches Museum, even if it is located in a small city, could have an influence on how restitution is managed in other institutions.

Another subject to consider is the matter of accessibility. It is necessary when there is a complete impossibility to bring these objects closer to the cultures that produced them, to make easy for them to access the collections. Museums need to reflect on this topic taking into account the classism and racism problems that the former colonies host. For example, the Weltmuseum in Vienna keeps an Aztec headpiece made of quetzal feathers. It is highly valuable and how it made its way from Mexico to Austria is still unknown. The Mexican

government fought unsuccessfully for decades to bring the piece back and, to this day, it is impossible for it to travel due to its fragile condition. For this reason, and as an act of “giving back”, the museum provides free entrance to any holder of a Mexican passport. This seems like a good gesture, but it is done with ignorance of the Mexican context, where the minimum wage is 5.88€ per day, making it practically impossible for the average Mexican to visit the museum. How to solve this specific issue is a big discussion, but it shows how decolonization policies are still done under European terms. The same circumstances apply to Egypt, where the minimum wage is 113€ per month¹¹. European museums need to work towards using their own privilege to bring their collections near to their original contexts.

7. Alternatives

As we observed in the sections above, the museum system has its roots in oppressive structures such as imperialism and colonialism, which are supported by sexism, classism, racism, amongst others. This is expressed through collectionism and its display of hierarchical divisions and also through the creation of indoctrination and control institutions such as ethnology museums. Today, it is critical to decolonize these places, as they were born of coercion tools that for years enslaved, minimized, and exoticized the inhabitants of former colonies.

Several thinkers of the counter-movements against these control mechanisms consider that the only alternative to authentically eradicate them is to tear the system apart completely from its grounds and that dissensus is the path to achieve equality (Eltahawy, 2019; Lugones, 2003; Ziarek, 2002). In this sense, to decolonize the museum from its foundations would mean to avoid every practice created in the nineteenth-century colonial mindset: collections should be dismantled, every piece in ethnological and anthropological museums should

¹¹ <https://wageindicator.org/>

return to its source community, and European museums should stop profiting from cultures that don't belong to their own context.

We consider this approach true, valid, and necessary. Nevertheless, it is not realistic today because, as Lumley points out: *[...] museum curators are only human. They have their own political allegiances and religion or lack of faith. They may be blinkered by their class background, their race, or their sex. Specialisms and false academic boundaries often lead to a rather narrow view of a subject while self-censorship can come into play when controversy seems likely* (Lumley, 1988: 96). To restitute collections, for example, would be one of the most radical acts that an institution could do to decolonize itself, but it would imply, indeed, several empty museums and acknowledging the privileges that oppression has given to Europeans. This is no simple task for either former colonies nor former colonizers, as Deliss explains: *To remediate the ethnographic collection is to engage with that mix of discomfort, doubt, and melancholia, the caput mortuum phase of alchemical regeneration, transforming these objects into a contemporary environment and thereby building additional interpretations onto their existing set of references* (Deliss, 2015: 29).

Therefore, we propose here different alternatives to decolonize museums, from small to big actions that can change the way we manage cultural institutions:

1. Publicly addressing colonialist structures

The first step to decolonize places and people is to become aware. To recognize the several privileges or denied rights that race, gender, and class give to each political subject, as Lugones states: *one cannot think well about racism and ethnocentrism or challenge and reconstruct the racial state or the ethnocentrism in one's culture and in oneself without an awareness of one's ethnicity, or of one's being racialized as well as of the ties between the two* (Lugones, 2003: 89). These considerations can be applied in every sphere

—public or private— and are usually more difficult to perceive for those who are benefited by the oppression mechanisms. Thus, to reflect on how our pre-given conditions such as skin color, socio-economic position, and gender affect our social, academic, and professional performance, is fundamental for every cultural manager. This is especially important for those who work in the ethnological and anthropological fields and indispensable in every cultural institution.

To address coloniality and other control tools is directly related to neutrality. As we have established before, in this work we consider that a museum cannot be neutral, and publicly establishing its position regarding decolonization topics it's the first step for awareness. As Zihlerl says: *Around these gaps the supposed privilege of neutrality is not, actually, an option for 'cultural' work and workers negotiating the inter-generational overdetermination of inequality in life's disposability, which sees some cultures managed and patronised by the state at the continuing expense of others* (Zihlerl, 2015: 177).

To examine how claiming neutrality supports colonial structures, we can analyze the Whitney Museum's case. In 2019, the online medium *Hyperallergic* investigated the members of the museum's trustee board, formed by several millionaires who donate enormous sums of money to the institution. In the resulting article¹², which followed a past 2015 investigation¹³, they revealed that Warren Kanders, vice-chair of the board, owns Safariland, a company that manufactures tear gas. This Safariland weapon was discovered to be used in several protests in the USA and, more recently, to repel migrants in the Mexico-USA border. The research sparked controversy as the museum remained silent until protests began —mainly conducted by the movement Decolonize This Place—. Four artists pulled out of the 2019 Whitney Biennial; 400 academics, artists, and cultural managers published a letter requesting

¹² [A Whitney Museum Vice Chairman Owns a Manufacturer Supplying Tear Gas at the Border](#)

¹³ [The Unlikely Connection Between the Whitney Museum and Riot Gear](#)

Wanders resignation¹⁴; and 100 Whitney workers signed a statement demanding the museum's administration to break their silence¹⁵.

On July 29th, 2019, Wanders quit the board. This case is not only an example of how protest and acknowledgment—in this case coming from the decolonial movements, the Whitney employees, and the 400 letter signatories— can change an institution, but also of how public statements can affect a museum's reputation and take away the public's trust in the institution. Adam Weinberg, director of the Whitney, published a statement directed to the Whitney staff on December 3rd, 2019, after Wanders' resignation, that said: *the Whitney is first and foremost a museum. It cannot right all the ills of an unjust world, nor is that its role* ¹⁶. In this letter, he also writes:

We truly live in difficult times. People are suffering in our city, the US and around the world: nationalism has risen to unimaginable heights; homelessness is rampant; refugee crises abound; people of color, women and LGBTQ communities feel under attack; and the environment grows more precarious. All these tragedies have understandably led to tremendous sadness and frustration, quick tempers, magnified rhetoric and generational conflict.

It is interesting to examine the incongruence between the last paragraph and the declaration of neutrality that he imposes to the museum, revealing his lack of empathy for the issues he recognizes to know. Weinberg also ignores the museum's employees and artists' viewpoints, as they do not agree with this stand. The museum director's position—and especially of a museum as known as the Whitney—is clearly political, and it requires the elaboration of many tactics to get funds and resources. But a position like Weinberg's is completely

¹⁴

<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4295-kanders-must-go-an-open-letter-from-theorists-critics-and-scholars-updated-list-of-signatories>

¹⁵ [Whitney Museum Staffers Demand Answers After Vice Chair's Relationship to Tear Gas Manufacturer Is Revealed](#)

¹⁶ [Whitney Museum Director Pens Letter After Vice Chair's Relationship to Weapons Manufacturer Is Publicized](#)

implicated in the colonialist structure: he does not care where the funds come from because it is not directly affecting his race or class as it is affecting migrants trying to cross the border. The money that lets some freely enjoy art is obtained by harming others —mainly the poor and the formerly colonized—. This model, which lacks empathy and is tone-deaf, will be no longer supported in the years to come as we can predict observing the many protest cases similar to this and the rise in forums and spaces combating colonialist actions that have surged in the past decades.

2. Acknowledgment in museum texts: use of language

In a previous section of this work, we analyzed how several terms used in everyday museum texts have an original colonialist and discriminatory language. These words —third-world country, primitive, colony— can have a negative impact on visitors, mainly on those from oppressed backgrounds and countries. To continue using this language —mainly in the ethnological and anthropological contexts— supports colonialist structures. It is fundamental to address this issue in exhibition texts because it's one of the first steps for cultural institutions in the acknowledgment of their privileges and origin as part of the colonialist system. As Lumley points out:

The nature of the museum's service to its users on the one hand, and the immediate appeal, the physical and visible 'reality' of objects on the other, protect such prejudices from open acknowledgement or examination. Contact between the curator and the user is mediated through the object and the display; the curator is distanced from his/her public, and is not immediately accountable in the same way as, for example, a teacher. General visitors to the museum do not 'read' what they see as the selection and interpretation of one person, or a group, from a range of possible 'meanings'; they have no access to alternative material, meanings, and arrangements [...]. Thus museums have been slow to take up issues such as racism, class bias, and sex discrimination, either as employing institutions, or

as a medium which propagates a particular and pervasive brand of history
(Lumley, 1988: 103).

We can analyze many aspects of this quote. Lumley reaffirms the position that the museum is completed by its users. This means it is central for museums to adapt themselves to the needs of the visitors. In contemporary society, we observe every day the increment of anti-fascist and anti-colonialist organizations, calls for restitution and integration, as well as the admission of past and present crimes. If cultural institutions don't answer to these claims, they will quickly become outdated and will be the object of backlash and protest, as we observed in the Whitney's case.

Lumley reminds us of how museum curators and cultural managers usually interact with their users in exhibitions: through the texts and images that accompany the display. The curator-visitor relationship is difficult since it is not face-to-face —with its obvious exceptions such as guided tours, dialogues, and conferences— curators and exhibition-makers need to tailor carefully what and how they will tell to the museum user. We call for a conscious redaction of museum texts in order to avoid terms formed in coloniality. Bhabha confirms this position as he says:

'What is to be done?' must acknowledge the force of writing, its metaphoricality and its rhetorical discourse, as a productive matrix which defines the 'social' and makes it available as an objective of and for action. Textuality is not simply a second-order ideological expression or a verbal symptom of a pre-given political subject. That the political subject — as indeed the subject of politics — is a discursive event is nowhere more clearly seen than in a text which has been a formative influence on Western' democratic and socialist discourse (Bhabha, 1994: 23).

It is easy to overlook —as Bhabha states— that the other is a political subject with systemic obstacles distant from one's own. It is troublesome to assume that a white European can thoroughly understand the background and life story

of, for example, Indian or Palestine people. Even inside former colony countries, a native white person won't have the same reality as an indigenous one. For this reason, it is important for curators and cultural managers to listen and consider different perspectives before writing and printing a text that will be accessible to all museum visitors. This is especially meaningful when this text will be placed beside objects from marginalized countries.

3. Listen, hire, and pay to subjects of coloniality

Following the previous point, another way to decolonize cultural institutions is the integration of people coming from the same background as the exhibited objects. Subjects of coloniality are often denied to have an own story—as it was plundered years before—furthermore, they are denied telling their own story, as it is told, researched, and exhibited mainly by Europeans. As Maldonado-Torres expresses: *A new attitude towards coloniality "demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as indispensable and insignificant* (Maldonado-Torres in Mignolo, 2018: 17).

Museums should integrate subjects from multiple backgrounds not only in academic areas but in management and exhibition, as they can provide answers that escape the Western logic and its colonial foundations. It is necessary to hire migrants to work in the museum staff. To give spaces for African, Asian, and Abya Yala curators, managers, and researchers in forums and dialogues with the museum users. Betasamosake Simpson says:

We cannot just think, write or imagine our way to a decolonized future. Answers on how to rebuild and how to resurge are therefore derived from a web of consensual relationships that is infused with movement through lived experience and embodiment. Intellectual knowledge is not enough on its own. All kinds of knowledge are important and necessary in a communal and emergent balance (Betasamosake Simpson in Mignolo, 2018: 18-19).

In this sense, it is interesting to analyze how European museums exhibit antiquities coming from former colonies, many times claiming admiration or diversity, but they don't provide spaces to actual individuals from these countries, and when it's done, they are often asked to do it without economical remuneration. Museums need to align their words with their actions and seek a real dialogue amongst cultures. The conversation that exists today —as living subjects of coloniality live in the margins of culture— it's one-sided and established only between European academics and antique pieces by dead people. Museums are proudly exhibiting their collections of ancient Egyptian art, but they are not giving spaces or voice to living artists from those nations. To recognize this is happening, and to act against it, it's part of the museum's duties.

4. Consideration of the community's needs

In section 5.1 of this text, we mentioned the case of the V&A Museum whose director said he would not provide praying spaces in the new location of the museum in Stratford, London, a borough with a high ratio of Muslim inhabitants. This is a clear oppressive action against the exact community that will host the museum, as it responds just to white European needs, ignoring Muslim and immigrant ones. *Decolonising means both resisting the reproduction of colonial taxonomies, while simultaneously vindicating radical multiplicity* (L'Internationale, 2015: 5), in this case, the V&A reproduces nineteenth-century taxonomies and hierarchies and therefore a colonial mindset that prioritizes the integration of Europeans in the colonies, but that has never permitted the integration of non-white immigrants in Europe.

We talked before how the integration of different backgrounds in staff and academics is vital, but it is also crucial to listen to the communities that surround the museum and that can make the institution thrive and make their own. A museum can also push away a community, as it is common with gentrification. This phenomenon has its grounds as well in class discrimination,

as poor people have to abandon their homes when museums get too popular when governments and museums favor tourism and the higher classes instead of the original inhabitants of a neighborhood. Gurian points out:

Many museums, especially the more notable ones, are important elements of the tourism infrastructure of the metropolis that surrounds them, and tourism is primarily a middle- and upper-class activity. These same institutions are described in the 'quality of life' bumf that is intended to elicit more managerial-level interest, an aspiration intended to enlarge the financial base. Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly, visitors and non-visitors alike may not wish museums to change because most citizens separate their belief in the value of museums from their actual use of them (Gurian, 2005: 204-205).

Decoloniality is not an easy task, as it implies dismantling several ideas that have been perceived as correct for hundreds of years, such as seeing tourism as an always positive activity. It would also disappear many ways in which museums have been economically supporting themselves, but this is a risk that needs to be taken to achieve the integration of the community with its cultural institutions. Coloniality and its contraceptives should be thought *with* and not *about* the subject. People should not be seen as an "object" of study, as a "diversity" quota to cover, or as an obstacle to building a new shiny museum. Understanding the community's needs is essential for ethical cultural management.

5. Active protest

Several times, museum employees have little to no power to act against coloniality inside the museum context. Even higher authorities can encounter many obstacles such as legal barriers or pressure from board members and sponsors since coloniality is part of the entire system in which the modern world is managed. In this regard, cultural workers and managers should seek to find spaces for active protest, as Ortiz says:

Decolonising a museum means sending letters to the Ministry of Interior, organising press conferences to condemn the use of culture in the discourse of integration, making the legal apparatus of the museum available to persecuted people; it means acknowledging the level of urgency imposed in the European context by the backbone of coloniality (Ortiz, 2015: 104).

This includes: to reject the participation of any board member in colonialist actions (e.g. Warren Kanders and the Whitney Museum); to not accept funding obtained from the exploitation of others (e.g. the Louvre¹⁷ and the Sackler name); to inform yourself about coloniality, racism, classism, sexism, and other domination tools; to not provide a space inside your cultural institution to advocates of hate movements; to offer the staff or organize amongst your coworkers spaces for debate and education regarding sensitive topics; and any other way in which you can contribute in your profession and inside your workplace to decolonize cultural institutions.

6. Restitution

Restitution is one of the most significant actions that an institution can do to remedy the damages of colonialism and to work towards decoloniality. As we established before, it is understandable that this step would have several repercussions in European institutions. Some authorities have the idea that if restitution happens, museums will be empty¹⁸. This may be true, but it allows us to reflect: first, about what does this say about ethnological European museums exhibiting foreign pieces, and second, that if this happens someday, then European institutions need to find a way to make their living without profiting from other cultures. While this is seen as a threat, it should be the actual goal for them.

¹⁷ [Musée du Louvre removes all mention of Sackler name from its galleries following protests](#)

¹⁸ [Why Britain Won't Return Ethiopia's Sacred Treasures](#)

Restitution would not only be part of historical recovery, but also allow the countries to profit from these pieces. This is the case of Ethiopia, whose government asked the restitution of objects looted by the British army during the Maqdala Battle: *The current government, which has embarked on a project of liberal reforms, is looking to develop its tourism sector* (Trilling, 2019). Pieces from this battle have been exhibited both by the British and the V&A museums, but there are plenty of others laying in the British Museum's basement, not even being displayed for the public but just kept there, seemingly as a display of power.

It is often debated if restitution is the correct thing to do since it is considered—and we have to recognize that sometimes correctly—that the receiving countries won't have the tools to take care of and preserve the objects in the same way as it's done in Europe. In these cases, it is convenient to analyze two factors. First, that the poor conditions of some former colony countries' museums are—again—a repercussion of colonialism. And second, that the same amount of resources required to take care of the pieces in Europe can be invested in creating the conditions to protect the objects in their original countries. Why this is not done responds to euro-centrist policies.

7. Actual praxis and not just words and statements: silence is complicity.

As Enrique Dussel says: *without praxis no pathway is made* (Dussel in Mignolo, 2018: 19). In most of the cases we have examined before, we can observe a common pattern of museum directives releasing public statements or declaring on interviews that restitution is the way, that they are deeply committed with decolonization and know the problems Eurocentrism, white supremacy, and other types of discrimination involve. But they take no real action.

A notorious case is the declarations of the French president, Emmanuel Macron, as mentioned before. He committed to return several African looted pieces to their countries of origin, but after 2 years he has only returned one object. In

Canada as well, where presidents all over the history have been demanded to acknowledge the past and present crimes against First Nations, several forums and debates have been celebrated with no legal consequences, neither restitution of territories nor integration of these forums' results into tangible policies. As Janes mentions:

The most concerted of these attempts was the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations Task Force on Museums and First Peoples – a national forum for discussing and finding resolutions to issues concerning First Nations and museums. The Task Force (1989–92) sought to define more equitable relationships among First Nations and Canada's museums, and addressed such issues as representation on governing boards, training and the interpretation of First Nations cultures, as well as access to collections and repatriation. The ensuing recommendations have no legal status and are not binding, and there has been no systematic follow-up to determine the extent to which museums have implemented these recommendations (Janes, 2009: 50-51).

The Canadian and French cases are not isolated events. Decolonial actions often find themselves hampered by national laws created centuries ago. Moreover, when decolonial policies are indeed applied, there are few to none evaluating systems to analyze its results and performance. As Zihlerl explains: *We can note that 'decolonial' efforts and agendas in some form or other (including very much non-actualised ones)— whether through pressures of activism or soft Euro-metropole diplomacy and co-exposure— are evident or buried in European archives (Zihlerl, 2015: 177).*

It is essential that cultural managers take this into consideration when developing and implementing decolonial policies and actions. First, that praxis will not be easy as there are several interests —emotional, economic, political, etc.— against decoloniality. And second, that it is necessary to create decolonial guidelines that will have tangible and real results. Subjects of coloniality should not feel again as an exotic asset that will just cover the integration quota for a

museum. This is related to points 3 and 4 above. To get the best results, it is crucial to work with the subject, avoiding patronizing. There is no one better to determine how a cultural institution can contribute—or not—to a community than the community itself. As Audre Lorde said: *The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house* (Lorde, 1978).

8. Conclusions

It is vital that cultural managers and workers address and pursue decoloniality, as colonial mindsets are part of a discriminatory and oppressive system that is having several consequences in our societies. We can easily observe how ultra-conservative anti-immigrant, anti-women's rights, etc. parties have raised all over the world. We are living in the middle of an ecological crisis. The new generations are struggling to find economic stability. Even if these problems cannot be solved by a single museum, it is necessary that we fight with the tools and possibilities that our profession provides and this comes within the cultural institutions. As Bhabha says:

To be in the beyond then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity to reinscribe our human historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side (Bhabha, 1994: 7).

That many of the texts we have used as references for this work are decades-old shows that decoloniality is a slow process, therefore we must start immediately to implement countermeasures not only in museums but in all the fields of art and culture. This does not mean that every cultural activity has to be *about* decolonization, but it means to take into consideration how cultural activities are implemented and if they are reproducing discriminative mindsets.

Museums are often referred as homes of knowledge and learning, but this will not be true until they stop reproducing structures that hurt, explode, and

diminish people. Museums being public institutions and with thousands of users every year have an ethical responsibility to combat these structures. How do you explain to a black kid that the only representations of her/him that exist inside a museum are as a slave? How do you explain to a Latin American that most of the Latinx creators exhibited in European museums were assassinated centuries ago?

White subjects live in a world where the perpetrators of crimes against them—such as the European Jews— have apologized, raised monuments, and paid tribute to the victims, whilst this has never happened to former colonies in the same dimension. White individuals are represented every day in positive roles, forgiven for their crimes, and hired because of their skin color, while blacks and indigenous people have to fight non-stop for inclusion and against discrimination. In this text, we have observed many cases that confirm this problem exists inside the museum structure and the case analysis reflected how even small institutions that apparently have no colonial backgrounds are still reproducing colonial mindsets. We call for active measures against coloniality inside the cultural field.

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Annex 1

Questions sent and answered by Uta Wallenstein, worker of the Herzogliches Museum Gotha. These are presented in the original language -German-, in order to present them as they were answered without alteration. An English translation is also provided.

GERMAN

1. Wie viele ägyptische Stücke hat das Museum?

Zur Ägyptensammlung zählen ca. 1250 Objekte [Plastiken/Reliefs, Kleinplastik (Amulette, Uschebtis, Statuetten), Mumien, Gefäße]. Die überwiegende Mehrzahl sind dabei Kleinplastiken.

2. Sind alle diese Stücke ausgestellt oder haben Sie andere Stücke gelagert?

95 Objekte befinden sich in der 2013 neu gestalteten Ausstellung. Die anderen Sammlungsobjekte sind im Perthesforum (seit 2014 neu eingerichtetes Depot der Stiftung Schloss Friedenstein Gotha) nach neuesten klimatischen Anforderungen deponiert (z. B. separate Klimaschränke für Mumien).

3. Haben Sie derzeit ein Programm, um diese Stücke zu konservieren und wiederherzustellen?

Das Restaurierungsprogramm in der Ägyptenabteilung läuft bereits über 20 Jahre und betrifft v. a. die Mumiensärge und Mumien. Alle im Herzoglichen Museum gezeigten Mumien, aber auch Bronzen, keramischen Objekte und Holzexponate sind aufwendig restauriert worden. Gerade heute habe ich einen Antrag zur finanziellen Förderung einer Mumiensarg-Restaurierung (Holzsarges des Nes-pa-aa, Spätzeit) fertiggestellt. Restaurierungen sind oft auf Sponsoring angewiesen, da sie sich v. a. bei den größeren Objekten kostenintensiv gestalten.

4. Kennen Sie die genaue Herkunft dieser Stücke? Zum Beispiel, woher Ulrich Jasper Seetzen sie hat und wie?

Zu 95% kennen wir die Herkunft unserer Sammlungsobjekte. Ulrich Jasper Seetzen hat zudem während seines Ägyptenaufenthaltes (1807-1809) eine Erwerbungsliste geführt, bei der oftmals die Provenienz genau verzeichnet ist. Er reiste wissenschaftlich als Forscher im Zuge der Aufklärung. Ihm ging es in erster Linie um Erkenntnisgewinn zu einer Kultur und um wiss. Untersuchungen auf den Gebieten der Geographie und Astronomie, aber auch der Sprachkultur im Orient. In diesem Sinne ist er ein Kind seiner Zeit. Um 1800 reiste eine Vielzahl von Universitätsabgängern (Göttingen war hier mit federführend) v. a. in den Orient, aber auch nach Amerika (z. B. Humboldt). Zu dieser Zeit

wertschätzte man die Kulturen ferner Länder und auch deren Bewohner. Zu Seetzen wurde diesbezüglich umfangreich geforscht und publiziert! Er sprach z. B. persönlich mit Vertretern afrikanischer Stämme, um etwas über deren Sprachen zu ermitteln, verfasste ein Wörterbuch.

5. Denken Sie, dass die Stücke legitim erworben wurden? Zum Beispiel, dass Herr Seetzen für sie bezahlt hat?

Seetzen hat die Objekte tatsächlich legitim erworben. In seiner handschriftlichen Erwerbungsliste finden sich sogar die genauen Ankaufssummen. Für seine Orient-Erwerbungen für den Gothaer Hof hatte er vom Gothaer Herzogshaus einen jährlichen Ankaufsfonds von 800, ab 1805 sogar 2000 Talern zur Verfügung gestellt bekommen.

6. Falls Sie diese Informationen nicht haben? Hat das Museum ein Programm, um die Herkunft dieser Stücke zu verfolgen? [not answered]

7. Falls die Antwort Nein lautet, wissen Sie, warum kein Interesse besteht, die Herkunft zu verfolgen? [not answered]

8. Was hält das Museum von der Rückgabe kolonialistischer Stücke? Würden Sie sie zurückgeben, wenn Sie die Herkunft nachverfolgen und feststellen, dass die Stücke unrechtmäßig entnommen wurden?

In der Gothaer Ägyptensammlung gibt es zum Glück keine Objekte mit kolonialistischen Hintergrund, so dass die Frage konkret nicht steht.

Im Allgemeinen wäre zu bemerken, dass die aktuellen Fragestellungen zu einem geänderten Selbstverständnis ethnologischer Museen natürlich ganz wichtig sind. Als wesentlich würde ich es hierbei ansehen, mit den Herkunftsländern der nachweislich betroffenen ethnologischen Museen (Besitzer von juristisch und moralisch unter zweifelhaften Umständen bzw. gewaltsam erworbenen Objekten) in einen wissenschaftlichen Dialog zu treten, deren Erbe gemeinsam zu schätzen, z. B. durch gemeinsam erarbeiteten Ausstellungen zur Kulturgeschichte der entsprechenden Länder.

Eine Rückgabe von kulturgeschichtlich wesentlichen Einzelobjekten im Sinne von Weltkulturerbe mit eindeutigem Provenienznachweis an Museen der jeweiligen afrikanischen Länder wäre aus meiner Sicht real machbar und als ein positives Zeichen zu werten.

9. Informieren Sie die Besucher in einem Text über die koloniale Herkunft der Sammlung? [not answered]

10. Falls die Antwort Nein ist, warum? [not answered]

11. *Haben Sie anticolonialistische Richtlinien für die Ausstellung der Stücke?*
[not answered]

12. *Würden Sie die Art und Weise, wie die Sammlung ausgestellt wird, ändern, um über ihre koloniale Herkunft zu debattieren, wenn Sie von einem Sozialverband gefragt werden?* [not answered]

ENGLISH

1. *How many Egyptian pieces does the museum have?*

The Egyptian collection includes approximately 1250 objects [sculptures/reliefs, small sculptures (amulets, shabtis, statuettes), mummies, vessels]. The vast majority are small sculptures.

2. *Are all the pieces on display or do you have other pieces stored?*

95 objects are [showcased] in the 2013 redesigned exhibition. The other collection objects are deposited in the Perthesforum (depot of the Schloss Friedenstein Gotha Foundation since 2014) according to the latest climatic requirements (e.g. separate climate cabinets for mummies).

3. *Do you currently have a program to preserve and restore these pieces?*

The restoration program of the Egypt department has been going on for over 20 years, especially the mummy coffins and mummies. All mummies shown in the Ducal Museum, but also bronzes, ceramic objects and wooden exhibits have been extensively restored. Just today I completed an application for financial support for a mummy coffin restoration (wooden coffin of the Nes-pa-aa, late period). Restorations are often dependent on sponsorship, especially because the design is expensive for larger pieces.

4. *Do you know the exact origin of these pieces? For example, where did Ulrich Jasper Seetzen get it from and how?*

We know 95% of the origin of our collection objects. Ulrich Jasper Seetzen also kept an acquisition list during his stay in Egypt (1807-1809), in which the provenance is often precisely recorded. He traveled scientifically as a researcher in the course of the Enlightenment. He was primarily concerned with gaining knowledge about a culture and scientific studies in the fields of Geography and Astronomy, but also the language culture in Orient. In this sense, he is a child of his time. Around 1800 a large number of university graduates traveled ([the University of] Göttingen was responsible for this), especially to the Orient, but also to America (e.g. Humboldt). At that time the cultures of distant countries and their inhabitants were valued. Extensive research and publication has been carried out on this in Seetzen! He spoke e.g.

in person with representatives of African tribes to find out something about their languages and wrote a dictionary.

5. Do you know if the pieces were legitimately acquired? For example, if Mr Seetzen paid for them?

Seetzen actually acquired the objects legitimately. In his handwritten acquisition list you can even find the exact purchase amounts. For his purchases of the Orient for the Gothaer Hof, he received an annual purchase fund of 800 from the Herzogshaus in Gotha, and from 1805 even 2,000 thalers.

6. If you don't have this information? Does the museum have a program to track the origin of these pieces? [not answered]

7. If the answer is no, do you know why there is no interest in tracking the origin? [not answered]

8. What does the museum think about the return of colonial pieces? Would you return them if you track the origin and find that the pieces were illegally removed?

Fortunately, there are no objects with a colonial background in the Gotha Egyptian Collection, so the question does not apply.

In general, it should be noted that the current questions regarding a changed self-image of ethnological museums are of course very important. I would consider essential to enter into a scientific dialogue with the countries of origin of the demonstrably affected ethnological museums (owners of legally and morally under doubtful circumstances or objects acquired by force). For example, through jointly developed exhibitions on the cultural history of the respective countries.

In my opinion, it would be feasible and a positive sign to return individual objects of major cultural and historical importance in the sense of world cultural heritage with clear proof of provenance to museums in the respective African countries.

9. If applicable, do you provide visitors with information about the colonial origin of the collection? [not answered]

10. If the answer is no, why? [not answered]

11. Do you have anti-colonial guidelines for the exhibition of the pieces? [not answered]

12. Would you change the way the collection is exhibited to debate its colonial origins if asked by a social organization? [not answered].