

# (De)colonisation of European museums: Five Minimum Standards for Re-energising Postcolonial Practices

Matilde Dani

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of Master of Arts in Transnational Governance of the European University Institute.

Florence, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023

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## Abstract

A museum should be a place where cultures, dialogue and social relations are enhanced. Given the renewed interest of the public scene on the topic, the author poses the question: Is there a need and a possibility to decolonise ethnographic museums? Should we have common and shared practices? In an attempt to eliminate colonial vestiges in museums, an analysis of literature and practices leads the author to analyse five European ethnographic museums in order to understand their merits and shortcomings. The subjectivity of these institutions and the diversity with which colonisation can be presented makes the proposal of a single generalised solution not preferable. An objective analysis, based on actions and variables drives the author to determine, however, that in order to revitalise museum practices there is a need to create a sharable framework. The design of minimum standards can help museums set clear and measurable goals to achieve a higher level of decolonisation. At the same time giving a role to the visitor as judge of the work of these institutions. Thus, trying to restore both internal and external impetus to the decolonial intent within museums that has been faltering over the years.

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*“The opposition between the realm of the sacred and the presumably secular, national space for the museum, a prevailing distinction in art history’s understanding of museum formation in Europe, is a conceptual structure that no longer meets the theoretical challenges of museums today”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh, ‘Reincarnations of the Museum: The Museum in an Age of Religious Revivalism’, in *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying* (Routledge, 2015).

## 1. Introduction:

### The vestiges of Western imperialism today

The vestiges of Western imperialist ambitions of the 19th century are still visible. They are rooted in the context in which we exist, they are within the institutions in which we live. It is surprising to see how the colonial expansions did not just take the form of conquests, slavery and massacres<sup>2</sup>, but created a social fabric based on those values. While today this kind of violence may seem like a distant and separate reality, almost impossible to think about, contemporary theorists actually argue that colonisation was perpetrated in other ways<sup>3</sup>. Although global governance ended colonisation after the Second World War, another form of subjugation was created: domination without hegemony<sup>4</sup>. The way cultures perceive each other has been profoundly shaped by colonising intent. Western, and particularly European, society has imposed values, beliefs and standards on others, and these legacies are still present today. Of the various aspects that affect colonisation, that of cultural domination<sup>5</sup> is the one that is most detectable today and has become relevant again in public debate thanks to movements such as the Black Lives Matter<sup>6</sup> and Rhodes Must Fall<sup>7</sup>.

Criticism is becoming increasingly disruptive by looking closely at all institutions created by the Westphalian system. In particular, however, the focus is on those institutions that were created in a functional way to achieve soft power and that still remain attached to their colonial roots: museums<sup>8</sup>. A museum in fact "*is a highly political institution, often involved or implicated in international relations, and an expert on power*"<sup>9</sup>. The politicisation of these institutions reached its peak with the creation of ethnographic museums, designed to display artefacts from the colonies, highlighting

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<sup>2</sup> Anna Brus, Martin Zillinger, and Michi Knecht, 'Introduction: Transforming the Post/Colonial Museum', *Zeitschrift Für Kulturwissenschaften* 15 (27 July 2022): 11–28, <https://doi.org/10.14361/zfk-2021-150203>.

<sup>3</sup> Brandie Macdonald, 'Pausing, Reflection, and Action: Decolonizing Museum Practices', *Journal of Museum Education* 47, no. 1 (2 January 2022): 8–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2021.1986668>.

<sup>4</sup> Ranajit Guha, 'A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986-1995', Book, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/a-subaltern-studies-reader-1986-1995>.

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Whose Heritage? Un-Settling "The Heritage"', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation by Stuart Hall', *Reading the Periphery.Org* (blog), 13 October 2016, <https://readingtheperiphery.org/hall2/>; Dai-Rong Wu, 'Cultural Hegemony in the Museum World', 2006, 8.

<sup>6</sup> For further information: <https://blacklivesmatter.com>

<sup>7</sup> For further information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodes\\_Must\\_Fall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodes_Must_Fall)

<sup>8</sup> Juilee Decker, 'Cities, Museums and Soft Power', *Consumption Markets & Culture* 21 (23 September 2016): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2016.1236254>; Nye, 'Soft Power the Means to Success in World Politics', 2004, [https://www.academia.edu/28699788/Soft\\_Power\\_the\\_Means\\_to\\_Success\\_in\\_World\\_Politics\\_Joseph\\_S\\_Nye\\_Jr](https://www.academia.edu/28699788/Soft_Power_the_Means_to_Success_in_World_Politics_Joseph_S_Nye_Jr).

<sup>9</sup> Christine Sylvester, 'Art/Museums: International Relations Where We Least Expect It', Routledge & CRC Press, 2008, <https://www.routledge.com/ArtMuseums-International-Relations-Where-We-Least-Expect-it/Sylvester/p/book/9781594514654>.

differences and inferiorities of other subjugated populations<sup>10</sup>. Museums are thus read as heirs to cultural colonialism, continuing to aspire to the achievement of their mission of "*selling nations*"<sup>11</sup>.

Movements in favour of decolonisation have existed as long as colonisation itself has existed, only they used to be found under other names<sup>12</sup>. Today, however, these have regained their vigour because of the realisation of how entrenched and accepted Western values are throughout the world and how this ends up being a form of perpetuation of colonial practices. In particular, the political use of museum spaces started to become a problem as they are institutions structured on the illusion of being able to catalogue the world, enclosing it in sections, in captions that aim to subjugate non-Western cultures as 'inferior'. Following the decolonial wave, since the end of the 20th century new critical discourses have begun to identify museums as formations of hegemonic knowledge<sup>13</sup>. These problematic issues have forced and given these institutions the opportunity to reinvent themselves<sup>14</sup>. Some European ethnographic museums, such as the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden or the Weltmuseum in Vienna, have acknowledged their responsibility in adopting a decolonial approach, attempting to put an end to or limit harmful practices<sup>15</sup>. These attempts have been varied, museums have been opened, globalised, mobilised, unlearned, repaired and reset<sup>16</sup>. In the 1990s<sup>17</sup>, this process began and it was expected that a transformation would take place that would end the era in which the museum was perceived as an ivory tower for the learned<sup>18</sup>. Trying then to transform them into institutions capable of involving different social actors<sup>19</sup>. With the push from the US and post-colonial movements, the work of museums began to change in response to the demand for greater social responsibility towards pressing contemporary issues<sup>20</sup>. Today's society has demonstrated, through

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<sup>10</sup> Barranco, Frances L., 'Decolonized/Ing Natural History and Ethnographic Museums: An Oxymoron - ProQuest' (University of Washington, 2022), <https://www.proquest.com/openview/889371e1e4a74ac74cf6333f98a0335e/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>; Annette B. Fromm, 'Ethnographic Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage Return to Our Roots', *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* 5, no. 2 (1 December 2016): 89–94, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2016.10.001>; Martyn Hammersley, 'Ethnography: Problems and Prospects', *Ethnography and Education* 1 (1 March 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457820500512697>.

<sup>11</sup> Wu, 'Cultural Hegemony in the Museum World'; Brian Wallis, 'Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy', in *Museum Culture* (Routledge, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Interviewee N° 6, Interviewee N° 6 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 23 March 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Brus, Zillinger, and Knecht, 'Introduction'.

<sup>14</sup> Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices, Online, 10 March 2023; Nicholas Thomas, 'The Museum Inside-out: Twenty Observations', in *Matters of Belonging, Ethnographic Museums in a Changing Europe* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Sidestone Press, 2019), 25–35.

<sup>15</sup> Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 10 November 2022; Interviewee N° 7, Interviewee N° 7 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 19 January 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Brus, Zillinger, and Knecht, 'Introduction'; Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr, 'The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics', 2018, 252.

<sup>17</sup> Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>18</sup> Ilaria Porciani, 'Musei, Traumi, Memorie del Novecento. Introduzione', *Storicamente* 13 (27 June 2017), <https://doi.org/10.12977/stor663>.

<sup>19</sup> Jordi Carta, "'Tra Nation-Building e Memorie Divise: Musei Storici in Europa e Le Specificità Del Caso Italiano'" (Università di Padova, 2021), <https://thesis.unipd.it/handle/20.500.12608/36083>.

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Carter and Jennifer Orange, 'Contentious Terrain: Defining a Human Rights Museology', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27, no. 2 (1 May 2012): 111–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2012.674318>.



forms of protest and demands, that the issue of cultural heritage as a privileged instrument of Western cultural hegemony needs to be addressed<sup>21</sup>. This is because critical traditions not only anti-colonial, but anti-racist and feminist have developed from it and against it, and thus encompass the whole fabric of society<sup>22</sup>.

Looking therefore at the needs demanded by today's society, the author chose to focus on the question: "*Is there a need and a possibility to decolonise ethnographic museums? Should we have common and shared practices?*". The search for an answer to this question begins with the desire to show how museums are Occidental institutions, born in a context of Western supremacy over indigenous and non-European populations. The aim is then to detect from the literature how imperial ideology and colonial practices have been naturalised in today's museums, thus continuing to preserve and (re)construct cultural, social, political, economic and aesthetic hierarchies. The focus will be on ethnographic museums in particular, and how their conception is still closely linked to colonial legacies. In order to carry out a comparative analysis, the author has chosen to look in particular at European ethnographic museums. These, in fact, are the biggest receptacles of criticism of post-colonial movements, and this is why the author felt there was a need to examine their work. If in fact advances in the process of decolonisation of museum institutions have been seen, they have been slow and difficult. Above all this development has been poorly evaluated<sup>23</sup>.

After demonstrating the connection between colonisation and museums, drawing on the concepts introduced by the "new museology", the author develops an analysis of five major European ethnographic institutes: Ilaria Alpi Italo-African Museum (Rome); Weltmuseum (Wien); Royal Museum of Central Africa (Tervuren); Linden Museum (Stuttgart); Quai Branly (Paris). Through the analysis of these five museums, also compared with others in the region (briefly analysed in Annex 1), the author will attempt to highlight which practices are most widely used and what criticisms have been made of them. This analysis is carried out through the use of five variables in order to meet the need for a more methodical and objective study of practices. The parameters are based on the book of Ariese and Wróblewska<sup>24</sup>: visibility, inclusivity, decentering, education and transparency. Under

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<sup>21</sup> Maria Pia Guermandi, *Decolonizzare il patrimonio. L'Europa, l'Italia e un passato che non passa*, Antipatrimonio (Castelvecchi, 2021), <https://www.ibs.it/decolonizzare-patrimonio-europa-italia-passato-libro-maria-pia-guermandi/e/9788832904826#cc-anchor-dettagli>; Grégoire Mallard, Dominic Eggel, and Marc Galvin, 'Global Challenges - Decolonisation: A Past That Keeps Questioning Us', *Global Challenges*, October 2021, <https://globalchallenges.ch/issue/10/decolonisation-the-many-facets-of-an-ongoing-struggle/>.

<sup>22</sup> Daniela Festa, 'L' impronta coloniale dello spazio pubblico. Conversazione con Françoise Vergès', *Rivista Geografica Italiana - Open Access*, no. 3 (22 September 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3280/rgioa3-2022oa14593>.

<sup>23</sup> Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 10, Interviewee N° 10 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 28 March 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Csilla Ariese and Magdalena Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide with Global Examples* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789463726962>.

each of them, actions with decolonial purposes will then serve as objective parameters to assess to what extent European ethnographic museums can be said to be decolonised, so as to understand what might be needed to achieve improvements in the field. In order to study of the work of these institutions, the author will make use of the knowledge of the staff of some European ethnographic museums through anonymised interviews, more information on which can be found in Annexes II, III and IV. The author conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with senior staff of European ethnographic museums and experts in museology and decolonisation. These provided a clear and systematic understanding of the merits and shortcomings of the practices employed, as well as an inside view of these institutions. Investigative and informal interviews were also associated with these, which helped the author to shape the research more precisely, further information on which can be found in Annex II.

Conducting the interviews revealed in a disruptive way how decolonisation requires a subjective approach given its complexity. Problems of, for example, government, space and funding make it difficult to have the same, all-encompassing approach in every institute. The author, referring to the literature and how the most important developments in the field have unfolded, believes there is a need to create a common frame. Given the subjectivity of museums, it has emerged that there may be actions that are cost-effective that could be implemented in order to be able to say that a museum has started its decolonisation process. The author created so-called 'five minimum standards', which emerged from dialogues with museum staff members. In her opinion, these five practices are intended to serve as a basic and minimal guide. Potentially helping museums to set clear and measurable goals for decolonisation. At the same time being a guide for visitors in being judges of the museums' performance. By creating minimum standards, applicable in almost all museum contexts, museums themselves can be held accountable for their actions and progress in decolonisation. The author claims that the creation of a solid base could also promote collaborative projects between museums, providing a shared frame of reference.

As complex and varied as colonisation can be within museums, and in particular in European ethnographic museums, the author believes that there is space and thus possibilities for a de-colonial approach. The five variables serve as a method for revitalising the methods used to date. The creation of a shared framework, such as minimum standards, in the author's opinion lead all museums to want to work together to advance and innovate existing practices.

## 2. Chapter 2:

### The Relevance of (De)Colonialisation to Ethnographic Museums

#### 2.1. Insight terminology

In order to comprehend whether ethnographic museums need to be decolonised, an understanding of what these two terms imply, and mean is necessary.

Colonial expansions throughout history have taken the form of conquests, slavery and massacres. Colonialism, however, is a practice of domination that involves the subjugation of one people to another, including culturally<sup>25</sup>. When discussing it in this study, reference is made to the European imperialist project that emerged when Europe's process of settlement, violent dispossession and political domination was initiated in the rest of the world, including the Americas, Australia and parts of Africa and Asia<sup>26</sup>. Although today this seems a distant and outdated reality, almost impossible to think about, contemporary literary theorists argue that there are other ways to perpetuate colonisation<sup>27</sup>. The type of colonisation of interest to this study is the cultural one that aims to annihilate, empty, and almost nullify a different heritage. This process is set in motion to further the rise of a dominant culture, defined through its imperialist cultural expansion<sup>28</sup>. Colonise in this sense can thus be associated with the term monopolise. According to Nozza<sup>29</sup>, the monopolisation of culture by the West is a phenomenon that has deep historical roots, with very complex social and cultural trajectories. It is both a phenomenon characterised by the centralisation of external stimuli towards a single focal point, hence centripetal; and a phenomenon based on diffusion towards contexts different from one's own, hence centrifugal<sup>30</sup>. Olivier Marboeuf in "Décolonisons les arts!" points out that when talking about colonisation, what is meant is reification and capitalisation. Associating different cultures with the 'other' leads to emptying its very work by enclosing it in a label that is anything but representative<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Margaret Kohn and Kavita Reddy, 'Colonialism', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2017 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/colonialism/>; Brus, Zillinger, and Knecht, 'Introduction'.

<sup>26</sup> Kohn and Reddy, 'Colonialism'.

<sup>27</sup> Kohn and Reddy.

<sup>28</sup> Graziella Loyrette, 'Why Is Colonisation Related to Art?', *Gallery Extra* (blog), 11 October 2018, <http://www.galleryextra.com/colonisation-art/>.

<sup>29</sup> Federico Nozza, 'L'arte tra monopolio museale e decolonizzazione culturale', *Lo Sbuffo*, 11 February 2021, <https://losbuffo.com/2021/02/11/arte-tra-monopolio-museale-e-decolonizzazione-culturale/>.

<sup>30</sup> Nozza.

<sup>31</sup> Marie-Laure Allain Bonilla, 'Decolonial Processes in Art: Institutions and Knowledge', trans. Phoebe Clarke, *Critique d'art. Actualité Internationale de La Littérature Critique Sur l'art Contemporain*, no. 52 (27 May 2019): 59–69, <https://doi.org/10.4000/critiquedart.46189>.

One of the most important studies on this subject is Edward Said's *Orientalism*: a term describing a structured set of concepts, assumptions and discursive practices used to produce, interpret and evaluate the knowledge of non-European peoples. Said represents a type of break with previous studies, drawing attention not to economic-political logics but to the relationship between knowledge and power. According to the theory, therefore, colonial and imperialist practices aimed at “*knowing the Orient*” were part of the very project of domination of those areas<sup>32</sup>. Orientalism can be seen as an attempt to extend the geographical and historical terrain of post-structuralist critique to Western epistemology<sup>33</sup>. In this way, it is possible to understand Said's three interpretations of Orientalism: a specific field of academic studies on the Middle East and Asia, which helps to define Europe and what lies outside of it; a practice of characterising Europe by drawing a contrasting image or idea, based on binary oppositions (e.g. rational/irrational, order/chaos); a way of exercising authority by organising and classifying knowledge of the East. Studies evolved and expanded with the work of Spivak and her critique of transparent subaltern discourse. The author starts by looking at those studies where an attempt was made to create a dialogue with the subaltern, removing the intermediary, with the aim of bringing out an authentic truth based on experience. The problem, however, is that experience itself is constituted through representation, and by denying this the detection of the problem itself become even more problematic and does not erase it. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak pivots on the fact that representation, mentioned by Said, has not disappeared<sup>34</sup>. This is possible because power is still present, especially in the forms of language and dialogue<sup>35</sup>. According to Chakrabarty's analysis<sup>36</sup>, this is made evident by the fact that European concepts are treated as universal, while the third world seems to be described as lacking, backward.

In the interest of this analysis, once it is understood what colonisation means, there is a need to understand what decolonisation is. This is described as a process of disrupting the power structures established by European colonialism, centred on property and profit<sup>37</sup>. In the context of this research although decolonising art does not mean destroying colonial works, it does not mean burning them and it does not mean making them disappear. On the contrary: destroying, extirpating, demolishing,

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<sup>32</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1979).

<sup>33</sup> Kohn and Reddy, 'Colonialism'.

<sup>34</sup> Rosalind Morris, ed., *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Oliver Hidalgo, 'Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Can the Subaltern Speak?', in: Cary Nelson/Lawrence Grossberg (Hg.): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, University of Illinois Press: Urbana 1988, S. 271–313 (dt. *Can the Subaltern Speak? Postkolonialität und subalterne Artikulation*, Turia + Kant: Wien/Berlin 2008, 159 S.), in *Klassiker der Sozialwissenschaften: 100 Schlüsselwerke im Portrait*, ed. Samuel Salzborn (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2016), 361–65, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-13213-2\\_84](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-13213-2_84).

<sup>36</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (New Edition)* (Princeton University Press, 2000), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rsx9>.

<sup>37</sup> Rachel Minott, 'Decolonial Artmaking in the 2020s | Afterall Art School', 2020, <https://www.afterallartschool.org/essays/decolonial-artmaking-in-the-2020s/>.

and burning cultural property was - historically speaking - exactly what the colonisers did<sup>38</sup>. Ted Loos<sup>39</sup> speaks of decolonisation as a movement that "*calls institutions to account for their role in the history of colonialism*". Underlying this thinking is the idea that it is necessary to consider artworks made by indigenous peoples as art, not as ethnographic material that provides a deeper look into a problematically exoticized "other". It is therefore evident how this is inextricably linked to identity politics: who can inscribe whom? Decolonisation wants to break the labelling process that has been practised for centuries by the West. In terms of heritage, the decolonisation of art consists of taking care of colonial works, studying them, understanding them in order to learn from them, to learn what colonialism really was. It is therefore crucial to study colonial art and practices in depth and understand how they worked<sup>40</sup>.

The phenomenon of (de)colonisation emerges within museums, institutions that until recently were associated with the concept of museum monopoly. Interpreted and seen as a declination of the art monopoly. Museum monopoly does not concern so much artistic production, but it is about its appropriation and preservation within museums. At the end of the 18th, beginning of the 19th century, experts begin to talk of musealisation: using spaces to show the public artefacts that could be manifestations of one's power<sup>41</sup>. Ethnographic museums are thus inscribed in the history of the formation of states, being characterised differently depending on the region they belong to<sup>42</sup>. If, in fact, in continents such as Africa and Oceania they were seen as a means of contributing to the creation of national unity between different cultural and ethnic groups, in Western countries, the ethnographic museum was a showcase in which to display the culture of the 'other'. According to Stanton<sup>43</sup>, ethnographic museums analyse different types of knowledge, which can be shared or segregated and which can follow different paths. Within them, collections become means of communicating information, and they should have primacy. This was learnt during the development of post-colonial thinking, which made possible to understand the obvious connection of exhibition techniques and the colonial approach. These studies began to gain more space in the public debate, and were compounded by the disruptiveness of this practice, already in the late 20th and early 21st

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<sup>38</sup> Max Jorge Hinder Cruz, '¿Descolonizar El Arte?', *La Razón | Noticias de Bolivia y El Mundo* (blog), 2019, <https://www.la-razon.com/tendencias/2019/10/16/descolonizar-el-arte/>.

<sup>39</sup> Ted Loos, 'A Canadian Museum Promotes Indigenous Art. But Don't Call It "Indian."', *The New York Times*, 13 July 2018, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/13/arts/design/art-gallery-of-ontario-indigenous-art.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Hinder Cruz, '¿Descolonizar El Arte?'

<sup>41</sup> Nozza, 'L'arte tra monopolio museale e decolonizzazione culturale'; Britannica, 'Museum - History Museums | Britannica', accessed 9 December 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/museum-cultural-institution/History-museums>.

<sup>42</sup> Fromm, 'Ethnographic Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage Return to Our Roots'; Britannica, 'Museum - History Museums | Britannica'.

<sup>43</sup> John E Stanton, 'Understanding Museums - Ethnographic Museums and Collections' (National Museum of Australia, 8 June 2011), [https://www.nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JStanton\\_2011.html](https://www.nma.gov.au/research/understanding-museums/JStanton_2011.html).

century. Thus began the restructuring of most collections to move away from the dichotomous vision of “*us vs. others*” painted by colonialism<sup>44</sup>.

## 2.2. New Museology

The literature since the 1970s began to perceive a number of shortcomings in museums<sup>45</sup>, which were seen as institutions “*isolated from the modern world, elitist, obsolete and a waste of public money*”<sup>46</sup>. They were, and partly they still are, based on the idea of the museum as an institution built around the rental building and collections, which were studied and labelled by a scientific community that still aimed to carry out the “*civilising mission*” of the population<sup>47</sup>. Substantially, a differentiation was made between “*high*” cultures, worthy of being preserved and studied, and “*low*” ones that were not<sup>48</sup>. Essentially reinforcing the museum institutions themselves as centres of culture, and the power relations between different social groups<sup>49</sup>.

Trying to distance itself from this view, the “*new museology*” attempts to redesign these spaces and their communicative methods in terms of their social and political role<sup>50</sup>. This implied reshaping conservation methods, the epistemological status of the artefacts on display, and the nature and purpose of museum research<sup>51</sup>. But also changing is the relationship museums have with people and populations, both internally and externally<sup>52</sup>. Thus, groups that have historically struggled more to be represented are opened up, and the visitor is given the role of controller of the museum's work<sup>53</sup>. Weil<sup>54</sup> argues that these redefinitions were only made possible by a shift in focus from objects to ideas. Therefore, the museum instead of being a mere place of exhibition becomes a place where culture, dialogue, and redefining social relations can be enhanced<sup>55</sup>. As a public space, it should

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<sup>44</sup> Britannica, ‘Museum - History Museums | Britannica’.

<sup>45</sup> Vikki McCall and Clive Gray, ‘Museums and the “New Museology”: Theory, Practice and Organisational Change’, *Museum Management and Curatorship* 29, no. 1 (January 2014): 19–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2013.869852>.

<sup>46</sup> Kennet Hudson, *Museums for the 1980s; a Survey of World Trends* (Paris/London: Unesco/MacMillan, 1977), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000024763>.

<sup>47</sup> Julia D. Harrison, ‘Ideas of Museums in the 1990s’, *Museum Management and Curatorship* 13, no. 2 (1 June 1994): 160–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647779409515396>; Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315002668>.

<sup>48</sup> Wendy Griswold, *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*, Sociology for a New Century Series, 2012, <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/cultures-and-societies-in-a-changing-world/book235089>.

<sup>49</sup> McCall and Gray, ‘Museums and the “New Museology”’.

<sup>50</sup> André Desvallées and François Mairesse, eds., *Key Concepts of Museology* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010).

<sup>51</sup> Desvallées and Mairesse; McCall and Gray, ‘Museums and the “New Museology”’.

<sup>52</sup> Deirdre C. Stam, ‘The Informed Muse: The Implications of “the New Museology” for Museum Practice’, *Museum Management and Curatorship* 12, no. 3 (1 September 1993): 267–83, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0964-7775\(93\)90071-P](https://doi.org/10.1016/0964-7775(93)90071-P).

<sup>53</sup> Stam; McCall and Gray, ‘Museums and the “New Museology”’.

<sup>54</sup> Karol A. Schmiegel, ‘Rethinking the Museum and Other Meditations. Stephen E. Weil | Winterthur Portfolio: Vol 25, No 4’, *Winterthur Portfolio*, 1 December 1990, <https://doi.org/10.1086/496513>.

<sup>55</sup> Harrison, ‘Ideas of Museums in the 1990s’; Carter and Orange, ‘Contentious Terrain’.



become a space for the population, a dialogue and confrontation centre<sup>56</sup>, ceasing to represent only the socially and culturally dominant group<sup>57</sup>.

Along with a shift in the literature there was also an attempt to change at the institutional level. The International Committee for Museology, in fact, started a process of redefining the museum itself, trying to adopt a post-colonial and all-inclusive approach. At the 26th conference in Prague, after years of negotiation<sup>58</sup>, a definition was released that places more emphasis on communities, participation and inclusion<sup>59</sup>.

*“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”<sup>60</sup>*

The terminological, theoretical and practical transformation of museum spaces, however, remains fraught with difficulties and obstacles that stem from the colonial legacy of museums and remain an integral part of them<sup>61</sup>. The theory of museology produced in the last half century has proven to be marked by paradigms created within colonial power structures because it is culturally grounded and politically engaged. If both museum and museology are culturally and politically determined, it implies that they have a genealogy marked by colonisation<sup>62</sup>. To image a post-colonial museum then it seems necessary to describe its colonial modalities and to seek a post-colonial impulse by allowing a cohabitation of ideas from different cultures<sup>63</sup>. In order to understand how theory has spilled over into practices, in particular how the post-colonial approach has influenced the work of ethnographic museums, the author wants to carry out an objective study of practices. In order to do so, five

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<sup>56</sup> Manuelina Maria Duarte Cândido and Giusy Pappalardo, ‘Museum People in Dialogue’, 2022, <https://icofom.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2022/12/LOW-2022-DUARTE-CANDIDO-PAPPALARDO-EDS.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup> Veysel Apaydin, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage: Construction, Transformation and Destruction* (UCL Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787354845>.

<sup>58</sup> Roberta Capozucca, ‘L’Icom non raggiunge un accordo sulla nuova definizione di Museo’, *Il Sole 24 ORE*, 1 October 2019, <https://www.ilssole24ore.com/art/l-icom-non-raggiunge-accordo-nuova-definizione-museo-ACPQyBo>.

<sup>59</sup> Cândido and Pappalardo, ‘Museum People in Dialogue’.

<sup>60</sup> ICOM, ‘ICOM Approves a New Museum Definition’, International Council of Museums, 2022, <https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-approves-a-new-museum-definition/>.

<sup>61</sup> Brus, Zillinger, and Knecht, ‘Introduction’; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 23 March 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Bruno Brulon Soares, ‘Decolonising the Museum? Community Experiences in the Periphery of the ICOM Museum Definition’, *Curator: The Museum Journal* 64, no. 3 (2021): 439–55, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12436>.

<sup>63</sup> Brus, Zillinger, and Knecht, ‘Introduction’.

European ethnographic museums will be analysed in comparison in order to see the steps forward and the problems that can be detected.



### 3. Chapter 3:

#### Glance into European museums, how decolonization is done

Museum colonisation is increasingly recognised as a problem that needs to be tackled across the globe, particularly in the West. This thesis focuses on the European area because it is direct relevance. Being the first museums designed by colonial values, they are the first subjects of criticism in the post-colonial movement. Analysing therefore the practices they put in place can help to understand the state of the art and lead to greater evolutions in the field not only in the European region but worldwide. In fact, advancing the decolonisation agenda in these institutions helps address the historical social injustices represented by museums at their foundation in colonial times. It would also allow challenging Eurocentric biases, fostering cultural exchange, and promoting greater equity and justice in the world.

The decolonisation movement has been evolving since the end of the 20th century. With the beginning of the 21st century, there was a real active momentum as a response to demands for social justice and equity<sup>64</sup>. The first activists(e.g. Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Uche Okeke) and museums to get involved in the decolonisation movement were mainly indigenous peoples, artists and scholars who questioned the representation and interpretation of their cultures and histories in museums<sup>65</sup>(e.g. National Museum of the American Indian<sup>66</sup>, Pitt Rivers Museum<sup>67</sup> and Tropenmuseum<sup>68</sup>). In this context, decolonisation means rethinking how museums collect, preserve, display, interpret and narrate objects from the colonial period<sup>69</sup>. Museum colonisation is multifaceted, which makes it complex to devise a single problem or a homogeneous solution that can be implemented. This is also why the status of decolonisation varies in each country, depending on political interest, curator commitment, available funds, and many other external factors<sup>70</sup>. In order to try to map this comprehensively, the study focuses on five variables that encompass the actions that can be implemented to decolonise a museum. These will make it possible to highlight general trends, but also innovative and failing examples. Outlining positive practices will allow the author to understand which steps might still be missing in European institutions and what needs to be changed. Thus,

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<sup>64</sup> Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>65</sup> Interviewee N° 3; Interviewee N° 7, Interviewee N° 7 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices.

<sup>66</sup> For further information: <https://americanindian.si.edu/about>

<sup>67</sup> For further information: <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/about-us>

<sup>68</sup> For further information: <https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/en/about-tropenmuseum>

<sup>69</sup> Interviewee N° 4, Interviewee N° 4 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 3 March 2023.

<sup>70</sup> Interviewee N° 4; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 5, Interviewee N° 5 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 1 March 2023.

seeing if, by relying on the “*new museology*” is possible to redesign spaces and communication in terms of the social and political role of these institutions<sup>71</sup>.

The five variables<sup>72</sup> chosen are based on the book "Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide with Global Examples" by Ariese and Wróblewska<sup>73</sup> broken down on the basis of interviews conducted within the staff of European ethnographic museums and looking at the ten principles that, according to the Museums Association<sup>74</sup>, should guide decolonial practices<sup>75</sup>:

1. **Visibility:** changing the visibility of ethnographic museums means talking about the way institutions have represented and shown artefacts and objects belonging to non-Western populations<sup>76</sup>. Therefore it means changing the approach to the objects themselves<sup>77</sup>. The single narrative based on stereotypes and colonial behaviour should therefore be eliminated<sup>78</sup>. These changes can take place through the transformation into a new institution, or the use of temporary exhibitions and interventions on existing collections, perhaps with the help of critical views of external actors such as artists from source communities.
2. **Inclusivity:** while museums were conceived as closed spaces, "*cabinets of curiosities*"<sup>79</sup>, increasing inclusiveness means making it public<sup>80</sup>. That is, opening it up across the board: to the visitor, to criticism, to dialogue with the source community and to an open recruitment process. Openness could also include using the source languages to describe the artefacts, thus generating an inter-linguistic dialogue. This must be done, however, taking care not to fall into tokenism. Creating a false sense of inclusivity would, in fact, perpetuate stereotypes and obscure systemic barriers to participation and representation within museums<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Desvallées and Mairesse, *Key Concepts of Museology*.

<sup>72</sup> It should be borne in mind, however, that the variables are interrelated and some aspects may occur in more than one of them.

<sup>73</sup> Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*.

<sup>74</sup> For further information: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/decolonising-museums/communicating-decolonisation/#>

<sup>75</sup> Museums Association, ‘Decolonising Principles’, Museums Association, accessed 23 February 2023, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/decolonising-museums/supporting-decolonisation-in-museums/decolonising-principles/>.

<sup>76</sup> Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices.

<sup>77</sup> Brulon Soares, ‘Decolonising the Museum?’

<sup>78</sup> Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 4, Interviewee N° 4 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 5, Interviewee N° 5 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 8, Interviewee N° 8 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 14 December 2022.

<sup>79</sup> Macdonald, ‘Pausing, Reflection, and Action’.

<sup>80</sup> Interviewee N° 4, Interviewee N° 4 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Yoon Hee Lamot, ‘The Mini-Guislain Toolkit: A Pre-Visit Service for Visitors with Mental Impairments’, International Council of Museums, 20 March 2023, <https://icom.museum/en/news/the-mini-guislain-toolkit-a-pre-visit-service-for-visitors-with-mental-impairments/>.

<sup>81</sup> Darren Walker, ‘Opinion | Museums Need to Step Into the Future’, The New York Times, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/26/opinion/warren-kanders-whitney-protests.html?searchResultPosition=2?key=bUm29oHJ47YS-c7U-->

3. **Decentering:** power relations have always existed within museums<sup>82</sup>, especially in forms of language and dialogue<sup>83</sup>. Decentralisation aim to deconstruct and proactively replace power hierarchies that reproduce colonial structures<sup>84</sup>. It requires a commitment to continuous learning, listening and collaboration with local communities<sup>85</sup>. The first step in such an approach comes from becoming aware of one's own privilege. In doing so, by collaborating and opening up to source communities, museums can become more inclusive, relevant, and meaningful to the communities they serve<sup>86</sup>. This would also reflect the achievement of the new description released by ICOM.
4. **Education:** includes giving visitors the opportunity to learn about new cultures, to learn from them, their traditions, their histories<sup>87</sup>(e.g. students from Tagai State College able to re-connect with aspects of their heritage at the University of Cambridge<sup>88</sup>). This implies that the museum should not limit itself to exhibiting the artefacts that are present but must create moments and opportunities for education for the visitor and for the staff within it<sup>89</sup>. According to this, the museum experience should aim to be one of growth and education.
5. **Transparency:** the basis of museum exhibition is the collection of objects that form the existing displays. The way in which these artefacts are acquired is often unclear, just as there is little transparency on how the history of the objects is told. There must be a commitment on the part of museums to reconstruct the biography of the objects in their collections and be prepared to narrate it to the public<sup>90</sup>. In this sense, taking a stand on what were the old and wrong acquisition practices and deciding to move away from them is also extremely relevant, because it implies transparency about the colonial past.

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y7AZxFyMfyYQeYhGqicp7v3uMw2TcY2oRDf0TqLDGrKa7MTXg4RkJpVhPMzVsQzdvd0ItRkdHR2VrekpPUThj Qmh3Z1NqMnF5T25fYw.

<sup>82</sup> Federico Silvio Bellanca, 'Le conseguenze del colonialismo sulla storia dell'arte africana | Artribune', 5 October 2021, <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/2021/10/colonialismo-arte-africana/>; Marco Enrico Giacomelli, 'Musei e restituzioni. Il punto di vista del Mudec di Milano | Artribune', 14 June 2022, <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/2022/06/restituzioni-museo-mudec-milano/>; Michèle Rivet, 'Decolonization and Restitution: Moving Towards a More Holistic and Relational Approach: Report on the Panel on Ethnographic Museums and Indigenous People, ICOM Kyoto, September 2019', *Museum Worlds* 8, no. 1 (1 July 2020): 204–9, <https://doi.org/10.3167/armw.2020.080114>.

<sup>83</sup> Hidalgo, 'Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak'.

<sup>84</sup> John Giblin, Imma Ramos, and Nikki Grout, 'Dismantling the Master's House', *Third Text* 33, no. 4–5 (3 September 2019): 471–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2019.1653065>; Interviewee N° 7, Interviewee N° 7 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>85</sup> Interviewee N° 10, Interviewee N° 10 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>86</sup> Interviewee N° 10; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>87</sup> Interviewee N° 7, Interviewee N° 7 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 8, Interviewee N° 8 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, 'Addressing Colonial Narratives in Museums', The British Academy, 19 April 2018, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/blog/addressing-colonial-narratives-museums/>.

<sup>89</sup> Interviewee N° 4, Interviewee N° 4 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>90</sup> Interviewee N° 4; Interviewee N° 5, Interviewee N° 5 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 7, Interviewee N° 7 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

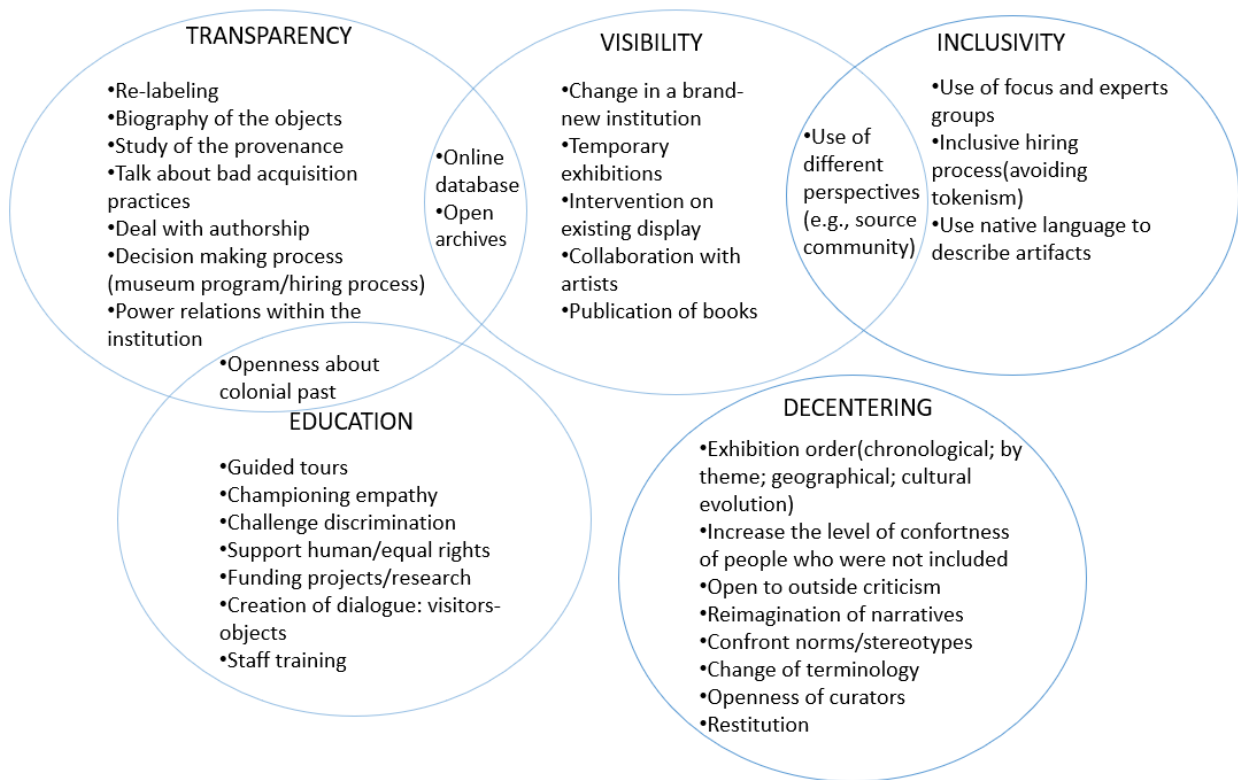


Figure 1. Graphical representation of five variables used by the author and their decomposition into actions. This representation aims to help the reader to understand the overlaps between the variables, and provide a summary of the actions which can be used to address each variable.

These variables (see Figure 1 for a graphical representation) will help in analysing the work of European ethnographic museums. They enable a more methodical approach to be taken and to be able to compare and highlight practices in Europe. This is needed because each ethnographic museum is completely different. Every museum has its history, collections, opportunities, and difficulties. It is impossible to determine who's the best, mainly because it is not a competition. Everyone has to find its own practice, the one that is the best for the surrounding and its society<sup>91</sup>. Reason why the author would like to emphasise here that it was deliberately chosen not to refer to the analysed practices as “best practices”. There are no objective parameters, or classification to be able to say which are best practices. Variables help to classify the actions of museums and see what has and has not been implemented. Furthermore, the subjectivity of museums requires a singular evaluation, which makes it possible to say that those practices are best only for that particular institution. By analysing the actions of some of European leading ethnographic museums, the author aims to highlight what actions have been applied so far and also to bring a critical approach to them. These five museums were among those the author tried to contact and analysed. The reasons for the selection are: the amount of information that can be found about them; the difference in the interest and involvement of the country's political sphere; the funds received over the years to carry out projects with decolonial

<sup>91</sup> Interviewee N° 4, Interviewee N° 4 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

intent; geographical location; and their relevance as “guiding museums” in the European decolonisation project.

### 3.1. “Ilaria Alpi” Italo-African Museum, Italy

To pursue the guarantee of visibility within museums, the most efficient method would be to dismantle the institution and recreate it from scratch. The ex-museum Pegorini established in 1875, now the Italo-African Museum “Ilaria Alpi”<sup>92</sup> in Rome is trying to do this by rebuilding itself entirely. It was created for propaganda purposes and to promote Italian colonial exploits with collections in Libya, Eritrea and Somalia<sup>93</sup>. The change started when the former Institute for Africa and the Orient became part of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage in 2018. The museum began a process of studying, inventorying, and paying attention to the collections and themes<sup>94</sup>. The basic intention is to place the history of the museum and colonialism in the broader context of relations between Italy, Europe and Africa. This change, according to the curators, must take place through the creation of a new space. Renouncing a classical museum structure, with a permanent collection, they want to work on temporary exhibitions that allow for the continuous recalibration of the museum's work<sup>95</sup>. The idea is that of a dynamic, open museum, a laboratory in transformation, with a permanent core designed to be updated and modified over time, and spaces for temporary exhibitions and meetings. With a certain degree of indefiniteness and openness that allows the themes of the sections to be presented not as definitive and closed contents, but as places of shared creation<sup>96</sup>. The museum's work is therefore not only based on a complete overhaul of its spaces (as for example the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and the Weltmuseum Wien have also done), but also envisages through the use of temporary exhibitions and collaborations with artists to give visibility to themes and populations that until now had not found space<sup>97</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> Gaia Delpino, ‘Un museo di propaganda, un museo chiuso e occultato, un museo da rimeditare e riaprire: dal Museo coloniale al Museo italo africano “Ilaria Alpi” | ASAI’, accessed 19 January 2023, <https://www.asiafrica.org/blacklivesmatter-italia-asai/un-museo-di-propaganda-un-museo-chiuso-e-occultato-un-museo-da-rimeditare-e-riaprire-dal-museo-coloniale-al-museo-italo-africano-ilaria-alpi/>.

<sup>93</sup> Roma Sito Turistico Ufficiale, ‘Museo delle Civiltà - Museo Italo Africano Ilaria Alpi’, Turismo Roma, 2 April 2021, <https://www.turismoroma.it/it/luoghi/museo-delle-civilt%C3%A0-museo-italo-africano-ilaria-alpi>.

<sup>94</sup> Goethe Institute, ‘L’ex Museo Coloniale di Roma’, goethe.de, accessed 19 January 2023, <https://story.goethe.de/museo-pigorini-it>.

<sup>95</sup> Giulia Grechi and Viviana Gravano, ‘Mostrare una collezione coloniale: riflessioni sul futuro riallestimento al Museo delle Civiltà di Roma. Intervista a Rosa Anna Di Lella, a cura di Viviana Gravano e Giulia Grechi’, *roots&routes* (blog), 14 July 2020, <https://www.roots-routes.org/mostrare-una-collezione-coloniale-riflessioni-sul-futuro-riallestimento-al-museo-delle-civilt%C3%A0-di-roma-intervista-a-rosa-anna-di-lella-a-cura-di-viviana-gravano-e-giulia-grechi/>.

<sup>96</sup> Goethe Institute, ‘L’ex Museo Coloniale di Roma’.

<sup>97</sup> Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 7, Interviewee N° 7 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

As praiseworthy as the work carried out by the museum is, it is necessary to consider that it has received very special attention and opportunities compared to other ethnographic museums in Europe, with substantial funds and resources from the Italian government<sup>98</sup>. Moreover, its work is criticised primarily for its failure to acknowledge the history of Italian colonialism and the damage it caused, particularly in Ethiopia and Somalia. Despite the stated aim of promoting dialogue between Italy and Africa, there seems to be a lack of diversity in staff and representation within the institution.

### 3.2. Weltmuseum Wien, Austria

The museum has an extensive collection of ethnographic objects, art, and artifacts from Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. Many of them were acquired during the period of European colonialism when European nations such as Austria had extensive overseas territories and established networks of trade and exchange<sup>99</sup>. The Viennese Museum was under renovation for four years before reopening in 2017. The changes implemented were concerning the permanent collection and its public areas<sup>100</sup>. This outcome was inspired by the choreographer Claudia Bosse, who in 2015 reorganised the content of the galleries according to various themes, including colonialism and cultural protection: e.g. the showcases were removed, eliminating the distance between the visitor and the object itself (as also done by the Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Carlo D'Albertis in Genova<sup>101</sup>). The new narrative, mainly based on the interaction between viewer and objects, suggests that the stories of ethnographic artefacts could be better understood through an active engagement of people inside and outside the museum to depict colonial history. The practice of intervening in the collections thus merged with two: the use of temporary exhibitions to raise important questions of debate or to reinterpret part of the collection; and the collaboration with artists to achieve a more multifaceted vision (e.g. Rajkamal Kahlon<sup>102</sup>, “*Stories of Traumatic Pasts*” exhibition with various artists (2020-2021)<sup>103</sup>). The museum has thus detached itself from the ordering principles that Western museums and collections have imposed on the objects presented since the 19th century<sup>104</sup>. In this sense, Bosse, given its origins, has been able to highlight the colonial legacy, but it is highly complex that it has been able to provide a revolutionary perspective on it. The practice of collaborating with artists, in fact, usually aims to gain

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<sup>98</sup> Interviewee N° 7, Interviewee N° 7 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>99</sup> Weltmuseum Wien, ‘Weltmuseum Wien: About Us’, 13 January 2023, <https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/about-us/>.

<sup>100</sup> Weltmuseum Wien.

<sup>101</sup> For more information: <https://www.museidigenova.it/it/filosofia-espositiva>

<sup>102</sup> For more information: <https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/exhibitions/stayingwithtrouble/>

<sup>103</sup> For further information: <https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/exhibitions/stories-of-traumatic-pasts/>

<sup>104</sup> Christoph Chwatal, ‘Decolonizing the Ethnographic Museum’, *Art Papers* (blog), 25 April 2018, <https://www.artpapers.org/decolonizing-the-ethnographic-museum/>.



an innovative, non-Eurocentric point of view by incorporating the perspectives of authors and experts who have experienced the colonial approach in their own lives<sup>105</sup>. To use the perspective of a Western miss part of the decolonial effort in this sense. The endeavour seems to be more symbolic than leading to concrete decolonisation. Which would be evidenced by a low collaborative engagement with indigenous communities, preferring a Eurocentric approach<sup>106</sup>. In an attempt to improve this position, the museum has opened itself up to criticism in the construction of its exhibitions<sup>107</sup>.

### 3.3. Linden Museum, Germany

A museum of world cultures, which believes that all cultures are of equal value. It is a showcase of a collection of over 160,000 objects from all over the world: Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. Many of these were acquired during the colonial era through various means, such as expeditions, trade, and colonial rule<sup>108</sup>. It presents the diversity of human cultures and encourages direct emotional and intellectual encounters with the original objects in the collections<sup>109</sup>. The Linden Museum has been preserving and acquiring every day, ritual, and art objects since 1884. From this historical perspective, the collections focus on non-European contexts. For the nature of its collection, it has been working for about six to seven years to decolonise its collection by engaging in a process of critical reflection. This includes creating a dialogue with the communities whose cultural heritage is exhibited<sup>110</sup>. The re-imagining into a “*living museum*” seeks to create spaces for dialogue and collaboration between the various communities, thus aiming to change the role of the museum in perpetuating practices of racism and colonialism<sup>111</sup>. In rethinking the structure, they focused mainly on three points: adopt a post-colonial perspective; involve local communities and communities of origin; and incorporate the present time, so it must be connected to the present day. A problem that emerges, however, in trying to create these collaborations comes from the choice of the collaborators

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<sup>105</sup> Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*.

<sup>106</sup> Claudia Augustat, ‘Dealing with the Colonial Past at the Weltmuseum Wien: A Curator’s Perspective’, *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 32 (2019): 17–31; Claudia Augustat and Wolfgang Kapfhammer, ‘Looking Back Ahead: A Short History of Collaborative Work with Indigenous Source Communities at the Weltmuseum Wien’, *Boletim Do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas* 12 (December 2017): 749–64, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1981.81222017000300005>; A. G. Karydas et al., ‘Handheld XRF Analysis of the Old Mexican Feather Headdress in the Weltmuseum Vienna’, *X-Ray Spectrometry* 43, no. 3 (2014): 138–45, <https://doi.org/10.1002/xrs.2529>.

<sup>107</sup> Chwatal, ‘Decolonizing the Ethnographic Museum’.

<sup>108</sup> Linden-Museum, ‘Linden-Museum - History’, accessed 29 April 2023, <https://www.lindenmuseum.de/en/about-us/history>.

<sup>109</sup> Linden-Museum, ‘Linden-Museum - Mission Statement’, accessed 6 March 2023, <https://www.lindenmuseum.de/en/about-us/mission-statement>.

<sup>110</sup> Interviewee N° 7, Interviewee N° 7 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 4, Interviewee N° 4 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>111</sup> Linden-Museum, ‘Linden-Museum - Mission Statement’.

themselves. How do we choose who can speak for these populations? How can long-lasting relationships be created? How to create institutional and not personal relationships?<sup>112</sup>. For this reason for the museum, making an exhibition means asking what is important, negotiating with communities and building the display together with them. They tried to change their approach to their collections, reason why they invested a lot on provenance studies<sup>113</sup>. The structure of the exhibition is not only based on the biography, but is intended to emphasise the beauty, and the context of the object. This major reappraisal of their work and approach also stems from the many criticisms they have received. In fact, while they tried to open up the museum to different communities, they also ended up receiving a lot of bad reviews for the difficulty of accessing and understanding their exhibits. In particular, it seems that their choice of openness ended up becoming a way of exhibiting that was too complex for the average visitor to understand. Therefore, according to some experts, it is important to be clear about the direction desired and the changes this will imply in order to avoid external criticism<sup>114</sup>.

### **3.4. Royal Museum of Central Africa(RMCA), Belgium**

Formed by artefacts collected during Belgium's colonial period in Central Africa, it is one of the largest repositories of Congolese and Central African art, history, and culture<sup>115</sup>. In 2013, the RMCA closed to renovate and revisit the museum's colonial contents and buildings. It reopened in December 2018 with the aim of "*presenting a contemporary and decolonised vision of Africa*" through its galleries<sup>116</sup>. One of the practices used is the inclusion of multiple languages in the exhibition (Dutch, French and English), so as to allow for wider inclusivity, although it is still a Eurocentric approach<sup>117</sup>. The creation of a decolonial dialogue is also made possible through collaboration with Central African communities, thanks to which the languages of the region can be heard in the galleries. "*The mix of Central African and European languages spoken through films in the galleries serves as a reminder to visitors that the space is not limited to European understanding, enjoyment and*

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<sup>112</sup> Interviewee N° 4, Interviewee N° 4 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>113</sup> Linden-Museum, 'Linden-Museum - Mission Statement'; Gesa Grimme, 'Systemizing Provenance Research on Objects from Colonial Contexts', 2020, <https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/76206/1/3237-9142-1-PB.pdf>.

<sup>114</sup> Interviewee N° 6, Interviewee N° 6 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>115</sup> RMCA, 'Origin of the Collections', Royal Museum for Central Africa - Tervuren - Belgium, accessed 29 April 2023, [https://www.africamuseum.be/en/discover/origin\\_collections](https://www.africamuseum.be/en/discover/origin_collections).

<sup>116</sup> RMCA, 'The Renovation of the AfricaMuseum', Royal Museum for Central Africa - Tervuren - Belgium, 2018, <https://www.africamuseum.be/en/discover/renovation>; Dominic Thomas, 'Museology and Globalization. The Quai Branly Museum', in *Africa and France. Postcolonial Cultures, Migration and Racism* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>117</sup> Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 1, Interviewee N° 1 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 16 November 2022.



*interpretations of objects*"<sup>118</sup>. New spaces have been created within the museum, “*The Rotunda*” and “*Lieu de Memoire*”, which aim to address the issue of coloniality, but at according to visitors were not effective in their intent<sup>119</sup>. This could therefore mean that the museum needs to work more systematically on increasing the comfortness of populations that were previously not included. In addition to criticism of these spaces, the RMCA has been criticised for its lack of non-Western representation, maintaining a focus on European explorers and missionaries<sup>120</sup>. For example, one of the interesting interventions was the gilded statue of a European missionary holding an African child, with a plaque reading: “*Belgium brings civilisation to Congo*”. This remained on display, but its historical context is explained through a cloth placed in front of the statue itself<sup>121</sup>. This, as well as some other performances, seemed more a means of glorifying colonialism without acknowledging its damage. Finally, further criticism was levelled at the failure to repatriate looted objects from central Africa in colonial times until 2022. The year in which the Belgian Parliament adopted the law that “*recognises the alienable character of assets linked to the colonial past of the Belgian state and determines a legal framework for their restitution and return*”<sup>122</sup>.

### 3.5. Quai Branly, France

Quai Branly is one of the main symbols of French colonial ethnology, based on “*itinerant, extensive and rapid cultural plundering*”<sup>123</sup>, with a collection of over 300,000 artifacts from Africa and Oceania that was previously displayed at the Trocadero Museum of Ethnology<sup>124</sup>. The Parisian Museum is attempting to deal with its colonial past first by recognising its heritage<sup>125</sup>. That is, by striving to recognise the ways in which colonialism has shaped its collections, its exhibitions and the interpretation of what it contains<sup>126</sup>. The Musée du quai Branly uses the notion of the “*metamorphosis*” of objects to indicate status and new values of museum objects, which have changed

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<sup>118</sup> Donata Miller, ““Everything Passes, except the Past””, *Science Museum Group Journal* 12, no. 12 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.15180/191213>.

<sup>119</sup> Miller.

<sup>120</sup> Interviewee N° 4, Interviewee N° 4 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>121</sup> Reuters, ‘King Leopold’s Ghost: Belgium’s Africa Museum to Reopen’, *EgyptToday*, 2 June 2018, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/4/51382/King-Leopold-s-ghost-Belgium-s-Africa-museum-to-reopen>.

<sup>122</sup> RMCA, ‘Restitution’, Royal Museum for Central Africa - Tervuren - Belgium, 2022, [https://www.africamuseum.be/en/about\\_us/restitution](https://www.africamuseum.be/en/about_us/restitution).

<sup>123</sup> Betzogo Etongo, Miaché Evina, and Narcisse Santores, ‘Restituer le patrimoine ou le déporter de nouveau: quand « La route des chefferies du Cameroun »mène au Musée du Quai Branly- Jacques Chirac en 2022’, 2022.

<sup>124</sup> Jen Westmoreland Bouchard, ‘Paris’ Quai Branly Museum: Collections and Controversy - Europe Up Close’, 1 June 2009, <https://europeupclose.com/article/paris-quai-branly-museum-collections-and-controversy/>.

<sup>125</sup> Musée du quai Branly, ‘History of the Collections’, accessed 8 March 2023, <https://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/collections/all-collections/history-of-the-collections/>.

<sup>126</sup> Dominic Thomas, ‘The Quai Branly Museum: Political Transition, Memory and Globalisation in Contemporary France’, *French Cultural Studies* 19, no. 2 (1 June 2008): 141–57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957155808089662>; Thomas, ‘Museology and Globalization. The Quai Branly Museum’.

from ethnographic artefacts to artefacts<sup>127</sup>. They have worked on remaking the meaning of objects through visual and written media, but the message conveyed now of the object is "guided"<sup>128</sup>, thus risking the re-imposition of the authority of the museum as sole interpreter, opening scarcely to new interpretations. This criticism is corroborated by the discontent of indigenous peoples who claim that it was built without consultation or input from the communities whose cultures are represented in its collections. In order to increase inclusivity, the museum has worked in two directions: diversification of museum staff, trying to ensure that non-Western perspectives are represented in the institution; collaboration with non-Western communities to revise its collection. But what critics continue to argue is that Quai Branly's approach is still too narrow, and that there is a need for a more decentralised and inclusive approach.

In line with French desire<sup>129</sup>, the museum also adopts the practice of restitution, and among the objects returned are, for example, 26 bronzes looted from Benin<sup>130</sup>. According to the museum, these returns took place in collaboration with non-Western communities and guided by principles of respect and cultural sensitivity.

These five cases show in an all-encompassing way how the five variables can be worked on differently and more or less efficiently. The author would say that a post-colonial approach can be found in each of them, or at least a tentative one. Their actions touch on different variables adopting different actions, and as shown by the critique there is still room for improvement even if they are leading institutions in the decolonization practices. The comparative study of these, as well as that of other museums, thus highlights how the subjectivity of the institution is significant and needs to be taken into account when adopting post-colonial practices. What is emphasised above all, however, is that every deliberate act that attempts to grapple with a museum's colonial past means decolonising a museum<sup>131</sup>. The magnitude and extent of these actions depends on the needs and possibilities of the institutions. Given the low interest at the political level in Europe<sup>132</sup>, the most important aspect that

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<sup>127</sup> Thierry Dufrêne and Anne-Christine Taylor, 'Cannibalismes disciplinaires', Billet, *Regards sur l'IRHiS : le carnet des doctorant-e-s* (blog), 10 January 2012, <https://irhis.hypotheses.org/3570>.

<sup>128</sup> Alexandra Loumpet-Galitzine, 'The Bekom Mask and the White Wtar: The Tate of Wthers' Objects at the Musée Du Quai Branly, Paris', in *Unpacking the Collection : Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum* (New York: Springer New York, 2011), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/eui/reader.action?docID=763161>.

<sup>129</sup> Savoy and Sarr, 'The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics'.

<sup>130</sup> Musée du quai Branly, 'Restitution of 26 works to the Republic of Benin', 2018, <https://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/collections/living-collections/news/restitution-of-26-works-to-the-republic-of-benin/>.

<sup>131</sup> Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices.

<sup>132</sup> Interviewee N° 2, Interviewee N° 2 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 9 November 2022; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 5, Interviewee N° 5 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N°12, Interviewee N° 12 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 26 October 2022.

needs to be found for the initiation of these practices is the willingness of museums in dealing with their colonial past. This can and is creating a movement of support for the decolonising cause, following a snowball effect<sup>133</sup>. The practices adopted so far are only at an early stage, and because of the deepness of the colonial roots of the museum and the collections, some experts in the field are doubtful whether decolonisation as an ultimate goal is possible<sup>134</sup>. It is needed to understand, despite differences within institutions, countries, and political interest, how to continue to progress and facilitate the adoption of colonial practices. Especially trying to avoid getting caught up in repatriation practices that are but a small part of the necessary and required transformation<sup>135</sup>. To have a more all-encompassing view, the author has made available in Annex I provides a summary table detailing which actions European ethnographic museums have put into practice. This is intended as a method to be able to highlight merits and shortcomings of these institutions and to have a starting point from which future research can be produced.

Thus, the different singularities of museums do not, in the author's opinion, make it advisable to have a single solution method. What does seem desirable, however, is the creation a sharable common framework that everyone should apply before being able to say they are decolonised. This can be developed as “*minimum standards*”. In the next chapter the author will try to use the literature and knowledge gained during the interviews to do so.

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<sup>133</sup> Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices.

<sup>134</sup> Interviewee N° 1, Interviewee N° 1 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 12, Interviewee N° 12 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices.

<sup>135</sup> Interviewee N° 5, Interviewee N° 5 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 6, Interviewee N° 6 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

#### 4. Chapter 4:

##### Revive pot-colonial approach by creating sharable standards

As showed by the examples, both the interviews and the literature indicate that it is extremely complex to find a univocal answer to the question "What does it mean to decolonise a museum?". This is because of the variety of ways and means in which a museum can be said to be colonised<sup>136</sup>. To decolonize them requires specific and subjective answers that can be applied on a case-by-case basis<sup>137</sup>. The variables in particular show how the measures can range across different areas of museum work, from language to physical display<sup>138</sup>. But at the same time, they depend on factors such as: staff and political interest, availability of funds and space, etc. To speak of decolonising the museum itself becomes almost absurd<sup>139</sup>. This is because the very concept upon which most of these museums were born is colonised at the grassroots. To decolonise these structures is considered by some almost impossible<sup>140</sup>. According to one of the interviewees, one cannot decolonise museums, one can make them anti-colonial<sup>141</sup>. This is because decolonising means "taking back", the problem is that you cannot take back the damage that has already been done, because as Miller wrote "Everything passes except the past"<sup>142</sup>. What one would perhaps need is to completely deconstruct the concept of the museum in order to create a new type of structure, so as to eradicate the colonial foundations<sup>143</sup>.

Given the complexity of putting such a development into practice, an alternative is to focus on creating a set of minimum and replicable standards. Considering the problems noted during the interviews, it seems necessary to understand how the decolonisation process can begin. In the opinion of the experts, what needs to be considered is the lack of political interest, space and time which block museums of allow them to take a step back. To unlock this situation the author used interviews and analysed practices to construct a group of actions that can shared by museums. Establishing minimum

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<sup>136</sup> Mallard, Egel, and Galvin, 'Global Challenges - Decolonisation'.

<sup>137</sup> Interviewee N° 4, Interviewee N° 4 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 6, Interviewee N° 6 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 10, Interviewee N° 10 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Laura Van Broekhoven, 'On Decolonizing the Museum in Practice', *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 32 (2019): 1–10.

<sup>138</sup> Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*.

<sup>139</sup> Sumaya Kassim, 'The Museum Will Not Be Decolonised', *Media Diversified* (blog), 15 November 2017, <https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/>.

<sup>140</sup> Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 6, Interviewee N° 6 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 7, Interviewee N° 7 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 13 and Interviewee N° 14, Interviewee N° 13 and 14 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, Online, 29 March 2023.

<sup>141</sup> Interviewee N° 6, Interviewee N° 6 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>142</sup> Miller, "Everything Passes, except the Past".

<sup>143</sup> Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 15; Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices.

standards, in the author's opinion, can give vigour museum decolonisation. If all are brought together to share minimum standards, this can lead to avoid relying solely on the debated practice of repatriation. Fostering investment, collaboration and learning from other institutions. This not only has the potential to raise interest within museums, but also externally. Indeed, if a wave of innovation is seen in European ethnographic museums, one can expect visitor interest to increase. These might then demand more interest and investment of resources from politicians, and thus push for continuous improvement.

#### 4.1. Becoming aware of the colonial nature

The first step for an ethnographic museum is to become conscious of its own position. As demonstrated, museums by their nature and conception, are colonial in origin<sup>144</sup>. This is why Ted Loos<sup>145</sup> speaks of decolonisation as a movement that "*calls institutions to account for their role in the history of colonialism*". It is necessary then for them to be cognizant of this and to be prepared to open a debate on it, as done by the Weltmuseum in Wien for example<sup>146</sup>. If this problem awareness is not present, it become impossible to implement any kind of practice to solve it. Asserting the underlying colonial entanglements of the museum and the problems related to it brings about a change in perspective<sup>147</sup>. Looking critically at one's own collections and how they have been put together can lead to noticing what are the detectable gaps, the glitches in it and thus questioning the whole system of display and narrative. Otherwise one misses, as Christina Kreps<sup>148</sup> wrote, the recognition of the historical and colonial contingencies that shaped the collections. Hence, there is a loss of understanding of those Eurocentric ideologies and prejudices that formed the basis of the museum concept, discourse and practice. To do this, therefore, there is not only a need for a retrospective look, but also an analysis of museum practices in former colonial contexts.

Once the museum, understood as the ensemble of actors within it, is able to perceive its own nature and take a critical view of it, then working to change it and being open to criticism is facilitated. This means making all those whose work impacts on the development and conception of the museum more responsible. Indeed, becoming aware of the colonial roots enables a change of mindset and the adoption of a post-colonial perspective. It should be emphasised, however, that this is not

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<sup>144</sup> Brulon Soares, 'Decolonising the Museum?'; Brus, Zillinger, and Knecht, 'Introduction'.

<sup>145</sup> Loos, 'A Canadian Museum Promotes Indigenous Art. But Don't Call It "Indian."'.

<sup>146</sup> Augustat, 'Dealing with the Colonial Past at the Weltmuseum Wien'.

<sup>147</sup> Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*.

<sup>148</sup> Christina Kreps, 'Changing the Rules of the Road: Post-Colonialism and the New Ethics of Museum Anthropology', in *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics* (Routledge, 2011).

unchallenging, as it involves modifying operations at their core, overhauling the way objects are collected and presented to the public. Frequently this happens as a form of internal battle within the museum itself. The tension between innovation and conservatism, once the doors of the museum offices are opened, becomes clear and obvious. While there may be actors within the museum who press for decolonisation, there are those who press for the maintenance of 'static' approaches. These kinds of tensions can occur in different ways and dynamics, internally and externally: there can be tensions between curators and scientific committee, between museum experts and community members, between museum experts and artists or between curators and government bodies. In order to work on external tensions, internal discussions need to lead to a homogeneous position and thinking on the museum's colonisation. This implies dealing with the past, with history, and with what may be the different reasons why certain actors within the institution prefer to maintain the state of things. Bridging museums to adopt postcolonial thinking is a long and often painful process, but one that leads to the growth of the institution itself<sup>149</sup>.

#### **4.2. Train staff on colonial roots of the institution**

The museum is not only made up of showcases and objects, but also of the people who work in them. To have a decolonised museum it is therefore necessary that the effort to decolonise comes also from within<sup>150</sup>. For the people who work in a museum, it is complex to be aware of its colonial nature since they are part of the system itself, especially because hiring process are hardly inclusive in Europe. For this reason, there is a need for an external point of view<sup>151</sup>. One is to hire consultants or experts in post-colonialism to conduct training sessions, as done by Linden Museum for example. In case this would be complicated, or too costly, access to resources and literature on the subject is usually provided. The method that seems to work most effectively, however, is to create moments of dialogue, and workshops with members of the community the museum represents<sup>152</sup>(e.g. Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Castello d'Albertis collaborated with Hopi communities). By engaging with these communities in a respectful and collaborative manner, museum staff can gain a deeper understanding

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<sup>149</sup> Interviewee N° 8, Interviewee N° 8 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 6, Interviewee N° 6 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>150</sup> Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*; Lori Wysong, 'What Would It Mean to Decolonize Museums?', *Hindsights* (blog), 14 April 2021, <https://medium.com/hindsights/what-would-it-mean-to-decolonize-museums-c0bd66fafd9d>.

<sup>151</sup> Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices.

<sup>152</sup> Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.



of the cultures they represent and the impact of colonialism on them<sup>153</sup>. But it is important to continue questioning how we decide who are the people who can speak for these communities, trying not to replicate colonial practices as the Linden Museum is trying to do.

Although this may seem an obvious step given how much museum decolonisation is discussed. In conducting the interviews, the author found more than one instance where the interviewees claimed that decolonising was not something that concerned their work or their museum, which highlights the internal battle aforementioned. The resistance techniques highlighted were not only those of justifying themselves behind the impossibility of being colonised given their recent foundation. But they also extended to denial of the need for colonisation, opposition to restitution or repatriation movements, or general resistance to the adoption of de-colonial practices<sup>154</sup>. The most insidious noncompliance, however, is that which hides behind tokenism: when decolonisation actions are put into practice in a superficial way, without going to work on the underlying problems.<sup>155</sup> If there are still curators and experts who do not believe that this problem concerns them, there seems to be a need for more training<sup>156</sup>.

### 4.3. Becoming aware of the multiplicity of possible narratives within the museum

A postcolonial approach in ethnographic museums must aim to challenge Western, European representation. This, according to practice and literature, can be achieved through a multivocality of viewpoints within the museum<sup>157</sup>. This, according to Brus et. al<sup>158</sup>, means representing and listening to a multitude of voices and perspectives while trying to create dialogues with the source communities<sup>159</sup>. This includes the perspectives of the colonised populations, as well as those of the colonisers and curators. A museum which can be described as “*open-door*” welcomes the opinions of communities, while trying not to adopt a tokenistic or temporary approach. A long-term

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<sup>153</sup> Andrew Palamara, ‘Sharing Authority: Creating Inclusive Dialogue in the Museum’, March 2018, <https://www.nationaldocents.org/docent-resources/interchange/sharing-authority-creating-inclusive-dialogue-in-the-museum>; *Seeding Authority: Examples from a New Museum Community of Practice*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1sjh0-CfgE>.

<sup>154</sup> Interviewee N° 12, Interviewee N° 12 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe, 12; Interviewee N° 1, Interviewee N° 1 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 2, Interviewee N° 2 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>155</sup> Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*.

<sup>156</sup> Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe;

<sup>157</sup> Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 4, Interviewee N° 4 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 6, Interviewee N° 6 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 13 and Interviewee N° 14, Interviewee N° 13 and 14 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>158</sup> Brus, Zillinger, and Knecht, ‘Introduction’.

<sup>159</sup> Interviewee N° 6, Interviewee N° 6 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

relationship must be sought, which is therefore not only linked to the creation of temporary exhibitions or consultations<sup>160</sup>. This therefore means asking, as the Linden Museum did, how to generate stable and lasting connections. The community involvement can have an impact on the museum's thinking, by creating an ongoing dialogue it can be possible to reflect the changes that society demands in the present.

Decoloniality therefore is about uniting all voices and opinions, even those that have been invisible. Thus, creating a narrative within the museum that is more nuanced and allows the complexity of what is behind it to be explained, as well as being more inclusive<sup>161</sup>. As written by Sium et. al., "*the decolonisation project seeks to reimagine and re-articulate power, change, and knowledge through a multiplicity of epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies*"<sup>162</sup>. The author is keen to emphasise that when she speaks of all voices, she means both those inside and outside the museum, i.e. not only those of the scientific committees, curators and workers, but also those of the communities represented, artists and visitors. This integration of voices must be applied in all the practices implemented, from captions to collaborations, aiming to inform its visitors of its colonial past, seeking growth on several fronts.

#### **4.4. Questioning the status of object 'owners' to rewrite the role of 'curators'**

Museums have traditionally been considered the 'keepers' of objects and their main function was to collect, preserve and display these objects for the public<sup>163</sup>. A central point in the debate of museum decolonisation concerns the recognition by museums that they are not 'owners', but custodians of those collections. The term 'curator' suggests a more active and engaged role for museums, involving the selection, interpretation and presentation of objects in a broader social and cultural context<sup>164</sup>. This entails an obligation to the peoples who created the objects and histories and their descendants<sup>165</sup>. Museums must essentially stop conceiving of themselves as owners with rights, in favour of a vision

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<sup>160</sup> Interviewee N° 10, Interviewee N° 10 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>161</sup> Mallard, Eggel, and Galvin, 'Global Challenges - Decolonisation'; Macdonald, 'Pausing, Reflection, and Action'.

<sup>162</sup> Aman Sium, Chandni Desai, and Eric Ritskes, 'Towards the "Tangible Unknown": Decolonization and the Indigenous Future', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (16 September 2012), <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18638>.

<sup>163</sup> Lynn Maranda and Bruno Brulon Soares, 'The Predatory Museum', *ICOFOM Study Series*, no. 45 (17 September 2017): 13–20.

<sup>164</sup> McCall and Gray, 'Museums and the "New Museology"'.

<sup>165</sup> Frank Howarth, 'Decolonizing the Museum Mind', *American Alliance of Museums* (blog), 8 October 2018, <https://www.aam-us.org/2018/10/08/decolonizing-the-museum-mind/>.



of custodians with obligations<sup>166</sup>. This is the approach taken by the “Ilaria Alpi” Italian-African Museum when it was dismantled and decided to become a dynamic museum with open archives.

This emphasize the role of curators, but it is not only up to them. It is about enacting an ideological deconstruction of how curatorship and heritage per se are perceived<sup>167</sup>. This requires the participation of different actors, such as members of scientific committees, politicians, but also visitors. It therefore means, for example, not adopting a problematic nature of the concept of “*caring*” per se. Because if misinterpreted it could create a renewed relationship of alterity between those in a situation of need and the helpers. It has to be perceived as a horizontal relationship, otherwise one simply changes terminology, without actually doing anything to modify the vertical relationship that exists currently.

#### 4.5. Stop and limit harmful practices

This last point only emerged from one of the interviews conducted<sup>168</sup>, but it appeared to the author as one of the fundamental and all-encompassing practices to be adopted. Looking at the history of ethnographic museums, it is evident how it is linked to the colonisation and theft of cultural heritage. The display and interpretation of these materials in ethnographic museums perpetuate colonial narratives and stereotypes<sup>169</sup>. For example, many exhibitions keep depicting non-Western cultures as primitive, exotic, and inferior to Western culture<sup>170</sup>. The use of words such as “*primitive*” and “*savage*” reinforces these negative stereotypes and perpetuates harmful colonial attitudes towards subjugated populations throughout history<sup>171</sup>. To stop it is complicated, as it means questioning and revising every detail within one's own performance, opening up to external dialogue, particularly with the source communities. It therefore means reviewing the way things have been done, exhibited and described to date in order to understand whether we are harming or have harmed someone in order to change them. This can be done, for example, by changing a label, removing a piece from the display

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<sup>166</sup> Howarth; Thomas, ‘Museology and Globalization. The Quai Branly Museum’.

<sup>167</sup> Anais Mattez, ‘Cultural Properties of Afghanistan: Colonial Presence, Looting and Restitution in Times of Conflict’ (Presentation during the workshop ‘Bridging epistemic divides in cultural heritage protection: An exercise in confrontation and conversation (8 - 9 May 2023; Badia Fiesolana, Florence’, Florence, 8 May 2023).

<sup>168</sup> Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>169</sup> Ivan Karp, Steven Lavine, and Rockefeller Foundation, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

<sup>170</sup> Allain Bonilla, ‘Decolonial Processes in Art’; Robert Aldrich, ‘Colonial Museums in a Postcolonial Europe’, *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (1 July 2009): 137–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630902981118>.

<sup>171</sup> Fromm, ‘Ethnographic Museums and Intangible Cultural Heritage Return to Our Roots’; Shikoh Shiraiwa, ‘Museological Myths of Decolonization and Neutrality: ICOFOM Symposium’, 2021, 203–7, <http://www.icofom2021.ca/publications/icofom2021-materials.pdf>; Macdonald, ‘Pausing, Reflection, and Action’.

(e.g. done by Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Castello d'Albertis in Genova), telling the story of how the items came to be showcased.

In order to try and stop these practices that have harmed and continue to harm communities, all of the aforementioned minimum standards are needed. Once one becomes aware of its colonial past and the harm that has been done, it is easier to work towards a remediation. What museums for now are usually putting into practice are excuses and attempts at repair, for instance by implementing tokenism or thinking of repairing the damage with repatriations<sup>172</sup>. These take the form of actions such as the return of stolen artefacts and financial compensation that are seen as means to heal the wounds of colonialism<sup>173</sup>. The most important thing, however, is not to get entangled in these methods. Because the harm that has been done can never be taken away or removed<sup>174</sup>. The institution has to change its approach to colonization, otherwise, it ends up operating “*neo-colonial*” actions, continuing to perpetuate the unequal power relations that led to the creation of this situation in the first place<sup>175</sup>.

Decolonisation of museums is a complex and multifaceted process that requires careful consideration and implementation<sup>176</sup>. Although its ultimate goal is to promote equity, justice and inclusivity, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to achieving this goal<sup>177</sup>, as showed in the third chapter. There are museums that most need to open up to a dialogue with source communities, others that need to modernise their membership in order to start overhauling their practices, or others that need to create a critical and dialogical approach with contemporary artists in order to revise the way exhibitions have been carried out so far<sup>178</sup>. Once again, there is no single, all-embracing approach, because if there was, the singularity of the museum itself and the cultures represented in it would not be taken into account. For this reason, the minimum standards can provide a sharable framework for museums wishing to work towards decolonisation in an ethical, responsible and accountable manner. These

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<sup>172</sup> Ariese and Wróblewska, *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums*.

<sup>173</sup> Alessandro Leone, ‘La restituzione delle opere d’arte alle ex colonie | Artribune’, 10 June 2022, <https://www.artribune.com/dal-mondo/2022/06/restituzione-opere-arte-ex-colonie/>; Pdraig McAuliffe, ‘Complicity or Decolonization? Restitution of Heritage from “Global” Ethnographic Museums’, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 15, no. 3 (1 November 2021): 678–89, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijab028>.

<sup>174</sup> Interviewee N° 15, Interviewee N° 15 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>175</sup> Leone, ‘La restituzione delle opere d’arte alle ex colonie | Artribune’; Rivet, ‘Decolonization and Restitution’; Giblin, Ramos, and Grout, ‘Dismantling the Master’s House’.

<sup>176</sup> Mallard, Eggel, and Galvin, ‘Global Challenges - Decolonisation’.

<sup>177</sup> American Alliance of Museums, ‘AAM Code of Ethics for Museums’, *American Alliance of Museums* (blog), 12 December 2017, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums/>.

<sup>178</sup> Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe; Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices; Interviewee N° 5, Interviewee N° 5 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

five practices are intended to serve as a basic, minimal guide for everyone inside a museum, not only for those who work in it, but also for those who visit it.

The five minimum standards(See Figure 2) can help museums set clear and measurable goals for decolonisation and, at the same time, be a guide for visitors in being judges of the performance of museums. This role as controller of the museum's work is in fact also attributed to them in the literature<sup>179</sup>, and should therefore be expanded. By creating minimum standards, applicable in almost all museum contexts, museums themselves can be held accountable for their actions and progress in decolonisation. But the creation of a solid basis could also promote collaborative projects between museums, providing a shared frame of reference. Finally, minimum standards help to achieve a greater degree of transparency towards source communities that can go on to build trust, possibly leading to more collaborations. Subjugated communities have historically been marginalised and exploited by museums and there is a significant power imbalance between museums and these communities. Minimum standards can help museums establish transparent and accountable relationships with source communities, fostering trust, collaboration and ultimately meaningful decolonisation. These, however, aspire to be no more than minimum standards, which can provide a basis on which museums can then build their own, subjective, decolonial approach.

Becoming aware of colonial nature	Train staff on colonial roots of the institution	Becoming aware of the multiplicity of possible narratives within the museum	Questioning the status of object 'owners' to rewrite the role of 'curators'	Stop and limit harmful practices
E.g. Weltmuseums in Vienna and Linden Museum have done it by questioning their colonial roots.	E.g. Linden Museum has created moment of dialogue and education for its staff.	E.g. Museo delle Culture del Mondo Carlo d'Albertis has worked on this by creating collaboration with Hopi communities for give new interpretation to their collection.	E.g. "Ilaria Alpi" Italo-African Museum has worked on the concept of curatorship instead as seeing itself as owners of the collection.	E.g. Pitt Rivers Museum, Linden Museum are working on limiting and stoping practices that could still be harmful for the source communities of their collections.

Figure 2. Summary of the Five variables with examples from ethnographic museums in Europe listed in Annex I.

<sup>179</sup> Stam, 'The Informed Muse'; McCall and Gray, 'Museums and the "New Museology"'.  
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## 5. Conclusions:

### Unlocking current museum practices to release further prospects for decolonization

A large part of the tangible and intangible collections from around the world found in European museum collections today were collected under colonial conditions and often with the use of force. Museum experts and collectors have expanded these colonial ideas and claims not only into collection practices but also into other museum activities<sup>180</sup>. The display and dissemination of knowledge has long been based on Western colonial and racist views, drawing a line between 'us' and 'the other'. Although the intention was to disseminate knowledge of cultures other than Western ones, the way they were narrated and exhibited did nothing but empty different cultures into labels that were anything but representative<sup>181</sup>. These colonial roots have not yet been eliminated. Scholars like Spivak, in fact, argue that the maintenance of these representations derives from the fact that power structures are still present, especially in dialogue and language<sup>182</sup>. Western, European knowledge is still perceived as universal, while the Third World is portrayed as always one step behind<sup>183</sup>.

Looking at these practices through a post-colonial lens, Stanton<sup>184</sup> argues that ethnographic museums analyse different kinds of knowledge, and their collections become means of communication. The expansion of this kind of thinking led already in the late 20th and early 21st century to the restructuring of most collections. The attempt was to move away from the dichotomous view of us-others painted by colonialism<sup>185</sup>.

Following the decolonial impulse a transition transition has taken place piecemeal, and slowly inside museums<sup>186</sup>. Today, request of a change have returned to the public scene also thanks to the Black Lives Matters and Rhodes Must Fall movements. But also because of the renewed interest on the part of some governments such as France in trying to repair the damage done during the colonial era<sup>187</sup>.

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<sup>180</sup> Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 'Staatliche Museen Zu Berlin: Colonialism', Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, accessed 4 May 2023, <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/ethnologisches-museum/collection-research/colonialism/>.

<sup>181</sup> Allain Bonilla, 'Decolonial Processes in Art'.

<sup>182</sup> Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

<sup>183</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

<sup>184</sup> Stanton, 'Understanding Museums - Ethnographic Museums and Collections'.

<sup>185</sup> Britannica, 'Museum - History Museums | Britannica'.

<sup>186</sup> Interviewee N° 9, Interview with expert on museography related to decolonial movements and practices; Interviewee N° 3, Interviewee N° 3 among ethnographic museum workers in Europe.

<sup>187</sup> Anna Pirri, 'La Francia e la restituzione del patrimonio culturale africano | Artribune', 29 November 2018, <https://www.artribune.com/dal-mondo/2018/11/francia-restituzioni-africa/>.

The complexity of the issue has made it difficult to implement single, all-encompassing solutions. Indeed, different practices have developed, branching out into different areas of museum work.

What emerged from the research is the possibility to try to get all museums to take a step towards the post-colonial approach through the creation of minimum standards. According to the author, a museum in order to be able to say that it has begun its decolonisation process, must therefore: become aware of the colonial nature of the museum; train staff on the colonial legacies within the museum; become aware of the multiplicity of possible narratives within the museum; question its status as 'keepers' in order to rewrite its role as "*curator*"; and stop and limit harmful practices. By creating this sharable framework, the author claims, it should lead all museums, even those that do not feel involved, to share the same grounding. The five practices are then intended to serve as a basic and minimal guide for every person inside a museum, not only for those who work in it, but also for those who visit it.

The author believes that they can act as enablers by helping museums to set clear and more objective, and thus measurable goals for decolonisation. This can create a higher degree of accountability of museums and their actions. That could have positive effects on collaborations, and investments in decolonisation projects. Basically, standards help to give an internal and external push to decolonising efforts. In fact, the author hopes that these will reinvigorate internal actions, but also claims from outside. By providing a framework, criticism and thus growth should be facilitated. This should make it clear that, according to the author, these five minimum standards are intended to be nothing more than minimum standards, which can provide a basis on which one can then build one's own, subjective, decolonial approach according to the subjectivity of the museum. Museums should aim to be place where culture, dialogue and social relations can be enhanced<sup>188</sup>.

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<sup>188</sup> Harrison, 'Ideas of Museums in the 1990s'.

## Annex I- List of ethnographic museums and list of actions implemented

Table 1 is meant to be a summarising and more comprehensive means of the work carried out by European ethnographic museums. The information given is derived from the websites of the museums themselves, from the present literature and from the author's reading of the opinions of experts interviewed. It does not aim to be a comprehensive summary of their actions or intentions.

It is only meant to serve as a tool to evaluate the work of the museums mentioned in Chapter 3 with that of some of the other museums in the European region and give to the reader a broader picture.

Table 1. List of 15 European ethnographic museums with implemented actions divided by variable.

Museum	Visibility	Inclusivity	Decentring	Education	Transparency
Museo italo-africano Ilaria Alpi (Rome, Italy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Change in brand new institution;</li> <li>-Temporary exhibition;</li> <li>-Intervention on existing display;</li> <li>-Collaboration with artists;</li> <li>-Open archives;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of different perspective;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Confront of norms and stereotypes;</li> <li>-Openness of curators;</li> <li>-Reimagination of narratives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Openness about colonial past;</li> <li>-Funding projects/research;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Focus on biography of objects;</li> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> <li>-Openness about colonial past;</li> <li>-Online database;</li> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> </ul>
Weltmuseum Wien (Wien, Austria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Temporary exhibitions;</li> <li>-Intervention on existing display;</li> <li>-Use of different perspective;</li> <li>-Collaboration with artists;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of different perspective;</li> <li>-Inclusivity of the language;</li> <li>-Dialogue with source communities;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Openness of curators;</li> <li>-Exhibition order;</li> <li>-Restitution;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offer of patronage of certain objects;</li> <li>-Dialogue: objects-visitors;</li> <li>-Openness about colonial past;</li> <li>-Funding projects/research;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Online database;</li> <li>-Openness about colonial past;</li> </ul>

	<i>-Dialogue with source communities;</i>				
Linden Museum (Stuttgart, Germany)	<i>-Intervention on existing display; -Use of different perspective; -Collaboration with artists; -Temporary exhibition;</i>	<i>-Use of focus and experts groups -Use of native language to describe artifacts; -Dialogue with source communities;</i>	<i>-Openness of curators; -Reimagination of narratives; -Restitution; -Staff training;</i>	<i>-Openness about colonial past; -Funding projects/research; -Dialogue: objects-visitors; -Staff training;</i>	<i>-Online database; -Focus on biography of objects; -Study of the provenance; -Power relations within the institution;</i>
Royal Museum of Central Africa (Turvuren, France)	<i>-Intervention on existing display; -Temporary exhibition; -Collaboration with artists;</i>	<i>-Dialogue with source communities;</i>		<i>-Funding projects/research; -Openness about colonial past;</i>	<i>-Online database;</i>
Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia di Firenze (Florence, Italy)	<i>-Study of the provenance; -Publications -Collaboration with artists</i>	<i>- Use of experts;</i>	<i>-Open to outside criticism; - Openness of curators;</i>	<i>-Championing empathy;</i>	<i>-Re-labelling(certain parts); -Biography of the objects; -Openness about colonial past;</i>
Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Castello d'Albertis (Genova, Italy)	<i>-Temporary exhibitions; -Study of the provenance; -Intervention on existing display;</i>	<i>-Use native language to describe artefacts;</i>	<i>-Exhibition order by geography; -Open to outside criticism;</i>	<i>-Guided tours; -Funding research; Creation of dialogue: visitors-objects</i>	<i>-Biography of the objects; -Study of the provenance; -Deal with authorship;</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Collaboration with artists;</li> <li>-Publications;</li> <li>-Use of different perspectives;</li> <li>-Online database;</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reimagination of narratives;</li> <li>-Confront norms/stereotypes;</li> <li>-Openness of curators;</li> <li>-Restitution;</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Openness about colonial past</li> </ul>
Museu Etnològic i de Cultures del Món de Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Temporary exhibitions;</li> <li>-Intervention on existing display;</li> <li>-Collaboration with artists;</li> <li>-Publications;</li> <li>Use of different perspectives;</li> <li>-Online database;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of experts;</li> <li>-Use native language to describe artefacts;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increase level of comfortness of people who were not included;</li> <li>-Open to outside criticism;</li> <li>-Confront norms and stereotypes;</li> <li>-Openness of curators;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Guided tours;</li> <li>-Championing empathy;</li> <li>-Challenge discrimination;</li> <li>-Support human and equal rights;</li> <li>-Funding research and projects;</li> <li>-Creation of dialogue: visitors-objects;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Openness about colonial past;</li> <li>-Biography of the objects;</li> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> <li>-Deal with authorship;</li> <li>-Power relations within the institution;</li> </ul>
Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford, United Kingdom)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Temporary exhibitions;</li> <li>-Intervention on existing display;</li> <li>-Collaboration with artists;</li> <li>-Publications;</li> <li>Use of different perspectives;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of experts;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Open to outside criticism;</li> <li>-Change terminology;</li> <li>-Openness of curators;</li> <li>-Restitution;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Guided tours;</li> <li>-Funding projects and research;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Biography of the objects;</li> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> <li>-Deal with authorship;</li> <li>-Decision making process;</li> <li>-Power relations within the institution;</li> </ul>



					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Openness about colonial past;</li> <li>-Online database;</li> </ul>
Museum Rietberg (Zuric, Switzerland)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Temporary exhibitions;</li> <li>-Intervention on existing display;</li> <li>-Collaboration with artists;</li> <li>-Use of different perspectives;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of experts;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increase level of comfortness of people who were not included;</li> <li>-Open to outside criticism;</li> <li>-Reimagination of narratives;</li> <li>-Confront norms and stereotypes;</li> <li>-Openness of curators;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Championing empathy;</li> <li>-Challenge discrimination;</li> <li>-Support human and equal rights;</li> <li>-Funding research;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Biography of the objects;</li> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> <li>-Online database;</li> </ul>
Swedish National Museums of World Culture, Världskulturmuseerna (Gothenburg, Sweden)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Temporary exhibitions;</li> <li>-Intervention on existing display;</li> <li>-Publication;</li> <li>-Use of different perspectives;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of experts;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Exhibition order;</li> <li>-Open to outside criticism;</li> <li>-Reimagination of narratives;</li> <li>-Change of terminology;</li> <li>-Openness of curators;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Guided tours;</li> <li>-Funding projects;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Re-labelling;</li> <li>-Biography of the objects;</li> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> <li>-Decision making process;</li> <li>-Power relations within the institution;</li> </ul>
Museum of Archology and Antropology (Cambridge, United Kingdom)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Temporary exhibitions;</li> <li>-Intervention on existing display;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of experts;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Open to outside criticism;</li> <li>-Reimagination of narratives;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Guided tours;</li> <li>-Funding research;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Biography of the objects;</li> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Collaboration with artists;</li> <li>-Publications;</li> <li>-Use of different perspectives;</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Confront norms;</li> <li>-Restitution;</li> <li>-Openness of curators;</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Deal with authorship;</li> <li>-Power relations within the institution;</li> <li>-Openness about colonial past;</li> </ul>
British Museum (London, United Kingdom)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Temporary exhibitions;</li> <li>-Intervention on existing display;</li> <li>-Collaboration with artists;</li> <li>-Publications;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of experts;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Restitution;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Guided tours;</li> <li>-Funding research;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Biography of the objects;</li> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> </ul>
Museo delle Culture del Mondo, MUDEC (Milan, Italy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Temporary exhibitions;</li> <li>-Intervention on existing display;</li> <li>-Collaboration with artists;</li> <li>-Publications;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of experts;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reimagination of narratives;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Funding research;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Biography of the objects;</li> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> <li>-Online database;</li> </ul>
Musée du quai Branly (Paris, France)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Change in a brand new institution;</li> <li>-Temporary exhibition;</li> <li>-Intervention on existing display;</li> <li>-Collaboration with artists;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of experts;</li> <li>-Use of native languages to describe artefacts;</li> <li>-Inclusive hiring process;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Exhibition order;</li> <li>-Open to outside criticism;</li> <li>-Reimagination of narratives;</li> <li>-Confront norms;</li> <li>-Restitution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Funding research;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Biography of the objects;</li> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> <li>-Talk about bad acquisition practices;</li> <li>-Deal with authorship;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Publications;</li> <li>-Use of different perspectives;</li> </ul>				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Openness about colonial past;</li> <li>-Power relations within the institution;</li> <li>-Re-labelling;</li> </ul>
Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden (Leiden, Netherlands)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Temporary exhibitions;</li> <li>-Publications;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Use of different perspectives;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increase level of comfortness of people who were not included;</li> <li>-Reimagination of narratives;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Guided tours;</li> <li>-Funding research;</li> <li>-Challenge discrimination;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Study of the provenance;</li> <li>-Openness about colonial past;</li> <li>-Biography of the objects;</li> <li>-Online database;</li> </ul>

## Annex II –Information about the Interviewees

Table 2 aims to provide general information concerning the interviews conducted in order to support their validity. It therefore shows the position of the interviewee in the museum, the location of the museum, the date of the interview, the length of the interview and the method. The privacy granted to the interviewees was considered necessary so that more critical reflections could be obtained not only on the institution to which the interviewees belonged, but also on other European institutions. Each interviewee was asked to sign a privacy consent form which can be found in Annex 3. The author is keen to mention that before conducting the interviews, investigative conversations were carried out with a few museum institutions and experts. What was learnt from these conversations revealed in the author's eyes the tensions and emotions within the museum and especially among the curators. This led to the creation of a semi-structured questionnaire that was more neutral (see Annex 4). The information gathered during these off-records conversations influenced the author's work, but for reasons of privacy and ethicality they were not used as a source of information.

*Table 2. General information about the Interviewees saying: general position covered; country of employment affiliation; date of the interview; length of the interview; how was conducted the interview.*

Interviewee N°	Position	State	Date	Length and modality
1	High - management	Belgium	16/11/2022	1 hours and 6 minutes; Online
2	High - management	Italy	9/11/2022	55 minutes; Online
3	High - management	Italy	10/11/2022	3 hours and 10 minutes; Online
4	High - management	Germany	03/03/2023	48 minutes; Online
5	High - management	Spain	01/03/2023	55 minutes; Online

6	High - management	United Kingdom	23/03/2023	54 minutes; Online
7	High - management	Italy	19/01/2023	1 hour and 5 minutes; Online
8	High - management	Austria	14/12/2022	48 minutes; Online
9	Expert	Netherlands	10/03/2023	44 minutes; Online
10	High - management	Switzerland	28/03/2023	52 minutes; Online
11	High – management	Switzerland	04/04/2023	50 minutes; Online
12	High - management	Italy	26/10/2022	50 minutes; Online
13-14	Expert – management	Sweden	29/03/2023	1 hour and 13 minutes; Online
15	High - management	United Kingdom	23/03/2023	54 minutes; Online

### **Annex III-Privacy Consent Form**

Below is the Privacy Consent form that interviewees were asked to sign before the interviews were conducted. This was made for the respondents to sign with the intention of guaranteeing their privacy so as to allow them more freedom in providing the author with a critical view of the work of the institute in which they work and other European institutes. The questionnaire was formulated in English and an Italian translation was provided to the interviewees in the Italian museums, both versions are given below. By sending the privacy consent form, the author wished to inform the participant about: the purpose of the interview, confidentiality and anonymity, the right to withdraw from the interview and data management.

## Interview Consent Form (EN)

Research project title: (De)colonization of Ethnographic Museums in Europe

Research investigator: Matilde Dani

Research Participants name:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the following information and then sign this form to certify that you approve that:

- The interview will be recorded and notes will be produced;
- If asked you will be sent the notes and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors;
- The notes of the interview will be analysed by Matilde Dani as research investigator;
- Access to the interview notes will be limited to Matilde Dani and academic colleagues and researchers with whom she might collaborate as part of the research process;
- Any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets can be anonymized if you don't wish to be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed;
- Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval;



## Quotation Agreement

**I also understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:**

Agree	To
	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.
	I request anonymity.

All or part of the content of your interview may be used:

- In academic papers, policy papers, news articles or blogs
- In an archive of the project

By signing this form I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the Interview consent form;
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Full name

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Participants Signature

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Researcher Signature

---

Date

---

### *Contact information*

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Name of researcher: Matilde Dani

Tel: (+39) 3385288929

E-mail: [matilde.dani@eui.eu](mailto:matilde.dani@eui.eu)

You can also contact Matilde Dani supervisor:

Name of researcher: Diane Stone

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## Modulo di consenso all'intervista (IT)

Titolo del progetto di ricerca: (De) colonizzazione dei Musei Etnografici Europei

Studente ricercatore: Matilde Dani

Nome dei partecipanti alla ricerca:

Grazie per aver accettato di essere intervistato nell'ambito del progetto di ricerca di cui sopra. Le procedure etiche per la ricerca accademica richiedono che gli intervistati accettino esplicitamente di essere intervistati e che le informazioni contenute nell'intervista vengano utilizzate. Questo modulo di consenso è necessario per assicurarci che lei comprenda lo scopo del suo coinvolgimento e che accetti le condizioni della sua partecipazione. La invitiamo pertanto a leggere le seguenti informazioni e a firmare il presente modulo per certificare la sua approvazione:

- L'intervista sarà registrata e saranno presi appunti;
- Se richiesto, le verranno inviati gli appunti e le verrà data la possibilità di correggere eventuali errori;
- Gli appunti dell'intervista saranno analizzati da Matilde Dani in qualità di ricercatore;
- L'accesso alla trascrizione dell'intervista sarà limitato a Matilde Dani e ai colleghi accademici e ricercatori con cui potrebbe collaborare nell'ambito del processo di ricerca;
- Qualsiasi contenuto sintetico dell'intervista, o citazioni dirette dall'intervista, reso disponibile attraverso pubblicazioni accademiche o altri canali accademici, può essere reso anonimo se non si desidera essere identificati, e si farà attenzione a garantire che non vengano rivelate altre informazioni dell'intervista che potrebbero identificare la persona;
- Qualsiasi variazione delle condizioni di cui sopra avverrà solo con la sua esplicita approvazione;

## *Accordo sulle citazioni*

**Sono consapevole che le mie parole possono essere citate direttamente. Per quanto riguarda la citazione, si prega di apporre la propria sigla accanto alle affermazioni con cui si è d'accordo:**

<b>Firma per il consenso</b>	
	Desidero rivedere gli appunti, le trascrizioni o altri dati raccolti durante la ricerca e relativi alla mia partecipazione.
	Accetto di essere citat* direttamente.
	Accetto di essere citato direttamente se il mio nome non viene pubblicato e viene utilizzato un nome inventato (pseudonimo).
	Acconsento alla pubblicazione da parte dei ricercatori di documenti contenenti mie citazioni.
	Richiedo che mi venga garantito l'anonimato.

Il contenuto dell'intervista può essere utilizzato in tutto o in parte:

- In documenti accademici, documenti politici, articoli di cronaca o blog.
- In un archivio del progetto

Firmando questo modulo accetto che:

- Sto partecipando volontariamente a questo progetto. Sono consapevole di non essere obbligato a partecipare e di poter interrompere l'intervista in qualsiasi momento;
- L'intervista trascritta o estratti di essa possono essere utilizzati come descritto sopra;
- Ho letto il modulo di consenso all'intervista;
- Non mi aspetto di ricevere alcun beneficio o pagamento per la mia partecipazione;

- Posso richiedere una copia della trascrizione della mia intervista e posso apportare le modifiche che ritengo necessarie per garantire l'efficacia di qualsiasi accordo sulla riservatezza;
- Ho avuto la possibilità di porre qualsiasi domanda e sono consapevole di essere libero di contattare il ricercatore per qualsiasi domanda futura.

Nome per esteso

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Firma del partecipante

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Firma del ricercatore

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Data

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### *Informazioni di contatto*

Per ulteriori domande o dubbi su questo studio, si prega di contattare:

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Potete anche contattare il supervisore (nome del ricercatore):

Nome del ricercatore: Diane Stone

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#### **Annex IV- Semi structured questionnaire**

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured form; the author created a set of basic questions divided into two sections. The first focused on the respondent's opinion of the state of affairs and other museums in Europe. The second focused on gathering information and opinions on the institution where the respondent works. The list of questions was used as a guideline for the interviews, it was not followed slavishly. This is because some of the information requested was first gathered by the author through literature or websites. This also provided the author and the interviewee with flexibility so that certain topics relevant to the museum institute in question could be explored. These kinds of interviews were participant-centred, meaning that they prioritised the interviewee's perspective and experiences. This approach was useful to explore sensitive or personal topics, as it allowed the interviewee to guide the conversation.

These interviews were conducted in English, Italian and Spanish, so the three questionnaires used as a basis can be consulted below, the author would like to emphasise that there are no changes between questionnaires, it is only a translation of the English version.

## Questionnaire

(EN)

### General Questions

1. In your opinion, what does decolonising a museum mean? What practices should be practised?
2. In your opinion, is the situation of ethnographic museums in Europe decolonised? And What, if any, have been the greatest advances in the decolonisation of European collections?
3. Which are the best museums in the field of decolonisation in the world in your opinion?
4. What are the reasons for why museums do not decolonise?
5. Do you think that the process of decolonisation is an expensive process in terms of resources, time and research?
6. How bureaucratically difficult is it to transition one's collections under a decolonised perspective?
7. Do you think it is important from the point of view of cultural diplomacy to have a decolonising approach within an ethnographic museum?

### Questions about the museum specifically

8. What do you consider to be your museum's strengths and weaknesses?
9. What kind of message do you want to convey to your visitors about the history of the objects in your collections?
10. How are the objects presented and in what language?
11. What is your level of research on the reconstruction of the biography of the objects you have in your collection?
12. In your opinion, does the museum have a good level of transparency regarding the origin of the objects?
13. Do you think that there are objects in your collections that could cause tension because of their origin, perhaps linked to a colonising past?
14. Have you ever received requests for restitution from other organisations or states? If so, what has been your approach to them?
15. Have you established contacts or collaborations with countries/bodies whose artefacts you hold? If yes, of what kind?
16. Thinking about what you think decolonising a museum implies, could you make improvements in the museum you work in?

## Questionario

(IT)

### Domande generali

1. Secondo lei cosa significa decolonizzare un museo? Quali pratiche dovrebbero essere praticate?
2. Secondo lei la situazione dei musei etnografici in Europa può dirsi decolonizzata? E quali sono stati, se ci sono, i maggiori progressi nella decolonizzazione delle collezioni europee?
3. Quali sono i migliori musei nel campo della decolonizzazione nel mondo secondo lei?
4. Quali possono essere le ragioni per cui i musei non si decolonizzano?
5. Ritieni che il processo di decolonizzazione sia un processo dispendioso in termini di risorse, tempo e ricerca?
6. Quanto è difficile a livello burocratico transitare le proprie collezioni sotto una prospettiva decolonizzata?
7. Ritieni che dal punto di vista della diplomazia culturale sia importante avere un approccio decolonizzatore all'interno di un museo etnografico?

### Domande sul museo nello specifico

8. Quali ritiene siano i punti di forza e i suoi punti deboli di questo museo?
9. Quale tipo di messaggio volete trasmettere ai vostri visitatori sulla storia degli oggetti che avete nelle vostre collezioni?
10. Come vengono presentati gli oggetti e in che lingua?
11. Qual è il vostro livello di ricerca sulla ricostruzione della biografia degli oggetti che voi avete in collezione?
12. Secondo lei il museo ha un buon livello di trasparenza per quanto riguarda origine dei beni?
13. Lei ritiene che nelle vostre collezioni vi siano oggetti che possano causare tensioni vista la loro provenienza, magari legata ad un passato colonizzatore?
14. Vi sono mai arrivate richieste di restituzione da parte di altri enti o stati? Se sì quale è stato l'approccio ad esse?
15. Avete avviato dei contatti o collaborazioni con paesi/enti di cui detenete alcuni artefatti? Se sì, di che genere?
16. Pensando a ciò che implica secondo lei decolonizzare un museo, si potrebbero fare dei miglioramenti nel museo in cui lavora?

## Cuestionario

(ES)

### Preguntas generales

1. En su opinión, ¿qué significa descolonizar un museo? ¿Qué prácticas deberían aplicarse?
2. En su opinión, ¿está descolonizada la situación de los museos etnográficos en Europa? Y ¿Cuáles han sido, en su caso, los mayores avances en la descolonización de las colecciones europeas?
3. En su opinión, ¿cuáles son los mejores museos del mundo en el ámbito de la descolonización?
4. ¿Cuáles son las razones por las que los museos no descolonizan?
5. ¿Cree que el proceso de descolonización es un proceso costoso en términos de recursos, tiempo e investigación?
6. ¿Hasta qué punto es burocráticamente difícil la transición de las colecciones propias bajo una perspectiva descolonizada?
7. ¿Cree que es importante desde el punto de vista de la diplomacia cultural tener un enfoque descolonizador dentro de un museo etnográfico?

### Preguntas sobre el museo específico

8. ¿Cuáles considera que son los puntos fuertes y débiles de su museo?
9. ¿Qué tipo de mensaje quiere transmitir a sus visitantes sobre la historia de los objetos de sus colecciones?
10. ¿Cómo se presentan los objetos y en qué idioma?
11. ¿Cuál es su nivel de investigación sobre la reconstrucción de la biografía de los objetos que tiene en su colección?
12. En su opinión, ¿tiene el museo un buen nivel de transparencia en cuanto al origen de los objetos?
13. ¿Cree que hay objetos en sus colecciones que podrían causar tensiones debido a su origen, quizás vinculado a un pasado colonizador?
14. ¿Han recibido alguna vez solicitudes de restitución de otras organizaciones o Estados? En caso afirmativo, ¿cuál ha sido su respuesta?
15. ¿Ha establecido contactos o colaboraciones con países u organismos cuyos objetos conserva? En caso afirmativo, ¿de qué tipo?
16. Pensando en lo que, en su opinión, implica descolonizar un museo, ¿podría introducir mejoras en el museo en el que trabaja?

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