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Narratives in Objects: Reimagining Colonialism in Cultural Institutions

Ana Margarida Lopes

Master in Art Markets

Supervisor:

PhD. Luís Urbano de Oliveira Afonso. Senior Associate Professor,
School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon

Co-supervisor:

PhD. Hugo Barreiras. Assistant Professor, School of Arts and
Humanities of the University of Porto

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SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS



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History Department

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Acknowledgements

To both my grandfathers, whom in their own way, each fought a battle that was not theirs to fight to begin with.

To my younger students, may the future of Education guide you towards acceptance and tolerance.

Abstract

The following document aims to dive into the research conducted for the master's dissertation of the master's programme of Art Markets, at ISCTE and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Lisbon University.

The goals of this research are well established in the context of the issues of Cultural Education related to the Colonial Period, particularly the period known as New Imperialism, during the 19th century. In result of this interest, it was conducted an analysis of exhibitions and collections harbouring objects and artifacts of this time, brought to Europe, with the goal to emulate practices of educating for this subject that make sense in our society today. This research also aims to stand apart from polarizing ideologies, instead it tries to stay unbiased to the subject and showcase the role of these exhibitions and collections in Cultural Education, specially relating to raising issues regarding Ethics, Justice and Historic Inequality.

Key-words

Colonialism; Cultural Education; New Imperialism; Ethnography

Education, Health; Welfare

Resumo

O presente documento relata a investigação realizada no contexto de dissertação de mestrado, no mestrado de Mercados da Arte, pelo ISCTE e pela Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa.

Os objetivos desta pesquisa prenderam-se a preocupações no âmbito da Educação Cultural relativamente ao período colonial, em particular o período colonial advindo das tendências do Novo Imperialismo do século XIX. Resultado desta intenção, foram analisadas exposições e coleções com objetos e artefactos trazidos para o território Europeu e que hoje contam a História deste tempo. Este projeto de Investigação procura manter-se à margem das questões de polarização ideológica, em vez, pretende colocar-se numa perspetiva objetiva e mostrar qual o papel destas coleções na Educação Colonial e como é o que podemos fazer nesta fase da História da Humanidade em que se levantam tantas questões ligadas à Ética, à Justiça e à desigualdade Histórica.

Palavras-Chave

Colonialismo; Educação Cultural; Novo Imperialismo; Etnografia

Educação; Saúde; Bem-estar

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Introduction

The idea of this study was born during my bachelor's years, when I first wrote a paper about an artist of African descent, that was then inserted in the movement Black Arts. It was while studying to write that paper that I found through the History of this movement how ill-informed about some of the events of the past we are. The issue noticed was not wrong information exactly, even though many articles will make us believe that we have been lied to since the beginning of written History, it was more about little details that were omitted or forgotten. Since then, and driven by own curiosity and passion for the objects of the past, I started wondering if these boxes in which we put movement and art styles could have been different had History been taught differently, and how the truths that we believe to be factual could have deeply influenced our way of seeing the world, our way of exhibiting and our way of narrating the past through the objects that were brought to us by our ancestors.

In addition to all of this, my research was also immensely influenced by own narrated History. Some of my ancestors, as well as many Portuguese people, came from an ex-colony, and had to immerse themselves and find themselves a new way of living. In addition to this, not that many years ago, in 1961, most Portuguese men were rushed to a war that upon a few interviews I found that they did not know what the reason for this conflict was. Amongst those men were both my grandfathers who have helped me navigate the Portuguese reality of this time, through their own remembering eyes. Though the Portuguese Colonial Conflict (1961-1974) does not influence directly this research, it was important to me to better understand it, because it helped me understand how people that are still alive today, viewed these past events and how these political set ups moulded generations and their opinion towards the ex-colonies and their products.

As previously mentioned, the objects of the past were always my passion and of extreme interest to narrate the past as well as shape my research. I have always found, upon visiting several collections throughout my life, that to look at these objects was like entering a new dimension. It was as if by existing they were proving to me, speaking to me, things that words could not describe, and it was because of this almost mystic connection that I decided that the objects of museum vitrines could be so much more than encyclopaedic illustrations and have in fact an educational dimension that could not be ignored.

As an educator myself, I thought that, perhaps, the way to navigate this topic and help people understand it better, was through these objects.

After realizing that colonial objects would be my centre, I needed to realize what kind. Eventually I decided to lean towards the objects brought to Europe to build Ethnological Museums and Collections. It was important to me that this was the case, because Ethnology and its role today was also something that I really wanted to mention in this big conversation of Colonial Education. Ethnology and its pertinence are being debated all the time in today's news casts and I understand that it is a rather polarizing subject. In addition to the conversation of Ethnological Museum into research centres, that change nothing but their names, we see that Europe in general reaches to make up for the past developing made up ways to achieve this illusion. Although I recognize this subtopic as something worth mentioning, it is very important to me that the research here introduced is not seen as one of these attempts, because it is not. This research is about educating through objects, using museums as educational tools and understand the colonial times of the 19th century as they tried to be, a weird but probably not ill intended attempt on research and scientific development.

To guide us through to all these subjects, the research is divided into the following categories: Firstly, we will dive more into these complicated theories that serve as a guiding light for curatorship and handling of these objects – Postcolonialism, decolonizing practices, their origin and what they mean for cultural institutions. Secondly, we will understand better how Ethnology has shaped this field and has shaped other museums and cultural institutions that harbour these collections. We will also realize why, having its history into consideration, are Ethnological Museums slowly being repurposed to fit the European agenda. Finally, we will start to analyse, in chapter III exhibitions that showcase collections that serve as an example of good practices and that achieve efficient results in terms of educating their public regarding the subject of Colonial Exploration and what it means for us, for the then colonies and for our future. At the end, we will gather the better practices and the ones which upon observation reveal better results, and supporting them by the theoretical framework previously done, will list and explain good practices for the exhibition of colonial objects that convey for a better understanding of the subject, helping education on the theme, using cultural institutions as a tool for this affect.

Chapter I

Introduction to the subject, literary revision and approach

Robert Young defines Postcolonialism as a term that *represents perspectives critical of or resistant to colonialism or colonial attitudes* (Young, 2020: 3). Though this is a great statement to start our journey it is important to note that not being socially critical of these times today, means to be wrong in our woke, post-modern, post contemporary society, in particular when inserted in the sphere of cultural and artistic domains. One could argue that this is not necessarily true, especially when more and more books and publications are being brought to light that are critical of this positioning, but in truth, when our politicians and public leaders (politicians, influencers or other socially accepted rulers) go against these routes they are scrutinized. Summarizing, according to Young, Postcolonialism defines the state of our society today, for we generally agree that being pro colonization is racist and being racist is bad, whereas being open to change is good. To the cultural sphere, and to the exhibition of colonial objects it should mean to portrait these objects in a light that respects them, respects their culture and their significance to their culture, as well as conveying its true meaning, whether if that means anything for western culture or not.

After going through several articles and publications, the conclusion we reach is that exhibiting cultural objects of this significance is extremely hard, for it might mean to call unwanted attention to the problems of our society, such being the fact that we live in a society with the means to globalization, but our minds and our ways have not caught up to it yet.

Objectively, to exhibit colonial objects should mean to select objects according to their native meaning, following a quality standard of their native creators. What often happens is that objects such as these, were brought to European territory according to western standards without any knowledge of their purpose or their role within their native societies. Secondly, museums and cultural institutions that harbour these objects should make sure they possess the necessary means to preserve and study them, this means essentially the employment of professionals and researchers that are dedicated to the study of the native nations of mentioned objects, to make sure that when exhibited, they will be amplified in meaning and not diminished. In addition to this, we should also ask what is important to keep, and make sure we use the resources necessary to eliminate or move what does not make sense. Thirdly, but not less important, we should trust that our society is ready to receive new kinds of curatorship and

approaches. Essentially, trust the process and understand that this is a journey with many stops, rather than a one end destination. This last one goes both to the curators and to the public.

Throughout readings we come across different types of colonial objects, in fact we even come across different definitions according to the time period being studied. Colonial objects may be considered any object that was commercialized brought to western societies from the then colonies, such as the merchandise that came to Europe from Africa, Asia and South America in the 16th century, like spices, precious minerals, silk, etc. Colonial objects could also mean the objects that were created or used to study the colonies, from the beginning of their existence but especially in the 19th century, such as measurement equipment, clothes and scientific journals. Moreover, and the objects that concern us now, colonial objects are also those which were taken from the then colonies through whatever means, ethical or not, and that have traditional, cultural, artistic or ritualistic meanings, that are now in Europe (Stahn, 2023).

It would be wrong to assume that every object brought to Europe that stands today in museum archives was brought forcefully, unethically or overall, wrongfully, however many were. Though colonies were pre-existent to the 19th century, it was then that Europe started building some of its major collections of colonial objects, namely for Ethnological collections, collectors of this kind, mostly private, set sail to try to gather as many interesting objects as possible to be admired in these collections, which meant a huge flux of non-European objects coming in (Leibniz Association, 2021). Today there is an increasing concern about the means of acquiring colonial objects, and studies of provenance are developed by every museum and institution that harbours colonial artifacts to make sure that they stand socially updated to the norm. Whether they were exchanged, looted or bought, most continue to fill meters and meters of archive collections, either because institutions do not know if they can put them out, or because they do not have interest to do so.

Even though many of these objects were safely acquired through means that we can support today, it is relevant to question their relevance in our society. This is a difficult topic because we can be accused of trying to conceal certain parts of the world by choosing not to exhibit them, but honestly, what good can it do to exhibit certain items when the public is not ready to receive them? For better or for worse there is still a huge cultural gap between the so-called western society and other non-western parts of the world, whose customs and beliefs go against the European norm. Though this situation in its core, does not necessarily mean anything, when confronted with the challenges of exhibiting a culture that is not intrinsically ours, we may face many challenges.

Exhibiting any kind of culture is difficult, for the purpose is usually to bring that culture closer to the observer. Perhaps if we are part of the narrative, it is easier to explain what it means to belong to it, what are its values and convictions, but when we are not part of it, or when we are trying to go through the imaginary barrier of global borders, it becomes almost impossible. To help us understand what it means to cross these borders, we can look at Goswamy's example, depicted in *Exhibiting Cultures* (1991) by Karp and Levine. The author and curator talks about its experience exhibiting Indian culture through its own standards, how certain concepts could not be translated and the meaning of the exhibition fell, for its audience could not recognize the importance of the material chosen. In addition, Goswamy also felt that there were resources lacking to truly be able to portrait the pieces selected in a way that he felt honoured their importance. Moreover, the conclusion that Goswamy reached was that without the foundations to understand the exhibition, the focus shifted from the objects to the selection process and all the concepts that were foreign for those attending (Karp; Levine, 1991: 70-71).

There are other examples of failed attempts of representation, we could talk about the communities of Native America, that felt so misrepresented in the past that they created their own museums and ways of preservation, which though correspondent to their standard have no legitimacy in the rest of the world; or we could bring the topic closer to contemporaneity by mentioning contemporary artists of African, Asian or South American descent, as it was portrayed by Peter Marzio (Karp; Levin, 1991: 124), but not only that would be redundant, due to the fact that many issues keep on being the same, it would also shift our study away from the main topic, which is to attempt to resolve some of the issues related to the exhibition of colonial objects.

Most literature about repatriation, wrongful acquisition and ways to prevent it that exists today, was produced by authors who are related to non-western origins, which also extends to the topic of colonial objects handling. It seems clear that these studies were conducted by those who were the most interested in them, but from an objective point of view, the ones who should have been interested from the beginning should have been people who directly handle collections with colonial artifacts. However, what we could argue is that up until very recently, the average museum curator could not recognize the necessity of studying such objects through a different lens other than the European one.

Efforts to try to dismantle the pre-existent ideas of curating colonial objects started around 1970, and since then a lot has obviously changed. In 1990 the NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) took place, which meant recognize the importance of other formats and systems of belief as important as the ones pre-established by

western societies, and soon after we had the International Council of Museums making efforts to help locate missing objects, repatriating the ones needed, as well as educate about wrongful acquisition. In addition to some of these measures, there are still a lot of campaigns today that are trying to create a different approach, and certainly a different idea of what it means to exhibit colonial objects. The Museums Association, for instance, has got, now, about eight different campaigns on the topic of decolonizing museums happening, as well as other initiatives to educate about these collections such as seminars, podcasts and other publications.

It is time, however, to analyse how we came to reach this moment. When did these objects finally flooded enough of our shores to constitute collections, rather than a minimal presence at someone's shop or living room. To come to the Present is also to travel to the Past, it is to realize that most objects filling museum floors were brought by the interest of imperialistic needs, such were the ones during the New Imperialism Period, in the second part of the 19th century.

The latter half of the 19th century was predominantly stained by a crisis that seemed to have driven those in power in the direction of the remaining uncolonized parts of the world. Though the interest in owning and exploiting colonies had been born sometime around the 16th century, centuries later, rulers around Europe regained curiosity for these practices and decided to awaken some of the tendencies that seemed then to have been frozen for quite some time. Differently from before, the game was patronized by different characters, this time Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia seemed to be ahead of those who previously started the trend, centuries before (Britannica, 2023).

Soon after, Colonial Exhibitions started to emerge. They were a subcategory of Universal Exhibitions. Despite their similarities, Colonial Exhibitions had the purpose to boost the interest in maintaining colonies, which raised many questions, in terms of funding and even necessity. However, the mentioned crisis that seemed to have unlocked the new wave of expansion, would benefit from the trading and commerce that came through the new territories. The exhibitions would amaze and hypnotize the public, reminding them of how immensely exotic and unique these territories were, providing the popular support of those generations. It is relevant to mention however, that commerce seems to have not been established immediately (Britannica, 2023), and that in many ways, the New Imperialism was more about power hungry rulers, rather than problem solving strategies.

Colonial Exhibitions continued to be a practice until 1948, the last one being the Belgian Foire Coloniale. Afterwards, a shift towards a different path happened. With the end of the Second World War, Colonialism started to decay. Territories in Asia and Africa started to rebel

against their regimes (Kennedy, 2016). This change also meant that the way to exhibit these collections would have to change soon. Around this time museums and other cultural institutions were already well rounded, modernized places, some of which were already holders of colonial items and as such they needed to update their curatorial practices to keep in touch with the changing times.

The transition from Colonial Exhibitions to museum stands was not immediate, in fact, the two seem to have coexisted for several years until the practice of Universal Exhibitions fell completely. Museums were pre-existent to the 19th century, however, it was then that the institutions of this kind started to know larger fame and audience and as such started to propagate in number (Lewis, 2024). The popularity was gained through the growth of society's pride as well as education guided movements. In addition to these, the industrialization of the world, rapidly changing, seemed to feel overwhelming for many, which demanded contrast and the preservation of the "old", museums fulfilled this role for several years (Lewis, 2024).

After the Second World War, Colonial Exhibitions were extinguished, but so were many other practices connected to the preservation of our history. Around this period, museums started to develop more specialized fields, not only in terms of denomination for the objects and their history, but for the daily operations of the institutions as well. Jobs inside museums multiplied, between specialized researchers, designers to help set up the exhibitions, media operators and marketing specialists to help deliver the message of shows, as well as educators and other kinds of communication mediators (Lewis, 2024). Even though times were changing, the needs and desires that first led museum directors were still there, to preserve our culture and way of living. Though industrialized societies seem to change faster, this desire for preservation was not exclusively theirs. Museums were not delimited by borders, in fact there are records of the creation of institutions in islands that were barely touched by the Industrial Revolution, such as the Caribbeans (Lewis, 2024).

We could argue that it was this desire to preserve one's culture that created more specialized museums – Ethnological Museums – however these also already existed during the same period as Colonial Exhibitions. From a dictionary definition, we understand that Ethnology is the science that describes and studies a culture by those who belong to it (Cambridge Dictionary). What we see, however, is that Ethnological collections have very little told by the peoples who produced their contents.

Ethnological collections were motivated by society's scientific and liberal ideals, propagated by Rousseau (Braunholtz, 1953: 90). The interest to captivate and emulate different cultures' way of living, this interest motivated several expeditions such as of Captain Cook's.

As expeditions were becoming more popular and therefore more frequent, so did the collections of those who later acquired the objects brought, and soon it was born the need to exhibit and educate the public about these places and their ways. One of the bigger collections known at the time was the one of Henry Christy, which was later gifted to the British Museum at the time of his passing. The collection continued to grow until it no longer fitted the rooms destined to harbour it, upon need it was created a new hall meant for a big part of the collection as well as other artifacts that were yet to arrive (Braunholtz, 1953: 93).

While Christy's Ethnological collection existed during a very early stage of curatorship and dealership of these items, the ones in charge of their handling immediately felt the lack of support that existed at the time — lack of personnel, infrastructure, etc.

The lack of means noticed, had nothing to do with the interest deposited on the collections, for we know that they were very popular, hence the decision of the British Museum to open a hall dedicated to their objects. What we observe today is that the lack of means to deal with these collections continues, leaving us asking why.

Objects brought from ex-colonies continued to be treated as curiosities rather than art or artifacts for several years, perhaps in some places they still are. However, in 1989 something completely different happened, something that changed the way people saw the objects produced by foreign cultures, past and present.

Jean-Hubert Martin set his goal to make a truly international exhibition, cultivating the interest of objects all over the world (L'Art au Large). The exhibition was named *Magiciens de la Terre* and it curated the art of 104 artists from which half were native from non-western countries (Art Ref, 2020). According to the curator, Martin visited every continent in search for artists of any nationality, with or without artistic education and training, producing both art and what some would consider traditional *folks* crafts. The goal was to end the supremacy of western art over the world and help other cultures penetrate in the world's artistic sphere without prejudice.

Though a revolutionary attempt, Martin's exhibition was not perfect. However, in spite of his mistakes, it helped take artistic and cultural objects out of Ethnological Museums and collections to a big artistic centre — Pompidou.

Colonial Exhibitions followed an empire's mindset logic. They were thought and created to glorify the colonizers, to make people believe that having access to these places was true progression. Though developed in the same logic as Universal Exhibitions, Colonial Fairs were not very science based. There were several pavilions, replicas of architecture and artistic objects, but converted to allure rather than educate. For instance, when given the opportunity,

a Mosque was built, a replica of an architecture dedicated to the devotion of a different God, however instead of praying, girls dressed in sexualized costumes dance, allowing a sexualized, reversed reading of the function of the building (Mitchell, 1998 *at* Pinot: 46).

Though there is a great gap between what were the mentioned above exhibitions, exhibitions such as the Jean-Hubert Martin and the past of Ethnological collections, they seem to all have contributed to our notions of what is the protocol to deal with colonial objects today. In recent studies, authors such as Alexandra Sauvage (2010) describe modern curatorship of colonial related artifacts as lacking in comparison with objects of other descents or even the western authors themselves. The researcher explains that curatorship of these objects is strongly supported by visual descriptions and adaptations for the “western eye”, as well as a strong effort to portrait the peoples who have produced the represented objects as a struggling, small group of individuals. The issue with these sorts of representation is that it continues to portray the peoples of ex-colonies as outcasts, homeless people, with no regard for their cultural heritage and no space for education on different ways of living (Sauvage, 2010).

Coming back to the Present moment, we are left to wonder what the role of Ethnological Museums is today. After deciding that, perhaps, Ethnological Museums are overpopulated by objects brought by New Imperialistic waves, we should wonder if they still make sense.

The main issue we see with Ethnological Museums is that they are not fulfilling their own proposition. If we think about it, an Ethnological Museum is already corresponding to a Postcolonial perspective, for they are, in essence, an anthropological line of museology that studies the Human species using its own voice. However, if there are half a dozen Ethnological Museums around Europe, with collections that harbour several objects that are originally from outside this territory, then where are these voices? Where are the proper voices for these objects?

Keneth Hudson believes that ethnological museums do not success with their mission, in the sense that other means of media, such as films, magazines and books, do a better job education

about these nations than a vast collection of objects with name tags under them (Karp; Levine, 1991: 458). The author describes these museums as insufficient, for they are supposed to help educate the public about non-western countries but they fail to do so. Not that they provide bad quality information, but because they fail to achieve the goals other types of media, such as film and books, which illustrate and educate about these cultures in a much more comprehensive way (Karp; Levine, 1991: 457). Furthermore, the author suggests that these collections are of poor quality, for they do no better than to present the surface of society (Karp; Levine, 1991:

458) and the institutions involved do not go to the lengths necessary to showcase these societies as whole.

To add to Hudson's work of critique, it is also relevant to mention that the concept of Ethnography is a creation of the Western society, in fact some of these institutions were created before colonies were even dissolved, such as the National Ethnological Museum, in Portugal (1893), the Ethnological Museum of Berlin (1873) and the Pitt Rivers Museum of Oxford (1884).

In addition to poor quality representation, misplacing and other ways that are inappropriately used to help emulate these cultures, there is also the matter of ethics. Most of the objects that we are going to talk about were acquired during the new wave of colonialism, during the New Imperialism period, which means they may have been stolen, or taken through violent interactions. Even though we know, through studies of provenance that that was not necessarily the case of a vast collection of contents exported, we know that there might have been other techniques used to seem like the exchanges were being done respectfully, such as the trading of objects through multiples, using copies of the real object to realize an exchange of pieces.

The ways that helped contribute to these exchanges manifest themselves today in the form of requests for repatriation and the right to have returned objects lost in the past. Curating colonial objects is a difficult task if one is not in touch with the object's origins. It is necessary for the curator working with such items to study deeply their meanings as well as work with someone who has a strong relationship with the item in question. Is it really right for institutions to display cultural objects of other nations? And by doing so, how can we make sure that the appropriate measures are being taken, as well as that the information is of good quality? And what does "right" mean in this situation? Who are we to serve as judges and persecutors of our ancestors? To talk about ethics within this field is perhaps to try to create a new way of doing things, for a structure and *modus operandi* is needed (Enwezor, 2019).

Throughout this first chapter we revised literature, we identified issues and challenges. Nevertheless, a huge part of this research aims to create a functional, ethical guideway for us, as part of the cultural sphere and as responsible for the objects that are trusted to us, offering good quality education provided by people who have the necessary, minimal training to do so. Museums have, for a long time, concern themselves with the task of education. We already established that the museum is a part of society. According to the American Association of Museums, the primary premise of any museum's educational department is Excellence and Equity (2022). This means to provide information as well as approaches that combine

intellectual rigor with the inclusion of a broader spectrum of our diverse society (American Association of Museums, 2022). On the other hand, the ICOM in its last Kyoto convention, built a definition of museum rather different. In this definition the term education was put aside, for it resembled a dated definition of representing the omniscient museum that explains the wonders of the world and arts from a high ivory tower to a passive audience (Maderbacher, 2020). Instead, they seem to agree on promoting a museum (inter)action, which honestly seems like a modern view on education. In truth, it is possible that both references are harmonious, it just seems like the ICOM is using an old fashion perspective on education.

If we admit that museums do have an education purpose, we are also confessing to the fact that not all museums and institutions have the right resources to provide this service with quality and above all, resourcing to modern, contemporary ways of teaching and mediating, and not dated passive audience versions of the same task. What are the challenges that rise when we apply this concept to colonial objects?

One of the first things we must consider is that most colonial objects are being exhibited since the moment they got to western grounds. Perhaps it may have started with Colonial Exhibitions, as mentioned before, which creates a problem in terms of legacy. How can we let go of these old patterns when there is such a long history of treating these objects this way. Associated with the first question, we also must think about what types of institutions can be charged with curating such exhibitions. It is important that the museum or institution be able to be sensitive to issues such as representation, authenticity and the history of the object as part of a different culture.

Secondly, we must think that there is a need to decolonize institutions in general. In practical terms, this means to understand the true meaning of the inequities of the past and the problems it still brings to the present (Young, 2020: 34). Decolonizing or decolonisation seems to be constant terms attached to this area of study. The difference between Postcolonial thinking and the term Decolonisation is two-dimensional. On one hand Postcolonialism was born from Marx's ideals, a multidisciplinary approach towards everything colonial, against imperialistic ideas, whereas Decolonizing was born connected to the colonization of the South America and their objects, which seems easier to apply to other colonial objects even if not Native American (Young, 2020: 35). Therefore, though we talk about Postcolonial thinking, in terms of raising against imperialistic tendencies, which may seem dated, but we can easily apply it to territorial wars all over the world happening now, when talking about the objects and the way institutions are set to exhibit them, it is easier to refer to the process of decolonizing. In addition, it is

relevant to refer that they are terms that go together and oftentimes overlap, resulting in the fact that they are inseparable from each other, especially when applied to the cultural sphere.

It is very important for us to make sure that the lessons of the past do not go unnoticed. It is one of the aims of this paper to find the way between this lumpy road to a more equal curatorship and cultural ground. To do this, besides analysing pre-existent works and literature on the subject, what we are going to do is to go through several exhibitions that have attempted to showcase colonial objects through a modern perspective and see if that perspective works in practical terms.

The exhibitions to be analysed will be the following:

- The British Museum: Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific perspectives, British Museum. UK.

- O Impulso Fotográfico: (Des)arrumar o Arquivo Colonial, Museu Nacional de Ciências e História Natural. Portugal.

- North Africa and Near East, Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac. France

- North Africa, Western and Central Asia, Ethnological Museum of Berlin. Germany.

The exhibitions were chosen through the following criteria: Happened less than 10 years ago, a lot has changed in the past decade, so we want to make sure that we are being fair in terms of criticizing these issues. Secondly the exhibits must exhibit colonial objects as defined before, as well as the fact that they must have happened in European territories, the reason for this is to help us minimize the field of study, or else it would be too broad. Moreover, the exhibitions have to be available online or have extensive online presence in the format of reviews, commentary and picture documentation, the reason for this is firstly it would be impossible for an individual to observe multiple exhibitions happening all over the world and even if it was possible, that would limit our observation to the present moment forgetting other past exhibitions that could be important for this issue. Furthermore, it is important for us to make sure this paper uses resources that are of public or general domain for reasons of access and the democratization of intellectual resources.

After their selection, the exhibits will be judge and analysed through the following criteria:

- Background. Where the exhibition's objects came from and why are they being exhibited in that way.

- Inclusivity and Representation. In this section we will try to understand in what ways the institutions responsible for these exhibitions are trying to include the right people, both from a social and scientific perspective. In addition to this, we will also see in this section the efforts to represent the cultures that are being exhibited well.
- Educational Impact. Here we will analyse the effectiveness of the exhibitions in educating the public about the objects and their narratives.
- Decolonising Practices. In this section we will analyse the quality of the efforts made by the institutions to fit in today's standard of representation.
- Engagement and Interactivity. How do these exhibitions engage with their audience and incentive discussion around the topics portrayed.
- Curatorial Innovation. What methods are being used to convey all of these aspects, and how curatorial practices deeply influence their effectiveness.

All the exhibitions analysed will be found in a summarize way in the Attachments section of this paper, in the form of a table.

Chapter II

Postcolonialism, Decolonization and Ethnological Museums

To start the journey proposed in the last chapter, we must find ourselves asking what it means, today, to decolonize. Decolonizing nowadays must be seen as an act of dismantling past prepositions rather than erasing one's past, the last ultimately being easier than the first. The Cambridge Dictionary translates this concept, in my opinion, in two different processes: First, acknowledges the need for the process to stop existing to get rid of (...) and then prioritises and emphasises that this is only possible over time. Together, the definition reads *to get rid of a system or process over a long period of time*.

What does this definition mean for cultural institutions? Should we just mark all the practices that we consider wrong (and by "we", we must ask "who") and throw years of work out of the window? Maybe not. What we should, however, is to find practices that are more significant for us in the present and replace, slowly, those which no longer make sense. Perhaps as a first step, we should ask each other what matters the most at the present.

Though it may vary on who is answering the questions, what I found most in literature is that there are a few words that jump out of the pages, namely: Representation, Indigenous Peoples (victims), as well as Ethics. In contrast, there are those concepts which seem to have been skipped over, such as Hybridity, Intersectionality, Memory and Trauma and Mobilisation of native Epistemologies. Perhaps not exactly skipped over, but mentioned in conclusion statements without conclusive guidelines on how to achieve them.

While pointing out flaws is usually the easy part, it is important to see how we can apply these concepts and hopefully come up with a few more to consolidate approaches that get the job done.

As previously seen, on the last chapter, but just before too, there are already several texts and researchers that mention at least a sort of inequity on what concerns the upkeep and exhibition of colonial objects. One format that seems to appear very often and somewhat popularised is the Ethnological Museum.

We have already seen some aspects of this model, what it offers and how it can be seen as dated but let us have a closer look.

The Ethnological Museum was not born due to the growth of collections of objects brought by the new wave of colonisers, during the New Imperialism period, however, it certainly benefited from it, and the urge for these objects created demand and therefor opened a gap in

the market that some collectors were happy to fill. The idea of having these objects presented in museum halls seemed to have been brought by an attempt to “noble” Mankind, to make even the most primitive creations seem like an achievement. When contemporary objects of different peoples were brought to Europe to be exhibited, it was like collectors and enthusiasts were trying to fill a Historic gap that existed within their own History. A gap that was fulfilled by the collection of these objects mobilising them from one very specific narrative to another, out of their time (Braunholtz, 1953).

In summary, big Ethnological collections were mainly constituted by objects brought from the Southern Islands, through missions such as the ones by Captain Cook. From what we know, most of these objects were negotiated and traded or bought, even if sometimes unethically so, as it has been previously mentioned. On what concerns the origin of these objects there have been several studies of Provenance done to reach some sort of conclusion on the veracity of these dealerships.

We know that Provenance is one of the main concerns of most museums, which makes sense for it is due to this aspect of collecting and acquiring that we can assign, not only a history and geography, but it also helps us determine the conditions in which the object might have been taken, which related to the subject in study is extremely important for today’s mindset. Provenance was instituted as a crucial part of collecting in the 19th century, and though it was never meant to be used as an “excuse” to stop commercialization or exhibiting certain objects, when it comes to colonial objects, it certainly is. Museums and other cultural institutions want to make sure that the objects they exhibit are in sync with the world’s positioning, which makes complete sense, for as we have already established, museums are a part of the social sphere. To solve the problem of these objects’ timeline and narrative, which for decades represented no problem, museums have started several programs of research for provenance and even return some of these artefacts, Ethnological Museums are no exception.

Besides the issues presented so far, Ethnological Museums have helped perpetuate wrong ideas of Historical narratives in the past. In some cases, Ethnological narratives have emulated some sort of idea of realness that did not translate to reality. This was the case of the use of some objects that, by not naturally belonging to the sights exhibited, accidentally or not, helped create wrong notions of what some of these places were. For example, using mannequins or dioramas (Iseke-Barnes, n.d.). The situations presented just now, does not necessarily look like a problem, after all this is just a visual solution, curators and organisers have come up with through time. However, we must not forget that we are still talking about real people, with real emotions, real lives. When we dress a mannequin with the clothes of a native tribe somewhere,

we are stripping away its meaning, for the mannequin is empty in meaning, it takes away from the peoples, it drives us to the idea of costume. In addition to the mannequins there are also the dioramas which naturally emulate a false contact with the culture and there is also the problem of the descriptive curatorship (Iseke-Barnes, n.d.), which has been brushed through in the past. Museum objects are not little pictures in books with a small, short subtitle under it, they should not be treated as such.

The amalgamation of all the situations portrayed just now, results in an eminent crisis of these kinds of museums. The several efforts to decolonize society has created a sort of hate speech towards Ethnological collections, but is the answer to close the few places that still attempt to exhibit these objects? Are Ethnological Museums the problem? Are they in the way of achieving a decolonized society?

When we think about what it means to decolonize society, we must question where it starts. The change in any society, whatever kind of change we are talking about, always goes through a process of re-education and this should be no exception on our way towards the decolonized world.

Education stands as a sort of program we pass for our children, and adults, that help them connect and understand the world that surrounds them, it is a key-sheet. When our schools and education institutions, from which museums are a part of, are not ready with the most updated version of this program, it is obvious that the education system is due to fail. Though some things are out of the control of these institutions, such as the number of students of non-Caucasian ethnicity integrated in classes, others are not. Let us start with the factors that are out of their control: schools and educational facilities cannot control who goes to them, and they also have no control over the way the message intended is passed and interpreted by the audiences. Representation plays an important role in children's education, this being the case, if a student sees themselves as not an island, surrounded by those who are different from themselves, not only in appearance, but perhaps even in language, cultural background and preferences, but sees themselves as a part of whole, that alone can help their academic success. This success does not only translate in terms of their cultural knowledge, awareness of their culture and others, but to other parts of education too, for they feel like they are not alone and as such, they are simply happier. Most ethnically diverse students, who are now young adults, report to have been the only ones in their classes (Iseke-Barnes, n.d.). Though educational facilities are not in control of these factors, they can control who they employ, and perhaps, in many ways, representation can help disseminate other cultures, ways of living and help our students feel less alone.

Another point that must be thought about in terms of decolonizing society is the re-telling of narratives. Perhaps, as a society, we should emphasise that written History is not universally true, simply put History and Truth are different matters. Our role, as formal or informal educators is to make sure that we transmit this idea clearly – written History is an interpretation of past events and facts (Iseke-Barnes, n.d.). A way to convey these learnings is to make sure that we retell narratives from different points of view, use several sources, documents and pictures (Iseke-Barnes, n.d.), and above all, try to depict the colonial experiment as a multidisciplinary situation with many sides and many shades, not black and white, not a world of winners and losers.

The practices mentioned above are just a few of the steps, but from what we have seen in literature and my own reflections, it is hard to see how Ethnological Museums can pose a threat to decolonization. Nowadays, Ethnological collections are renewed, re-thought, the approaches used are different and the practices that were dated, such as the mentioned before, were abandoned (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004). However, there is still a big issue of heritage that stands in our way, the memory of these practices, the responsibility of these museums towards their objects and the memories of the peoples they wrongfully portrayed, has devalued them as a trustable entity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004) and perhaps our society cannot look beyond that.

Though not every Ethnological Museum is up to date with the principles that we are trying to make part of our new programme of education, some are, and as such we must see these institutions as valuable allies to trigger the change in curatorial practices that we want to see. If we are willing to evolve past the black and white vision of our past, as a society, in what concerns colonialism, are we not ready to do the same for these institutions, if they too make the effort needed to stay pertinent today.

Despite the big journey many museums have yet to make, namely Ethnological collections harbours, those are not the only institutions that need an update. In fact, the problem of post-colonialism approaches is that they cannot function solely in museum rooms, they must be linear across the whole society, and off course that is no easy task.

We define the colonial period as the time in which colonial endeavours took place, specifically the period comprehended between the 16th and 19th century (RELACult, 2020). It is true that colonies and colonisers changed a lot within these centuries, the practices, the problems, the laws, etc. However, it is also true that the effects of these colonial times, no matter how different among each other, impact our society today. As a matter of fact, we cannot clearly say when colonial endeavours stopped, we can say when efforts to demonise these practices

started, which is hardly the same thing. What we are left with today is a History and Geography of “misshapens” and misplaced, centred around a few countries and not the History we would like to see narrated, as the archives of a civilization that inhabits a globe. In addition to the general misinformed society we are presented with today, we have a process denominated internal colonialism, which also presents a challenge for our Post-colonial society, and that is defined as a process fruit of standardise colonialism but that triggers disputes of territory and culture within the then colonies, creating not a sense of ally between these places, rather a sense of adversary (RADACult, 2020). This phenomenon is likely an issue created by the demographic movements that originated physical and cultural differences in the peoples of today.

The process of decolonizing society becomes not only a process that needs to take place in European territories, but inside the territories of countries in Africa, America and Asia. This process too, should try to leave out the name calling approaches we are often introduced today. The past cannot be repaired, the present represents action: What are we doing now? And the Future, that will be our prize. Never forgetting that the present, the modern world had its casualties too. This Postcolonial world has victims, because though it aims to achieve equality, our world today is flawed too, flawed with some of the same issues that colonialism brings hunger, poverty, war.

Museums, as part of the social sphere, as an educational facility have one of the most important roles to play. For starters we already have several exhibitions named or centred around Postcolonial thinking. Even though they somewhat represent the modernization of topics, they are not always well intended. Behind these exhibitions are politically correct approaches and the so-called “white guilt”. Perhaps the aim should be less about printing “Postcolonialism” all over billboards, and more about dedicating the same resources towards colonial objects, hiring specialists, making sure that they are being given the same care as other artefacts in the same institutions.

Ethnological Museums are too museums, they too have this responsibility, and perhaps because of its past, and the weight it still holds, even more so. To say they do not have a place in our modern society is too much. We live in a society blessed with technology and infrastructures that allow space for almost everything, for better or for worse. However, let us change their mission, let us make the Ethnological Museum a place of communication cultures, by their own means from their own people. These museums should travel away from their values in portraying the identities of the world, for today what it means to belong is not the same as it was 10 years ago, and that was not that long ago.

Ultimately, Ethnological Museums are still guided by this way of seeing the world – a world of borders. The physical borders of this world are no challenge for our society. Between social media, gold visas and the capitalistic eye, borders vanish quicker than sand through holes. To belong somewhere, to be native of some place, to say “I am Portuguese” means so many different things for some many people. Though there are things that unite those who identify as native of any place, it is ultimately an individual experience, it is like belonging to a family, everybody does, but they look different doing so. If we live in an individualistic world, why are we trying to fight this urge?

To emulate a nationality in a museum is possible if we are aware of these concerns, understand that we value the individual and that we too live in a self-centred world, so if a museum tries to make of it anything but this, it is not wrong, it is simply false.

Chapter III

Analyzing exhibitions according to standard

As seen in previous chapters, it is important to acknowledge the role of exhibitions in portraying our collective History. They play a significant role in education, postcolonial initiatives in a way to decolonize our society, as well as make us do the work of thinking about what is important to us, as a society, to keep and to move on.

During the last section, we saw how Ethnological Museums and Collections seem to be unfitting for our standards, and wondered what could be done to improve their roles in a way that their History, however long, would not matter. We have also seen how these museums, but other cultural institutions to have a major role in society's education systems. How the cultural sphere impacts those it surrounds and makes them want to know and do more. Lastly, we acknowledge the power of decolonizing actions, their importance and where to start, especially when regarding artistic objects and their "owners".

So far, we have wondered inside, trying to reach the answers for questions within, trying to fit concepts into words and how they have shaped our practices so far. Now it is time to look outside, to see how concepts fit actions.

Following in this chapter we will look at some exhibitions that have tried to address what we have talked about so far. These exhibitions were chosen under the premise of their relevance within the work frame we are studying. They are all based in Europe and took place less than 5 years ago; they exhibit objects that were brought during the exploratory visits to the then colonies during the 19th century. Though colonial times started long before this period, these exhibitions will walk us through what it means to make use of objects that are part of such recent History.

First, we will start by understanding in which context the exhibitions were created, and what motivated them. We will call this sector Background. Following this context setting, we will look at the actions and the works they have gone through to allow that the exhibition is not only accessible, but that it clearly represents the cultures its objects belong to. This section will be named Inclusivity and Representation. Next on, we will study how effective their educational strategies are, how well the message passes to the audience, as well as what are the educational strategies planned by the Education Department, if there are any. This section will be called Educational Impact. Afterwards, it will be time to look at the core of our study, what measures were taken to ensure that the speech and relationship with the objects participates in Postcolonial practices, and it has a decolonizing role. This criterion will be mentioned as

Decolonizing Practices. Finally, the last to be analysed will be the curatorial practices used, for this aspect is extremely important to ensure an exhibition achieves its goals. Curatorship is the synergy among fields that allow a gathering of objects to suddenly make sense and tell a story, and as such, could never be ignored. This last section will be regarded as Curatorial Innovation.

1- Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific Perspectives

Background

The exhibition debuts on the 250th anniversary of Captain Cook's departure on his travels towards the Pacific Islands. The exhibition was created and hosted by the British Museum in 2018, and it stayed in exhibitions until August of the following year, 2019. The main goal of this work was to conjugate two different perspectives of these travels, modernizing the way we tell Captain Cook's story. However, when it does it, it does not try to portray Cook as a malicious man, or his intentions as well as others who joined him and his endeavours as such. The exhibition blends the objects brought by Captain Cook with artistic pieces by Pacific Contemporary Artists, creating a unique double ended point of view. In addition to the multidirectional approach, the exhibition was divided into sections, named after moments of the journey itself, starting with Setting Sail (Strooke, 2019).

Inclusivity and Representation

Though the exhibition starts by following Cook's perspective, offering a foundation for such with his own journal. Soon the audience finds that there is more to it. Throughout the exhibit the journal is mentioned as the official narrative, however, it completes this official narrative with other perspectives brought to us by the art of Contemporary Artists, such as Michael Tuffery (Figure 2) and the collective memory of their people, who inspire their works. The multiple testimony of both the peoples of the islands and the travellers helps us understand that the way we wrote History was lacking perspective. Perhaps due to the fact that the travellers, not knowing the way of life before, could not understand how it had changed. The fact that the curators were able to include the native perspective without straight forwards dialogues or written texts, shows us that art also speaks.

Educational Impact

The delivery of a well-rounded perspective of both people and travellers, help the audience immediately understand that this is not the story of one man who travelled to an island,

it is about hundreds of people and multiple strings that intersect in many points, just like in a ball of wool. The mixture of text, objects and artistic objects helped the audience materialize the existence of these peoples, and the use of contemporary art helped them understand that this is not an issue of the past, but something that, though happened a long time ago, still affects lives today. The exhibition does not only tell a story, but it also shows that it is reality still, evolving people with its dimension and real objects, resourcing to text to explain what is left untold. The text is usually a blend of studious work and quotes from the artists and the journal of Captain Cook. In addition to this, it is often that we see the same object being portrayed by different artists, one from the past and a contemporary one, which can help the audience better understand that some of the art, in particular illustrations, that were used at the time to educate on the peoples of the Pacific Islands, were adulterated to be consumed by western society (Strooke, 2019). If we take a moment to analyse the resemblances, they are there, but it is easier to see the differences (Figure 4). Finally, the use of the journal as the fundamental object that is the foundation of the exhibition could work as a tactic to convey the significance of the personal. The official narrative of these events is taken from the personal experience of one man.

Decolonizing Practices

As it was mentioned in chapters before, the use of multiple perspectives and points of view, as well as different realities, particularly those of the native peoples of the Pacific Islands will always be the ultimate decolonizing effort, for it voices those who have been silenced. The use of both cultural artifacts, part of a collection of things brought by Cook, and contemporary art (Figure 3) is also a great way to include these peoples in the conversation. By doing this the exhibition is saying that they too have a place in this discussion and by contributing with their own art it is saying that this is what we are doing in the present, yes it affected their reality, but how so? Illustrating what could be otherwise theorized.

Curatorial Innovation

As the exhibition was set in the British Museum, it was not surprising that everything was well organized and the objects well curated. The exhibition did not occupy one of the biggest halls of the museum, even so, an entire room of the building as well a little foyer was painted burgundy (Figure 1) and filled with the objects that brought these trips to life five years ago. The dark, warm tone colour that was chosen contributed to a sensation of warmth and intimacy, which makes perfect sense when we think of the fact that we are diving through a

man's journal, something that is intimate on its own. Besides de colour, vitrines and frames filled the walls of that room in the British Museum. The space resembles, in some respects, the memory of an antiquarian, with many different objects of several dimensions and which relationships do not always seem immediate. However, after a shallow analysis we notice that the sorting of the artifacts is not random, but a calculated assemblage to convey different meanings. Though most objects were not particularly big, there were a few which immediately caught our attention. This relationship between different dimensions, the way the space is organized all contributed to a very organic, sinuous sensation, which brings the audience closer to the objects, almost as if the visitors are the ones embarking on the journey themselves and while doing so, they too are part of the narrative.

It is relevant to mention that for this exhibition the treatment of the objects, though careful and multidimensional, as one could only expect from an institution with the dimension of the British Museum, plays a backstage role to the immense work done with the space. The atmosphere while visiting the exhibition was truly a mixture of mystery and intimacy, which could only be translated into the voices of those who lived and lived these narratives.

2- O Impacto Fotográfico: (Des)Arrumar o Arquivo Colonial

Background

The exhibition was hosted by the National Museum of Natural History and Sciences of Portugal, starting in December 2022 and will be on display until the end of June 2024. The main goal of the exhibition is to exhibit the objects brought to Portugal in the context of the travels of the 19th century with the goal of studying the former colonies, which were dissolved after 1974 (Museu Nacional de História Natural e Ciências, 2022). By doing this, the museum wanted to showcase the artifacts in a way that matched our current views on the topic, following a decolonial approach to curatorship and narrative writing.

The space is organized in two different parts, one that showcases photographs, cameras and other pictorial resources of border demarcation, and a second one discussing the fruits of an anthropological colonial mission that, voluntary or involuntarily, contributed to the reinforcement of prejudice and the normalization of racism (Museu Nacional de História Natural e Ciências, 2022).

Inclusivity and Representation

The exhibition, the museum and the curators involved in this initiative all are very upfront with the idea of this exhibition being a step, though small, towards a more fair and just society (Museu Nacional de História Natural e Ciências, 2022). It is hard to understand what they mean by simply saying it, but what we can see when looking through the exhibition is a real attempt on realness. From full scale pictures to the real-life objects that were used to measure and study the populations of the then Portuguese colonies, what we see is truth. The objects vary enormously, there are few that are cultural objects brought from the colonies, many are scientific tools, which without spelling it out for the audience, illustrates what was happening during this period, in these countries.

The walls of room 01, in the National Museum of Natural Sciences of Portugal, are filled with pictures, drawings and memories of the people who were put under a regime. We do not see happiness, nor sadness for the matter, perhaps conformity. The exhibition, in its rawness, brings out the multidimensional perspective of a colonial past, and by doing so without many filters achieves a sense of respect rather than sadness or guilt. The audience cannot help to feel connected to these peoples. The people who are presented through the frames of these curators are not a curated kind, nor are they illustrations of travellers, they are what they are, in all sorts of shapes (Figures 5-6).

Educational Impact

It is important to mention that the whole content of this exhibition had, at some point in time, the purpose of education. Not the sort of education one does in a museum, but to educate a country about its possessions. By switching the focus away from these practices, it educates against it. While the approach of the exhibition follows a very disorganized environment, the audience is amazed, perhaps even stunned, with the documents presented to it. The papers, the albums, the objects are mostly of scientific relevance, which almost automatically makes the public think of these peoples as an object of study. When followed by the large texts and memoirs presented throughout the walls of this room, the audience will start to slowly understand that that was exactly the case, which floods us with feelings of wonder, of questioning but also of disgust and anguish from our own past as a western society.

Decolonizing Practices

In its essence, what we see at the exhibition shown at National Museum of History and Natural Sciences is a process of dismantling concepts, as if they were taken apart piece by piece

until they no longer make sense. Though the exhibition also has the active participation of people from the places represented, which cannot be ignored, the perspectives we are introduced to are nothing but real, which elevates this feeling of representation to a different level. Not only the objects accompany this proportion, which is only natural since those are real objects, but the photographs and pictures alongside them also are augmented to completely submerge the visitor. By doing this, when we look at the woman standing next to us at the exhibition, we realize that this woman is not part of the crowd, instead she is part of the documents brought to us during the 19th century. This approach makes the exhibition feel human in more senses than one.

Engagement and Interactivity

As it was previously seen in other exhibitions mentioned before, *O Impulso Fotográfico*, also traces a snake like path for its visitors, which makes the people attending wonder and indulge themselves in the several objects that fill the floors, the walls and the ceilings of the room 01 of the Museum. Unlike other exhibitions seen so far, this one includes a space specifically to be intervened by the visitors. This space is an installation that blends into a gathering of Post It's which can be used by the audience, written on and post back on the wall (Figure 7). What we see happen is that slowly and visit by visit a new installation of sorts is born. The wall soon is filled with pictures, drawings and messages from all kinds of visitors to those little ones who are just excited to participate, to those who see their History retold and feel like the hole has been filled.

Curatorial Innovation

Contrary to other exhibitions seen so far, it was readily available the names of the curators who contributed to the organization of this exhibition. They were António Fernando Cascais, Carmen Rosa, Catarina Mateus, Lorena Sancho Querol, José Luís Garcia, Marinho de Pina, Margarida Medeiros, Nkaka (K4PP4) Bunga Sessa, Rita Cássia Silva, Samira Amara, Sara Fonseca da Graça a.k.a. Petra.Preta, Santos Garcia Simões, Soraya Vasconcelos, Teresa Mendes Flores (Museu Nacional de História Natural e Ciências, 2022).

What the curators brought to us was an attempt to make sense from chaos. The room where the exhibition sits does not resemble the well-organized rooms of any given museum, instead, we are presented with the idea of unpacking an old bag that was perhaps left to undo at a grandfather's house. Though it can sound like it could create more confusion than anything else, it makes perfect sense in this context. How hard it is to continue to talk about these topics

and continue to expose them, it is important to jump from the “encyclopaedic” approach and make the objects live and tell their own stories.

3- North Africa and Near East

Background

The collection North Africa and Near East is the foundation for several exhibitions in the Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac, in France. This is a public collection, and its exhibit at the mentioned museum results in a solution agreed between the involved parties for the upkeep of these objects that were mostly donated by private collectors who have retrieved them from past colonies in the past. The museum in question is a facility that specializes in the preservation of objects that originated outside of Europe, particularly those who were once in Ethnological collections or institutions (Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac). This collection harbours objects from very distinct chronologies, starting in the 10.000 B.C. up until the 20th century, and involves countless objects. Though this is not specified by the institution, what we see is the survival methods and approaches of an Ethnological Museum, which the Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac seems to have replaced.

Inclusivity and Representation

As previously said, this collection is used as a foundation for different exhibitions, currently, the museum offers three different sectors of this collection, divided by: masks, adorns and *Pavillon des Sessions*. The vast selection of objects is obviously very inclusive for it calls upon several different types of artifacts. However, it is hard to understand if this is something positive. While there are those institutions which specialized too much on a niche subject which then might become a problem on its own, this is not the case of the Quai Branly Jacques Chirac. In fact, I believe it is safe to say that the museum is too broad in its exhibitions. That does not necessarily mean that the objects are not well studied, but the fact that it brings together such variety, with no immediate connection between artifacts is problematic. The museum may not be accused of lack of representation, but perhaps, miss representation. For starters the theme of the collection is not specific enough. Yes, these are objects particular to these regions, which could be argued it is enough said, if the places were then specified individually, but on top of the broad geographic zone, we are also presented with a broad chronological space which honestly becomes an issue of bad representation. By saying this, we are essentially saying that what is happening is that the institutions is treating this vast collection with so many different

origins and typologies as one big whole, the same way we could miss-represent someone from Portugal saying that they are European. It is true, Portuguese people are from Europe, but that is just too broad.

Educational Impact

Though the quality of the information has nothing to be said about, there is a limited progress on this front for this case. Though the museum offered several free accessible online resources, they are limited in terms of what it means to educate nowadays. In addition to this factor, the institution also seems to be more concerned with a “universal” education, rather than its society’s. By this, I mean that the educational initiatives are not meant for small groups or even for the visitors but directed to the scientific community. However science based, a museum’s efforts to educate must be directed to the several aspects of society, not just for a part. Regarding the information available for those who visit, there is not a lot to be mentioned. The rooms of the museum are well lit, organized parcels, devised into sections that make the apprehension of knowledge more “digestible”, as if we are reading short chapters at the time, rather than a whole book. The information is delivered in a well, simply put manner, with short, simplified information on the objects.

Decolonizing Practices

The museum in analysis seems to have been born with the intent to convey a different meaning to what it was to harbour colonial objects. According to itself, the institution goes to no limits concerning the transparency and accuracy of the information delivered and saves no efforts to be able to portrait the objects in truthful lights. By doing so, the Quai Branly adopts a certain sense of universalism, a scientific based approach for its narrative. Contrary to the museums revisited so far, this institution rather sees itself as an engine of science and truth seeking, than a humanistic based facility.

The institution prides itself to be amongst those who are at the top of research in these fields, and by positioning itself this way it avoids certain kinds of critics, such as biased. By positioning itself as a scientific entity it is already proclaiming that what they depict is the scientific, rigorous truth (Merigot, 2024). Perhaps this is a less ideal solution, on what concerns the humanistic sciences, but it is an attempt to tell History without choosing sides, by simply putting as it can be proved. Though interesting, this lacks the compassion that we see in other approaches. Moreover, it is limited by resources available and the fact that most objects use,

propose and mission lays on the oral words, in practices that may be extinct and whose register cannot be found by following the scientific method.

Engagement and Interactivity

The selection of objects is very vast, from clothing pieces to ceramics, textile art and ex-votos. Being the collection of objects so different, it creates a feeling of being inside an organized mess. The feel of the exhibition is very close to the antiquarian experience, except that it is renovated to our modern standards. In addition, the organization of the exhibitions, being by geographic place, creates a sense of exploration, uncovering and finding, that I believe motivates the visitor to want to know more about the items that surround them. However, besides the curatorship, there is not a lot being done in this front. The entire exhibition interactivity lays on the emotions that the text and the objects awake in the visitor. This adds to the notion of the museum's scientific approach, and the way its unbiased.

Summarizing the points made throughout this chapter. It is relevant to mention that every exhibition or collection here mentioned is part of either a big museum or institution world-wide, or at least with great relevance within its nation. This to say that these institutions set the example for other smaller entities. As such, they should be seen as good examples, even if there is still a road to walk.

In addition to this note, it is also wise to add that the criteria used to categorized and comment the work of these establishments are intertwined, and that some of the topics analysed touch others, perhaps that is part of the great beauty of museum education. It is an enormous ecosystem with several different parts that work together as whole to bring the message to visitor, shifting their focus and with some luck making them reflect on what surrounds them.

Chapter IV

Findings and Guidelines

At last, it is the time to reflect upon our research and its products. We started this journey with a clear goal in mind: to understand how we can update, in a Postcolonial fashion, our museum education tools to better understand our colonial past, specifically applied to curatorship.

My research was divided into the following points, all of which helped me penetrate this topic in a more intricate and understanding way. First, we saw the need for this kind of literature emerge. We went through the pre-existent literature about Postcolonialism, saw some definitions and relevant authors who, without a doubt helped shape this road. We also established our goals and the important ways in which we were going to contribute to this field, by providing practical analyses of exhibitions and highlighting the ways they innovate on what concerns colonial education and the study of its objects. The objects that fill the stands of museums were always my first inspiration, and in the same logic that a picture is worth a thousand words, an object is worth ten times more. It is more than a representation, it is part of something bigger, it is the product of the advancements of Humankind, whether that advancement is technological or emotional or civilizational. We set our goal to analyse three exhibitions that portrayed collections of objects that were once brought from the colonies of the New Imperialism period, during the 19th century. It was very important that some of these collections were once part of some sort of Ethnological collection, as it was seen, for the Ethnological dimension is a very big part of this research and one that is very relevant for our Present and reflects immensely the want and needs of our people today as a society.

Secondly, we analysed the theory behind it all. We entered the topic of Ethnological collections and museums, what they mean for our society today and what is their place. We saw that they perhaps try to archive a part of national identity. What we see ourselves concerned with is that not only is national identity a very broad and complicated concept today, it also perhaps dated. What it means to belong is now more difficult to define than ever before and we see that there is still an attempt on keeping those concepts alive when their existence within the practical life had never looked more threatened. Though Ethnological Museums have had a very important job in the past, in the present their existence seems redundant and an attempt to keep its history alive. Museums are more than archives, and if that is what Ethnological museums are trying to continue to do, then yes, their job is done, but I believe that we are

allowed to ask for more and most important of all, I believe they can be more and their changes should be more than just the name that sits on the *façade* of the building. This second chapter was very relevant to understand the place where the exhibitions analysed sit. What is the musicological conjecture that they come from, to understand some of its options in terms of exhibition, but also to understand their goals, which I believe we did.

In the third chapter we endeavoured on the analyses of three exhibitions: one at the Portuguese National Museum of Sciences and Natural History, one at the British Museum and finally, one at the Mesée du quai Branly- Jacques Chirac. All these exhibitions had very different goals, as did their institutions. However, they all cared for objects that were brought, through different means from the ex-colonies, in addition to this similarity, the objects also share a certain didactic function, as it is agreeable with the time in question. All these exhibitions showed great prowess in terms of postcolonial approaches, however different, showing that this is too a field of multidisciplinary approach, there is no one true solution, there are several approaches possible.

What was seen in the first chapter is that there is a certain recent need to justify and apologize for the colonial past of European territories. Though it is true that to start a colony today would be wrong on many different fronts, to have colonies in the 16th century was a common practice, and this was the situation all the way until the 19th century, when our objects were brought from their original homes. To try to find guilt and victims of the past seems perhaps a tiresome and needless task. What we see, though, is that there is no lack of trying from rulers all over the world, some of whom seem to forget their own History at times. That is not the point of Postcolonial or Decolonizing approaches. There is no right side up with History, there are sides, multiple sides and multiple narratives that surround each other and intertwine, and to see those sides shown is the goal. We went through the several parts of History that contributed to our advancements in terms of Postcolonial education and techniques to decolonize our cultural institutions. We also compared the first steps of museums towards change, until some of the biggest exhibitions of these objects. Finally, we set the goals that were met on the last chapter with the analysis of current or recent exhibitions.

Secondly, and throughout the second part of this research, we mentioned the importance of Ethnological museums and studies for the development of the study of the objects brought from the then colonies. We concluded that though these museums and institutions were important to preserve and archive the objects target of this study, their history and conduct through the year have made the nowadays public worried of their intentions and their meaning today. This concern could be perhaps eliminated if the museums went through a shift in

practices, but we did not go too much into this topic, as it is not the intention of the study presently being conducted. In addition to challenges still to overcome of Ethnological museums, we also realized how other notions, such as the idea of national identity, play a relevant role in the decision-making process of curators when dealing with colonial objects.

Lastly and upon considering real examples of the practices and challenges acknowledged until then, what was concluded was very interesting. Following this paragraph there is a list of good practices or perhaps suggestive guidelines that can be found more in depth in the Attachments section (see Attachment B).

1. Contextualize Narratives
2. Incorporate Multiple Perspectives
3. Inclusivity and Representation Approaches
4. Promote Education
5. Include Decolonizing Practices
6. Curatorial Innovation
7. Community Engagement
8. Transparency regarding Object Provenance
9. Ensure Balance between Sciences and Social Sensitivities
10. Promote Interaction and Reflection

Final Notes

This thesis set out to explore ways in which we can improve the curatorship of colonial objects in museums and cultural institutions. Along the way, we found that there are other very important parts of dealing with these objects, namely their provenance, their history, their passage by Ethnological Museums, and the overall history of curating these types of artifacts.

By dividing the research into four parts, I believe we were able to reach interesting and positive conclusions. We identified the interest and niche in which this research is integrated, identifying also its need. We sought to understand the connection between the origin of the objects and their existence in the present, by going over the path that curatorship has drawn so far, mentioning all the important milestones that lead us to today. We then explored how some institutions can use this history to produce some very interesting solutions of curatorship. By analysing these exhibitions, we were able to understand how we can do even better. Lastly, we set up our own conclusions by providing a few guidelines that hopefully will help create a sense of equity and global history when introducing these objects to the public.

Upon reading the pre-existent literature, we were able to understand that terms such as Postcolonialism and Decolonization, which are brought up several times throughout the body of this thesis, have sometimes a negative effect on people. By mixing politics with history and culture and history of exhibiting, we saw that people can feel all types of ways when we try to use these terms to make an argument. Understandably, articles from both pro and against arguments are being written all the time, however it is important for this research that we see these words not as excuses or reasons to do anything, but simply as adjectives given to approaches to achieve equity in the cultural sphere regarding colonial objects.

Through our study, we found that one of the main harbours of colonial objects have been Ethnological Museums, institutions that, in some way, have tried to, historically, portray different kinds of notions of national identity and human history. We saw that today's argument against Ethnological institutions and collections is quite strong. People seem to see it as a reminder of different times, and perhaps, feel threatened by them. However, just as times changes so can these institutions. There is no need to erase centres of important research, when, when it comes to colonial objects, these are but the few that focus on studying these types of objects. However, we appeal for transparency and honesty. It is important that society, and particularly the communities that feel they may have been affected by the unwritten history,

feel that they are not being lied to, this being the case it is very important that museums do not just change their names, or their buildings, but change their approaches and their work frames.

We have also concluded that the efforts being made to decolonize cultural institutions may come in different forms, and it is precious that we pay attention to this, there is true originality in curatorial practices, and it must be recognized as a tool to help dismantling old believes of showcasing artifacts. We found this out by conducting a thorough analysis in three exhibitions of good quality museums, with Ethnological pasts. By doing so we can recognize how Ethnology has an important role to play, if only played correctly.

These findings have important implications for the future of museum curation and education. By demonstrating the potential for exhibitions to either perpetuate or dismantle colonial narratives, this research underscores the need for continued efforts in decolonizing museum practices. This is crucial not only for ethical representation but also for fostering a more informed and inclusive public.

As any research, this too has its limitations. Unfortunately, it was very hard to analyse more data. Though there were still a few more resources available for this effect, it was also a matter of time and space, which did not allow for more to be done. In addition to this challenge, it would be interesting to better understand the impact of these exhibitions in the lives of those who have visited them, for it would help us better understand the true impact of these efforts. However, such study will have to be let for the future, no matter how important I recognize it is.

Summarizing, I hope this thesis contributes to the ongoing discourse on decolonizing museum practices by highlighting both the progress made and the challenges that remain. By critically assessing current curatorial approaches, I believe this work will encourage more nuanced and inclusive strategies in the representation of colonial narratives, fostering a more equitable cultural landscape.

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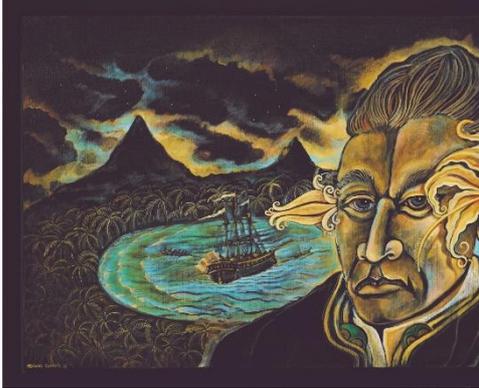
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Attachments

A - Table of Objects Mentioned in Exhibitions Analysed

 <p>The image shows the entrance to an exhibition gallery. On the left, a tall white wall features the text 'Reimagining Captain Cook Pacific perspectives' and a list of names. The gallery floor is polished wood, and several display cases and informational panels are visible in the background.</p>	<p>Image 1</p> <p><i>Entrance to the 'Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific perspectives' exhibition in Room 91 at the British Museum, London, image courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum</i></p> <p>Fount: Third Text 28/05/24 13h10 http://www.thirdtext.org/stooke-cook-britishmuseum</p>
 <p>The painting depicts a man's face in the foreground, looking towards the viewer. In the background, a tropical landscape with a bay, a small boat, and a volcano under a dramatic, cloudy sky is visible.</p>	<p>Image 2</p> <p>Michel Tuffery, <i>Cookie in the Cook Islands</i>, 2008, acrylic on canvas. 50.5 x 76 cm</p> <p>Fount: Third Text through British Museum 28/05/24 13h14 https://i.ibb.co/zfjg9ZJ/Tuffery-Michel.jpg</p>

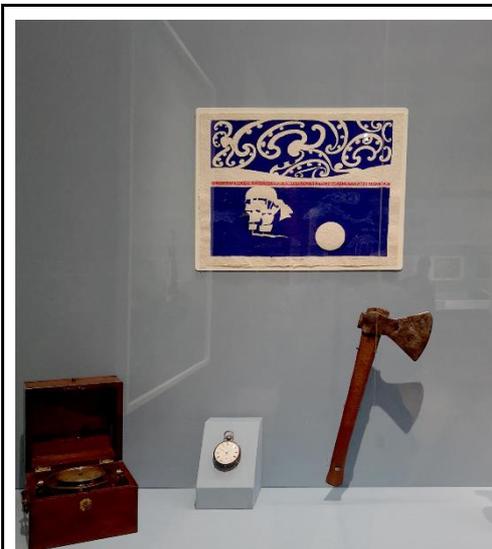


Image 3

Display case in the 'Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific perspectives' exhibition featuring Steve Gibbs's Name Changer, 2016

Fount: Third Text

28/05/24 13h19

<https://i.ibb.co/qxHQC6p/4-L-cropped.jpg>



Image 4

Display case in 'Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific perspectives', with left: reproduction of a detail of Tupaia, Otaheite: Dancing girl, and Chief mourner, 1769; centre: engraving after John Webber, A Young Woman of Otaheite Dancing, 1784; right: Isaac Taylor, after Giovanni Battista Cipriani, New wonder rose, when ranged around for Thee / Attendant Virgins danc'd the Timrodee, about 1774

Fount: Andrew Strooke

28/05/24 13h29

<https://i.ibb.co/f2HcNsb/5L.jpg>

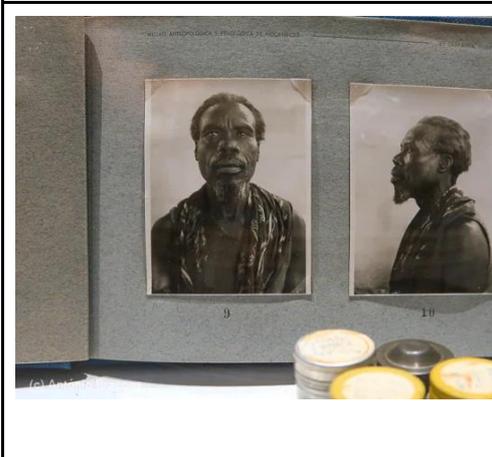


Image 5

*9, 10
Aspetos das Exposição,*

Fount: António Bracons

28/05/24 17h23

https://fasciniodafotografia.files.wordpress.com/2023/12/exp-muhnac-desconstruir_arquivo_colonial-2309-fot_a_bracons-ff-28.jpg?w=640



Image 6

Vanula de Jesus
Aspetos das Exposições

Fount: António Bracons

28/05/24 17h25

https://fasciniodafotografia.files.wordpress.com/2023/12/exp-muhnac-desconstruir_arquivo_colonial-2309-fot_a_bracons-ff-3.jpg?w=800



Image 7

Post It's wall

Fount: Museu Nacional de História Natural e Ciências

03/06/24 16h15

https://www.museus.ulisboa.pt/sites/default/files/styles/max_2600x900/public/images/gallery_image/2023-05/786-fb93a5dd97a34a8a84de212e59a4919b.JPG?itok=sYq_ZoEB

B - Table of Sugestive Guidelines

Contextualize Narratives	It is important to mention where does the main narrative line is coming from. Making sure that the public understands that history is made up by many different parts.	E.g. <i>'Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific perspectives'</i> This exhibition uses a journal as the object who conducts the whole narrative. By making this clear at the beginning, the public understands that an object as personal as this will obviously be torn by its author's perspective.
Incorporate Multiple Perspectives	As several parts of a whole, different perspectives should be included to consider the complexity of the events that are being narrated.	E.g. <i>'Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific perspectives'</i> When the curators decided to include aspects of contemporaneity, namely the works of contemporary artists, they reached out for other surfaces of the same event. Making this exhibition not only diversified in human perspective but also in chronological perspectives. E.g. <i>O Impulso Fotográfico</i> Here the multiple perspectives are given through the integration of real-life size pictures that immediately transports the viewer to a much bigger sense of reality. The people

		<p>portraited and studies by the exhibited objects are not made-up, they are real, they existed.</p>
<p>Inclusivity and Representation Approaches</p>	<p>Upon visiting these types of exhibitions, it is important that the people who relate to the cultures exhibited feel well represented.</p>	<p>E.g. - <i>North Africa and Near East</i></p> <p>In this exhibition we found an example of what perhaps not to do. Though the museum offers a vast detailed study of the objects, by exhibiting it all within the same exhibition without a clear distinction between them, it seems like the curators are trying to fit too much within the same box.</p>
<p>Promote Education</p>	<p>It is very important, in the case of this study, that the emphasis on education is upheld. As part of the social sphere the cultural institution is also responsible to help educate its visitors. As such, the mission to educate on the subject should be seen as one of the most important parts of the exhibit.</p>	<p>E.g. <i>O Impulso Fotográfico</i></p> <p>The replica of the settings in which previous studies were conducted, the exhibition offers a very interesting, creative approach to the matter. While it could have been limited to the informative texts presented throughout the whole exhibition, the adaptation of the content to bring out feelings in its public is a great way of making people think. To educate is not to freely hand in knowledge is</p>

		to inspire people to want to learn and this exhibit does this very effectively.
Include Practices	Decolonizing	<p>Obviously, it is important that the exhibitions follow an up-to-date mindset and that means to adopt a gather of practices that help make this real. There are different ways of accomplishing this.</p> <p>E.g. <i>'Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific perspectives'</i></p> <p>In this exhibition the distancing from colonialism is achieved by conveying a deep sense of personal narrative to history. Here, the museum clarifies that though a contributor to colonies, the mission seen as the "official" narrative was but a part of the whole. While presenting the personal experience narrated in the journal, it also showcases the art of those who in the present feel that this past event affected their lives and their communities.</p> <p>E.g. - <i>North Africa and Near East</i></p> <p>In this exhibit, the approach is completely different, though not less valid. The museum concerns itself in creating a strong sense of scientific mission, driving away from the personal experience. As such, the institution focusses on the</p>

		scientific and objective study of the objects, not allowing for other possible, less objective interpretations.
Curatorial Innovation	Because we are still studying exhibitions, it is very important that they still maintain the appeal of innovative ways of exhibiting. This is a relevant factor for good curatorship also helps convey meanings and above all, helps connect with audiences better.	E.g. <i>O Impulso Fotográfico</i> This exhibit is one of the major pillars of this study, it is a very effective example of how innovative and differentiated approaches can help modernize older concepts that may have acquired a bad reputation through the years. The unorganized approach that the exhibit follows, as if someone was taking objects what of a very large box, incites, excites and promote natural curiosity. It also helps the public understand the perspective and narrative of this exhibition, for this is the exhibition of an archive, by doing so it helps create the mystic of an old, maybe lost archive that holds secrets of the past inside.
Community Engagement	It is relevant that when creating these exhibitions, the curators concern themselves in including	E.g. <i>North Africa and Near East</i> In this collection the objects are studied by specialists of

	<p>people that relate to the cultures being exhibited. This may mean different things, for example I could mean add artists from the ex-colonial sights, as seen in the analysis, but it can also mean to include specialists of this geographies in the scientific study of the objects.</p>	<p>the time periods and geographies that the objects belong to, making sure that their study is more than a physical description. E.g. <i>'Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific perspectives'</i> Here the involvement comes from completing the exhibition with artist form the ex-colonies, making sure that the present reality is well represented.</p>
<p>Transparency regarding Object Provenance</p>	<p>Though not too much touched on, provenance is still an important part of the cultural life of these objects. It is important that as a cultural institution of any kind, one of the concerns when handling these types of artifacts, their origin is well studied and made sure that if not approved by present standard that is well explained. It is obvious that not all objects have clear trajectories, but then it is important that institutions keep being open about it.</p>	<p>All exhibits analysed had meticulous studies of provenance done, and though in some cases it was not relevant for the exhibition. Every museum had the information readily available to be downloaded from their websites.</p>

<p>Ensure Balance between Sciences and Social Sensitivities</p>	<p>Ultimately this is one of the hardest parts of exhibiting cultures. On one hand we want to keep it clean, and science based, but on the other hand we want to connect to these objects, as humans we crave that intimacy with the inanimate.</p>	<p>E.g. <i>'Reimagining Captain Cook: Pacific perspectives'</i> In this exhibition we saw the concern to moderate between the artifacts that contributed to the historical part of the narrative, but with the addition of testimonies of the present. Not only is this an example of good representation, it is also an example of balancing the recoveries of the past, studying them thoroughly, but also having into consideration the impact that these past event may have had in present civilizations.</p>
<p>Promote Interaction and Reflection</p>	<p>Audiences are not stupid, perhaps not all publics are well informed about the subject being brought up, but people need to be fed crumbs to achieve reflection. I believe that it is a big part of education to leave the individual craving more. Exhibitions can have this power, to help the audience navigate perhaps without giving them that many conclusions, for the</p>	<p>E.g. <i>Impulso Fotográfico</i> The delimitation of spaces for people to walk in, contributing to a sense of path that one must follow, helps create the idea that there are here things to unfold, to find. Not only is this an example of effective curatorship, but it also conjugates with the idea of education and reflection. The exhibition allowed for the participation of its public and encourage the audience</p>

	conclusion part is one that should be achieved by the observer and not the curator.	to participate in the conversation with the <i>post-it</i> walls, for example.
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