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## Coloniality and Contextuality<sup>1</sup>

The past decade has seen the rapid growth of the discourse of decolonisation. It reminds me of the 1970s when cultural democracy was in popular parlance. What is common for both is that most of the discursive arguments are from the Global North, especially Western Europe, the epicentre of colonial self. The recent Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has come as a challenge to the apologists and revisionists. For the BLM is about rights holders. It is about legacies, understanding contextual histories, and cultural, economic, social and environmental justice. For all those liberal Global North Charters and Declarations that talk about human rights without adequate emphasis on cultural rights, fundamental rethinking is needed. What may work for the Global North, does not necessarily work for the rest of the world. This is one of the fundamental premises of all forms of decolonisation. We all appreciate and learn from the thinking and paradigms of the Global North. The challenge is to find a blended discourse that is not dominated by the former Metropolitan centres, but brings out the best from all quarters. Perhaps the progressive framework is the UN Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030. They address the non-binary of both Global North and South. For instance, not only the global economy is now all integrated but most importantly climate change affects all of us. For instance, the melting of the Arctic ice caps directly impacts on Small Island Development States, with rising sea levels, such as Tuvalu and Kiribati on the other side of the world in the Pacific. The devastation of COVID 19 has no borders, a lesson well learnt.

The binary of the discussion on Coloniality, its embeddedness, and contextuality over the decades, needs to be interrogated from centuries of changing hegemonic agenda from the Metropolitan establishment of the European colonial powers. It also needs to be interrogated in the elite portals of the Global South where an upwardly mobile middle class could strangle decolonisation. The collusion of elite politics of the colonisers and colonised is a rarely addressed relationship in museology. Its legacy endures. For instance, it is not enough to question institutions such as the British Museum alone as it influenced frozen in time museums in India and elsewhere but also extends its neo-colonial arm through consultancies that attempt to ‘modernise’

the museums in the former colonies. Millions of dollars have been spent by the Indian government to hire major British establishments to build the capacity of museums in India, perpetuating the colonial paradigm. While, it provided valuable outside exposure to the personnel in India, they returned to their home museums within a political, bureaucratic and socio-economic context that precluded them from applying all the valuable lessons learnt. In fact, an evaluation of the British Museum consultancies found that the benefits were at best marginal. Now the majority of parachute consultants largely based in the cities have a strangle hold on the generous budgets of the Indian Government. They at best, with the occasional exception, tend to cut and paste from the West and project manage vendors of physical infrastructure to build or develop flash museum architecture and designs without contextual relevance and development. They mainly perpetuate coloniality in its contemporary manifestations.

My initiation into the dialectic of coloniality and contextuality began in 1985/86 when I was asked to take up the coordination of what became the seminal affirmation action program for Indigenous Peoples in Australian museums and heritage domains. Anthropologists and archaeologists argued that I was 'neither white nor black' and that I was educated in India, and that I should not be heading the program. Those were the days when a PhD from Oxbridge, core of "Mother England", assured a university job in Australia. Britishness, whatever it was, was quintessential for someone to become a Vice Chancellor in Australia until the 1980s. Things have progressed considerably and Australian museums and universities are setting up some of the global trends. Fortunately, I was appointed at the recommendation of Aboriginal Educators on the National Aboriginal Education Committee of Australia. My position was funded initially and overseen by two eminent museologists of Australia: Late Don McMichael, founding Director of the National Museum of Australia and Late Dr David Ride, former Director of the Western Australian Museum. It was under the latter's leadership that the term or the notion of Aboriginal Keeping Place was initially conceptualised in Australia. Both Anglo and white and serious scholars but with much needed empathy in the gradual decolonisation of Australian museums from its colonial and White Australia policy days. They were invited to follow up on the establishment of the program by the then Indigenous Advisory Committee to the Council of the National Museum of Australia. The argument validating my role came from a white, British and Anglo archaeologist, Wilfred Showcross, from the Australian National University, who said that the initiative is important as I was 'neither white nor black'. He argued that I belonged to the 'third ethnicity'. He strongly believed that it was necessary to move forward outside the racial binary of Australia. I was privileged to have as the Chairperson of the Program Advisory Committee, another Anglo Australian, late Professor John Mulvaney, the first archaeologist to excavate in Australia, breaking the tradition of digging only in Europe.

My emphasis on race and ethnicity here is that they are not simple nor oppositional binaries. It is in the liminal space across the divides that we shadowbox and keep searching for the process of decolonisation.

Coming back to Vienna, the majority of participants in this ICOM Austria Seminar are young people from Austria and Europe. I share with you the beginnings of my journey as a museologist and heritage specialist, one of the first coloured or black persons working at a decision making level in the respective heritage domains of Australia. I was then closer in age to the young people here. The point is that the binaries of cultural borders, be they racial, ethnic, colour, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, faith or whatever, create an oppositional discourse. It is important that the way forward is one that honours mutual respect and is evidence based, providing multivocality within the framework of contemporary pasts. Dissent and informed debate is critical. Museums and academies need to come together to enable public intellectuals to explore layers of significance in our histories that inform present day heritage manifestations in our cultural values. While political correctness and institutional opportunism result in an ephemeral behavioural change, it does little to bring about attitudinal change that is sustainable in the long run. It is not only about sharing authority, it is also parting from a position of power, which museums and academies rarely do wherever they are. I argue that the forums centring the First Voice of primary stakeholder community groups is quintessential for the participation of the rights holders. It is for an opening up of the curatorial power and authority of the collection/s holder. It is to establish a more holistic appreciation of heritage, one of the many preconditions for talking about decolonization. I also argue that decolonisation is not only a concern for the Western European museums. You take for example India where museums have frozen in time collections managed by bureaucracies. Coming back to the young Austrians and future museologists present here, if I may, I invite their attention to rethinking the museum as a civic and inclusive space. Transformations are taking place across the world and we must be prepared to share and learn from comparative experiences.

I thank ICOM Austria for this opportunity to speak here. Vienna has a particular significance for my discursive position here. If you will, I will ground myself in the local realities. Indeed, I do have a pedigree with Vienna, a journey like no other in addressing inclusion and cultural diversity in museums. When I first started working in the heritage field more than four decades ago, a couple specialising in rock art from Vienna were in the camp in the jungles of central India during excavations. Now the place is a World Heritage site, Bhimbetka. Soon after I was in Vienna to study the contribution of the University of Vienna to Buddhist studies. I also managed to visit and learn about human values from Mira Ben (Madeleine Slade), who retreated

to an idyllic place outside Vienna. She was one of the most prominent disciples of Mahatma Gandhi. I also immersed myself, experiencing the Christmas markets in the heart of the city, which in 1978 were a significant part of the rural urban continuation of Austrian village cultures and an integral part of the intangible heritage of Vienna and its hinterland. What was invaluable to a young Indian researcher visiting Vienna was more than the World Music City. It was the understanding of urbanism in all its complexity, a necessary context for the museums of today in either the well-known cultural precinct, the MuseumsQuartier, or beyond that are served by ICOM Austria.

Years later, I was privileged to work with the local team in organising the opening plenary of keynote speakers for the Triennial General Conference of ICOM in 2007. Most importantly, as the Vice President of ICOM, especially with the support of the then President, Treasurer and Executive Board of ICOM, I formulated and launched the Youth Participation Program with bursaries. It has now permeated the entire ICOM with more than a thousand young people transforming the aging profile of ICOM membership. It was also the time when we had the largest ever concurrent session at an ICOM meeting. It was organised by the ICOM Cross Cultural Taskforce that I chaired. It was this session that finally led to the adoption of the ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter during the Triennial General Conference of ICOM Shanghai 2010. The youth initiative, the final report of the ICOM Reform Taskforce and the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force meeting blended together with excellence and brought about several transformations of ICOM. Responding to *Intergenerational Challenges* on the 22 August 2007, Dr Bruno C. Brulon Soares, the current President of ICOM ICOFOM, the main international forum for museological debate, had the following to say as one of the first youth bursary holders:

- *My participation in the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force (CCTF) session consisted of a presentation of myself and my views on the museum field as well as my perspectives on the CCTF group.*
- *The presentation included a summary of Museology in Latin America and the introduction of ICOFOM LAM – a Regional Committee of ICOFOM in Latin America. Its main purpose is to discuss the museological theory in Latin America, considering its own issues and the reality of the countries in this region of the world. ICOFOM LAM convenes annual meetings in different places analysing and discussing the context of cultural diversity that is, many times, blended in the region.*
- *I had the chance to introduce the Brazilian initiative of the National Movement of Young Museology and the Electronic Magazine Young Museology that was created by young professionals*

*and students of the Museology School in the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO).*

- *The importance of this initiative of the CCTF is to begin a dialogue with the diverse youth views of the Museum field and it is a privilege to be part of this global dialogue.*
- *Last but not least, I thank the opportunity to be side by side with such great young museologists that were, as much as myself, challenged to become part of this dialogue.<sup>2</sup>*

The current debate on the Museum definition has an important legacy from Vienna. If the Santiago de Chile Declaration launched the decolonisation of museums in 1972, it was ICOM 2007 that adopted the major shakeup of the ICOM Statutes and especially incorporating intangible heritage and cultural continuity into the current definition. It was enabled by the ICOM Austria hosts who worked diligently to bring together participants from all corners of the world, both the Global North and the South, into an intercultural dialogue and especially for the first time in ICOM new and energetic youth voices.

More recently, it was a privilege to give the plenary speech in Vienna at the Conference of the Asia-Europe Museum Network (ASEMUS) in 2014 on the theme Exploring Borders. The ASEMUS focus was on inclusion and its significance for the rethinking of former metropolitan collections of Europe and in doing so arguing for a seamless engagement with the contextual relevance of where they originated.<sup>3</sup> It was then a pleasure three years later to be a guest for the opening of the revamped Welt Museum. Its Director, Dr Steven Engelsman, who oversaw the transformation of the institution, has a doctorate in mathematics and logic. He is neither an anthropologist nor archaeologist, the conventional disciplines that inform ethnographic or now rebranded world museums. He shared a situation with me, being from outside the disciplinary constraints. He brought in different perspectives to the changes in many museums across Europe through open dialogue and critical engagement.

On the eve of Austrian National Day (25 October 2017) the Weltmuseum – World Museum of Vienna opened its doors to showcase its cultural treasures. The Federal President of Austria Alexander van der Bellen, a former politician of the Green Party, standing on the podium at Heldenplatz, called for harmony in community and global peace. What is significant is that the balcony from which Hitler made his “Anschluss” speech in March 1938 was right next to the stage. That was about hate and war; this about love and peace. A powerful and symbolic moment for the decolonisation of spaces, places and museums. The inauguration was followed by cultural performances seamlessly connected with the cosmopolitan nature of the museum collections.



**Fig. 1** Vienna is emerging as one of the most vibrant multicultural cities in Europe despite the wider European opposition to refugees and immigrants. Performances by Indian and South African dancers, Sandhya Raju and Noma Nkwali, from the very place at Heldenplatz where Hitler gave his well-known Anschluss speech is symbolic of the triumph of democracy and multiculturalism over fascism.

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A scintillating fusion of Kuchipudi dance by Sandhya Raju, from where I come from, and Indian hip-hop by Akilesh Kesavan enthralled the audience.

Unlike most West European countries, the majority of the Viennese collections were not acquired through colonial officers and scientists. There are some exceptions. There are those acquired through third parties with questionable colonial legacies. The Austrian emperors had a keen interest in understanding the world through art and artefacts and paid large sums of money on the market. This interest in understanding diverse cultures is intact among the natives of Vienna even now.

Museum leadership, such as the one at the Weltmuseum, embraced a systematic approach in developing an aspirational state-of-the-art 21st century museum. First a catalogue of significant objects was researched with source communities and published. Then the narratives were researched and teased out from each select object/collection to create an experience that is educational, and visitor centred. Careful research and conservation measures were ensured. The Vienna administration endeavoured to hire a balanced mix of in-house specialists working full time, critical for the sustainability of the project, and international experts and consultants, with adequate funding. This is the approach of the diverse museums in Vienna and especially in the MuseumsQuartier. It is a beginning. They have the potential to become critical focal points for quality tourism and enhance Vienna's GDP and to generate employment in both the formal and informal sectors and attain the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In the past couple of years, I have had the privilege of working with the Mayor's Office of Vienna on the ongoing challenges and transformations of the World Heritage City of Vienna. It evolved on the Danube River in eastern Austria. It developed from early Celtic and Roman settlements into a medieval and Baroque city. It eventually became the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was the leading European music centre, with outstanding composers and musicians such as Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. The architectural ensembles of Vienna are outstanding. Baroque mansions and gardens. The late 19th-century Ringstraße ensemble lined with grand



**Fig. 2** The 1.2 km long Karl Marx Hof is symbolic of Red Vienna. It includes a museum on the history and memory of the place. © A. Galla

buildings, monuments and parks; and the Gründerzeit constructions from the beginning of the modern period. It was added to the World Heritage List for the following criteria of the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention:

*The urban and architectural qualities of the Historic Centre of Vienna bear outstanding witness to a continuing interchange of values throughout the second millennium.*

*Three key periods of European cultural and political development – the Middle Ages, the Baroque period, and the Gründerzeit – are exceptionally well illustrated by the urban and architectural heritage of the Historic Centre of Vienna.*

*Since the 16th century Vienna has been universally acknowledged to be the musical capital of Europe.<sup>4</sup>*

The surprising aspect of Vienna that I learnt about is the social housing that is used by nearly 25% of the population. It is also called the Red City because of its socialist character over the past century. It is the most humane to residents. Reasonably priced rentals. Maintained by the City Administration. This social consciousness is commendable in Europe. Vienna is also the fastest growing city in Central Europe. Given its human rights approach and the welcoming of refugees and migrants, the diversification of the population is organic and inclusive. It is also one of the main headquarters of the UN organisations. Vienna now has a diverse population that brings with it a range of performing arts and musical traditions. These are not just transplanted forms, but emerging hybrids and fusions nurtured by the creativity of the city. A national multicultural festival and a World Music event seem apt during summer months, especially in the 150-year-old ice skating rink near the Konzerthaus. Vienna

is a dynamic and lively city where a range of arts, culture and heritage traditions have transformed and informed creative Vienna.

So how does the city deal with the changing demographics and emerging neighbourhoods in the 21st century? Relevance to contemporary populations is critical for encouraging commitment to conservation from the immediate stakeholders. Changes can be challenging. The conflicts between conservation and development are universal. If you look at the history of World Heritage Sites in Danger, you would be mistaken to think that the situation is mainly the concern of countries of the South, so-called developing or low economic indicator countries. It may come as a surprise that one of the best-preserved World Heritage cities, Vienna, is under scrutiny for the maintenance of its characteristic skyline. The Mayor of Vienna, Dr Michael Ludwig, decided to take a constructive way forward – that is to seek the comparative experience of other World Heritage cities, especially in Europe. The findings will also inform the long-awaited drafting of the management plan for the historic core of Vienna. He emphasised that protecting and managing its cultural heritage are central tasks for Vienna. “The City of Vienna invests heavily in preserving the historic city centre and protecting its heritage of cultural assets. Vienna is a living city in full development – it is not a museum. We need to focus on combining conservation and development.”<sup>5</sup>

Over fifty representatives from 25 World Heritage cities came together in Vienna, 13–15 February 2019, under the rubric of the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC). Amsterdam, Berlin, Bordeaux, Bruges, Brussels, Budapest, Dubrovnik, Krakow, Prague, Riga and Warsaw, Baku, Moscow, Istanbul, St. Petersburg and Tel Aviv participated. China and Mexico also sent representatives. They met in the Town Hall sharing the different challenges and approaches for safeguarding heritage elements in their cities. President of the Vienna Provincial Parliament, Ernst Woller, summed up the proceedings facing World Heritage Cities: “Cities are home to more than half of the world’s population. Many of these cities also have World Heritage Sites that require protection. What is more, almost all cities are undergoing rapid growth and dynamic development, which needs to be reconciled with World Heritage preservation. Cities bear social responsibility and have to remain living, liveable habitats for everyone who lives there.”<sup>6</sup>

Maria Vassilakou, then Deputy Mayor and Executive City Councillor for Urban Planning in Vienna, explained: “The City of Vienna is aware of its valuable heritage and does its very best to guarantee the protection of the city’s priceless cultural and architectural assets. At the same time, more and more people are attracted by the high quality of life Vienna offers and choose to live, work or study here. Reconciling these various tasks is a challenge, but Vienna is not the only city facing this challenge. The



**Fig. 3** Representatives of World Heritage cities signed The Vienna Declaration – Preservation, Development and Management of World Heritage in Dynamic Cities on 15 February 2019.

©Alexandra Kromus PID. One of the first systematic attempts to decolonise heritage discourse is through the process and production of the volume entitled *World Heritage: Benefits Beyond Borders* (Ed.) Amareswar Galla, Cambridge University Press and UNESCO Publishing, 2012. After a desk audit revealed that a substantial number of publications were by scholars and experts from the Global North, the volume included 26 case studies by 30 experts and scholars from both the Global North and South and the contributors spoke 129 languages spread across the linguistic diversity of the world.

high number of participants at the conference shows quite impressively how many cities are committed to finding a way to reconcile growth and preservation.”<sup>7</sup>

It is useful to recall how Vietnam decided to best ensure a balance between two non-negotiables – Conservation and Development. It did not see them as either/or options. But rather the country decided to build on the capacity of responsible institutions to upskill and build their ability to promote Sustainable Heritage Development. It was one of the few countries in Asia to address Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and will do well with SDGs. As the champion of the Red City Vienna, Mayor Dr Michael Ludwig eloquently argues that no city is a museum frozen in time. Perhaps we need to extend the World Heritage discourse beyond the city as an artefact



**Fig. 4** MAK, a Design Museum, interrogates its collections focussing on meaning. Lacing Up the Body (MAK), Spot the Tree of Life motif unravels the design of corset, gender and male gaze.

to the city as a living organism subject to the processes of urbanism, and in doing so integrate the missions of its museums. The paradigm shift to urbanism as a dynamic process would enable Vienna, for example, to address SDGs and make a greater effort at documenting and safeguarding its intangible heritage as it evolves, providing a dynamic profile of Vienna. It has all the basic groundwork in place. It is the interdisciplinary and holistic approaches that are needed. I would even go a step further and propose that the whole of Vienna could be considered as a historical cultural landscape or ecomuseum or a series of interconnected ecomuseums. This is a challenge I pose to all the young people here. It would help you all to scope, explore and interrogate your sense of place in Vienna as we move into the third decade of the Twenty-first century.

Relevance, living heritage and interdisciplinary thinking in education and cultural democracy from the early 20th century transformed and mainstreamed design to improve life. One of the most well-known schools which purveys this mindset is the Bauhaus school with the manifesto “Thinking the World Anew”. The Bauhaus Centenary in 2019 interrogated the heritage of design and investigated how changing values inform innovation, inspiration and creativity. The MAK design museum in Vienna was host to the Design Biennale in 2019 on *Changing Values*. The MAK Conference “The Vienna Biennale for Change: Brave New Virtues. Shaping Our Digital World” focussed on brave visions on handling artificial intelligence and new technologies, on shaping innovative (urban) ways of work, on new ways of living (together), and on responsible consumption.” Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, General Director of the MAK, initiator and head of the Biennale, states: “With the possibilities of art, design, and architecture, the Vienna Biennale will contribute to shaping a future based on values.”<sup>8</sup> The question is, which values can the utopia of an economically and socially just and fair as well as ecologically sustainable future become reality? Can museums get in step with such contemporary thinking?

We are familiar with the impacts of leading edge museologists such as Duncan Cameron who queried the museum as a “temple or forum” in 1967. Steven Weil

argued the museum as an “idea” and object as a “thing” in 1989. At the 2002 Asia Pacific meeting in Shanghai, ICOM demanded the decolonisation of the museum, calling for rethinking the museum as a dynamic institution and including Safeguarding Living Heritage. In 2008 we launched in Leiden, The Netherlands, in partnership with ICOM, a research initiative. The goal was to answer the question of how to make the museum more inclusive. It is an open-ended research network which meets annually for intellectual debate and discussion rather than simply prescribing what inclusion is.<sup>9</sup> In 2010 ICOM adopted the Shanghai Charter on Cultural Diversity that called for a shift from Monoculturalism to Cultural Pluralism.

The current definition of a museum in its sixth iteration since 1948 was updated and adopted unanimously in 2007 in Vienna. As the then Chair of the ICOM CCTF (2004 to 2010) I participated in the complex negotiation process through the ICOM Reform Taskforce to have “intangible heritage” included in the definition: *A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.*<sup>10</sup>

Rethinking museums as relevant spaces at the end of the second decade of the 21st century has become imperative. At the same time as the Vienna Design Biennale Conference on *Changing Values*, the Extraordinary General Assembly of ICOM 2019 in Kyoto discussed and debated the adoption of a proposed new definition, an output from almost two years of work by a group of highly experienced museum experts. But it was deferred. The debate almost broke up the professional body, the largest for heritage in the world. The proposed definition: *Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens*



**Fig. 5** Ludwig van Beethoven sculpture presents a very different view of one of the greatest composers by German artist Markus Lüpertz in Vienna, 2017. 2.70-metre-high, Bronze. “I tried to portray the artist’s problems, his difficulties, his deafness, his problem as a human being in a sense, in a work,” Lüpertz said.

*in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.*<sup>11</sup>

Those of us working on cultural justice through museums and in the broader society in general felt that our life journeys had been vindicated by the proposed definition. India is yet to join the debate. But India witnessed in 2019 a plethora of museum conferencing raising a number of important questions interspersed with a few excellent case studies of transformations as well as plenty of show and tell of the conventional demonstrations. Vendor driven culture of transformations without institutional capacity building is evident. Even if meetings are limited to burgeoning urban elites and their cultural reproduction in a market economy, these are conversations one must have to open up the legacies of the past and start decolonising museums. I have consistently asked the question as to what is national in the several National Museums of India and what is Indian in the Indian museum, the oldest and the largest in South Asia. The silence is resounding! The government of India has just come up with a new five-year plan with a substantial budget, to shake up the entry level training sector and to prompt much needed professional development. Hopefully it won't be more of the same and that there will be new and conscionable change agents beyond the national capital and other major metropolis in India. More than 70% percent of the country, villages, is forgotten by the museums in India.

India was an active member in the UNESCO General Conference that adopted the text of a new standard-setting instrument on the *Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society* in November 2015. It was drafted in close collaboration with ICOM. It affirms the Code of Ethics of ICOM. Member States of UNESCO have agreed on setting and implementing a set of global guidelines for the protection and promotion of museums and collections. It is to become the cornerstone of international and national museum policies and legal instruments. It refers to the current definition from 2007. It reflects the international community's strong commitment to assisting museums in fulfilling their roles in contemporary society to promote sustainable development and intercultural dialogue safeguarding heritage in all its manifestations.

Hopefully ICOM will edit and amend through negotiation with its constituent committees, membership, partners and UNESCO to adopt a progressive new definition in the 2020s. The new Secretary of the Smithsonian, Lonnie G. Bunch III, historian and founding Director of the iconic and phenomenal, National Museum of African



**Fig. 6** One of the largest early Buddhist collections in the world is in the British Museum. Removed by colonial administrators from one of the largest Buddhist Stupas in South Asia, in Amaravathi, it is part of the aesthetic of the Amaravathi School of Art. While visitors go to see the collection oblivious of its coloniality, Buddhist monks and nuns congregate in large numbers at the site of the removal and its contextuality in Amaravathi, Andhra Pradesh, India. © A. Galla

American History and Culture on the Smithsonian Mall, offers three suggestions for museum transformation when and where appropriate. “A community-driven model of interpretation, collecting, and relationships that might assist them in navigating the tensions between history and memory” so that “museums matter”; “help audiences find the contemporary resonance of a museum’s efforts”; and “reposition cultural institutions as sites of value that are the centres and not peripheries of their communities”.

In conclusion, having lived in Denmark, I recall that the Europeans are familiar with the Danish *Hygge* or cosiness as translatable to happiness. Given the diversity of understandings of happiness in Europe, in Vienna we have *Schmäh* (Schmey) a “word with many meanings. It can denote a joke, a trick or lie. But also, regional or personal charm, a sense of humour and wit. It is a word that holds an inherent tension-between levity and sharpness, high and low culture. Conversationally, it is displayed in banter,

the quick back and forth characterised by quintessentially Viennese sense of rhythm” (Courtesy Daniela Enzi). This is a beautiful aspiration for all. Museums as civic spaces have a significant role to play in advocating a better quality of life for everyone irrespective of cultural borders. The extent to which the heritage collections in museums generate narratives promoting intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and understanding is critical. From the monological museum, we need to develop the dialogical or plurilogical processual inclusive museum. If the journeys of collections are better understood, then multivocality is possible. Decolonisation is a process to liberate the collections both in the contemporary present context and the range of historical cultural landscapes that they have traversed. Evidence based research and ethics of engagement with the primary stakeholders and all others are key vehicles in decolonising the collections. I have always advocated and continue to do so, suggesting to young people here that museums need to become relevant, reflexive and revealing within a framework of stakeholder mapping, establishing a stakeholder participation framework and being transparent in the pursuit of ethics of engagement. Jean-Paul Sartre warned us that colonialism is a system. We need to be on our guard against what might be called “neocolonialist mystification”. If there is honesty and integrity in our intent, then we can fill the void between the museums of the Global North and South. Agenda 2030 and SDGs provide the framework. The next decade could very well be critical for the future of museums and decolonisation.

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## Notes

- 1 This article is the written version of the keynote address given at the ICOM Austria – Seminar, Vienna, Weltmuseum, 6 December 2019.
- 2 Conference Proceedings of the 21st ICOM General Conference, Vienna 2007, [http://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2007\\_Proceedings\\_eng.pdf](http://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2007_Proceedings_eng.pdf) (10 February 2021), 105.
- 3 See my talk about “What is the Inclusive Museum Movement”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppMFxTtaULE> (10 February 2021).
- 4 See <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1033/> (10 February 2021).

- 5 Opening remarks by Michael Ludwig at the Conference of the OWHC at Vienna City Hall, 19 February 2019, see <https://www.ovpm.org/2019/02/19/world-heritage-cities-between-development-and-preservation-owhc-workshop-and-conference-in-vienna/> (10 February 2021).
- 6 Ibidem.
- 7 Ibidem.
- 8 <http://2019.viennabiennale.org/en/mission/> (10 February 2021).
- 9 See <http://inclusivemuseums.org/> (10 February 2021).
- 10 <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition> (10 February 2021).
- 11 <https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/> (10 February 2021).