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“CAPTURING THE PAST”: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE MODERNIST PRACTICES OF THE HISTORY PRODUCTION IN THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUMS

The main focus in this paper is the problem of the timeless representation of the past as it is represented in the museum concerned with anthropology, ethnology, folklore and/or ethnography. Here history is understood not in the narrower sense of a linear succession of great events, but in the broader meaning of “the past” as an ideological discourse about what took place before the present and its significance. Within that definition, giving different ethnographic examples from the ethnographic museums that differently present “us” and “others”, I will try to understand by whom and how the past is represented, and whose reactions its presentation provokes. Through the critical analysis of the museums’ representations of culture, I will try to suggest theoretical positions that anthropologists can employ in order to be good advisors in the critical deconstruction of museums’ displays, not just in “anthropological” museums, but in museums in general.

Key words: *history, anthropology, museum, us/them*

Museums, as paradigmatic modernist institutions, are closely connected with the emergence of the nation-state in the nineteenth century (Harvey 1996) and have a prominent role in codifying its values in many parts of the world (cf. Kaplan 1996a).¹ They are one of a wide range of social institutions that serve as a tool for the production of social knowledge, which codified the state’s power

¹Notions of both modernity and the state are complex and not clearly defined, but the discussion of their possible meanings is beyond the scope of this paper (for more anthropological accounts, see for example Gledhill 2000, Rabinow 1989). Here, I just want to stress that it would be wrong to automatically connect museums and the emergence of nation-states. Museums are older than nation-states and early ethnographic displays of foreign and “traditional” cultures could be found in Renaissance curiosity cabinets (for discussions of the origins of museums see, for example, Findlen 2004, Hooper-Greenhill 1992).

(Foucault 1998). The ‘official’ culture of the nation-state is often codified through different types of museums, which classify ‘culture’ in terms of ethnology, history, science, art and so on, the implicit assertion being that different ‘parts of national culture’ are being ‘properly’ represented in this form.

However, that does not mean that a state is a thing or a person that could possess conscious motivation. Following Foucault, it instead should be understood as a product of the small-scale activities of many people in different institutions, rather than in the minds of particular people or organizations.² Hence, an understanding of the state’s production of knowledge through the museum should be grounded in the research of the cultural production of a specific type of museum that is ‘one class’ of a larger family of national museums. Those museums concerned with anthropology, ethnology, folklore and/or ethnography are the main concern in this paper.

Analysing museums’ representations

One of museums’ public roles is to preserve “what is valued” as an institutional public memory. As Hopper-Greenhill (2000: 23) writes,

“Groups of objects, brought together in one place to form a collection and then displayed, make visual statements. The beliefs, attitudes, and values which underpin the processes of acquisition become embodied in the collections, as some objects are privileged and others left to one side. The public display of these collections make a visual narrative which naturalises these underpinning assumptions and which gives them the character of inevitability and common sense. The presentation of what appears to be (and is) visual evidence, materializes and thereby appears to confirm the ‘reality’ and the inevitability of these visual pictures”.

The production of history in a museum, as Stocking (1985) explains, is a paradoxical process, since the displacement of objects from their original contexts in order to preserve them in their original forms, makes them ‘timeless’, while at the same time their arrangement in the exhibition is intended to evoke the historical context from which they were removed. The problem of the ‘timeless’ representation of the past is one of the main concerns of this paper. In this paper, history is understood not in the narrower sense of a linear succession of great events, but in the broader meaning of “the past” (cf. Jordanova 2000). From this, history is seen as an “ideological discourse about what took place before the present and its

² However, it also does not mean that people are passive victims of the state unable to reflect upon its ideology (cf. Navaro-Yashin 2002).

significance” (Yelvington, Goslin and Arriaga 2002: 347). Within that definition, giving different ethnographic examples I will try to understand by whom and how the past is represented, and whose reactions its presentation provokes.

Myers writes that the study of a museum is actually an “ethnographic study of cultural production” (quoted in Dias 2001: 96). Harvey (1996) distinguishes two basic approaches to visual culture and the museums within it: textual and interactional (Baudrillard’s work is an example of the former, and de Certeau’s of the latter). In the first approach, anthropologists “conduct a hermeneutic decoding of the museum’s representation” (Yelvington, Goslin and Arriaga 2002: 345) assuming that the museum’s visitors are passive recipients of the exhibition. However, as Macdonald (1996: 5) suggests there is not “such a neat fit between production, text and consumption” and it is necessary to take into account how people interpret the exhibition, since there could be a huge gap between the official idea of representation makers and people’s reactions to it. An anthropological approach to the “public sphere” of the museum can use the advantages of contemporary ethnographic practice in order to go “behind the scenes” as MacDonald (2002) puts it in her ethnographic account of the London Science Museum. This thus avoids a simple reading of the exhibitions as text, but includes the social forces that create them.

Representing “Otherness”³

The establishment of the first anthropological museums corresponded with the emergence of anthropology as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century. Evolution, as the dominant scientific discourse of the time, shaped museums’ displays that tended to classify objects according to their function and arranged them in their “evolutionary order” (for example, Pitt Rivers and his museum in Oxford) (Chapman 1985). Later, it was more common to classify “cultures” as bounded wholes (according to so-called “geographical system”) and place it in the scale of human evolution.

In this approach ‘cultures’ are seen as bounded entities that could be defined through sets of ‘customs’ embodied in material culture (Coombes 2003). As professor Shoeman, who was working in South Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century writes, “mankind is divided into *volke* and...each *volke* has its own particular culture” (ibid, 211). Similarly, Curators believe that ‘culture’ can

³I am aware that the borders between “us” and “other” are blurred and could be drawn on different bases (gender, class, etc.). South African and Kenyan examples could be also considered within the category of “representing ourselves” since represented indigenous groups live in the states in which exhibitions were held, as in their home-countries. However, exhibitions were created not by representatives of the groups, but by “others”.

be ‘scientifically’ traced through material culture and the objects as transmitters of the messages that can be simply decoded (cf. Maroević 1995 for the similar account). This epistemology is borrowed from the natural sciences, and it was typical of early museum practice, however it remains relatively unchanged in many museums even now. These ideas are drawn from the nineteenth century taxonomic practices of natural sciences where it served as a basis for comparison and classification (Pearce 1992). According to similar principles, anthropological expeditions aimed to capture “pure specimens” by detailed measurements that would provide ideal, but accurate physical descriptions of natives. Coombes writes that after an expedition in 1911 some models of Bushmen were made and displayed in a South African Museum without “any attempt to see the figures... as part of complex social and cultural networks, nor indeed to see them as they were at the time of the casting” (ibid. 220).⁴ There were no dates or names of the people in the accompanying text. The display was an example of a “racial type” and the only explanation referred to the evolutionary classification of Bushmen as people belonging to the “Upper Palaeolithic period” (ibid. 220).

In accordance to the change in the dominant paradigm in anthropology that occurred in the disciplines in the 1920s, in 1950, figures from the cast were incorporated in the “Bushman Diorama” trying to give some kind of social context depicting the activities of birth-hunting or fire igniting and describing the display as a group of hunter-gathers. The diorama image became so popular that “one enterprising company produced a series of postcards depicting individual cast figures” (ibid. 224), which became synonymous with tourists’ views of Cape Town.

Finally, in order to deconstruct the traditional anthropological practice of exhibition making from “measurement taking” to “modeling”, museum curators in the 1980s placed the diorama in its historical contexts, showing its origin and changes from the group of casting figures to the final version.⁵ The curators wanted to show “that there was a contradiction between what was known by Peringuey and Drury [the authors of the diorama] and what was shown in the Museum” (ibid. 225). The new exhibition showed archive photographs of Drury’s models with their names and dates of photographing, and pictures of the diorama shown naked Bushmen next to the cast figure of a Khoisan woman “who unlike her counterpart in the diorama, was fully clothed” (ibid. 225). From the archives left behind by Drury, it was clear that Khoisan women in that time wore “proper” clothes and that researchers had serious problems persuading them to take off their clothes to photograph them in their “natural conditions” as they were later represented (cf. Peterson 2003 for a very similar account of photo-

⁴ Very similar representations of Aboriginal “timelessness” occurred in Australian museums in the first half of the twentieth century (Anderson and Reeves 1996). The museums’ displays that persisted to the mid-twentieth century were strikingly similar to that of Bushmen, including similar dioramas that depicted Aborigines hunting (ibid.).

⁵ The museum deconstruction examples that follow are a few of the numerous similar attempts conducted by different native groups and/or anthropologists (see Simpson 2001).

graphing Aborigine women in the same period). In all previous exhibitions in the South African Museum, Khoisan people were not just shown as an example of an earlier stage of human evolution or simply as timeless, but they were deliberately misrepresented to fit with European ideas about 'adequate savage appearance'.

The above example shows how the historical process could be included in anthropology's usual 'timeless' description of culture. As the author of the exhibition explains, new ways of object displaying tended to "encourage an awareness of multiple views and not reduce the complex presence of an artifact to a single, authoritative interpretation" (Coombes 2003: 227).

However, despite the curators' attempt, visitors' responses were not completely positive and the exhibition did not correspond with visitors' "historical memory".⁶ Visitors to the museum felt that many things were missing from the exhibition: history of colonization, resistance of Bushmen and changes through which they passed. As Crane (2004) explains,

"although the manifest content of history is often the explicit core of the debate, it is historical consciousness – a personal awareness of the past as such and a desire to understand experience with reference to time, change, and memory – which has emerged as the unmentioned key term in a changing museal discourse" (p. 319).

Pippa Skotnes, organized another exhibition, "Miscast", that aimed to deconstruction further the "scientific process" of the exhibition's making.⁷ Skotnes displayed photographs of the spectacular exhibitions of the Khoisan together with artifacts related to specific individuals who were "shown" at the exhibitions, thus individualising represented people. She depicted the violent way of measurements and molds were taken by showing photographs of measurements, anthropological instructions for the date obtained, and casts of body parts made from Drury's molds. The floor in the second room was covered with medical and anthropological journals, police records and advertising materials that depicted Khoisan people in the usual derogatory way, while photographs on the wall showed the daily life of the Khoisan people taken by Paul Weinberg between 1984 and 1995. Thus, she contrasted the usual 'timeless' representation of the Khoisan people with photographs of the same people using modern western goods in their everyday activities. Finally, in order to reverse the power relation of viewer (westerners) and viewed (Khoisan), video cameras were installed to record viewers' reactions, thus putting visitors in the position of the Khoisan people.

⁶One of the reasons could be that tourist guides continued to characterise the Bushmen's hunting style in the language reserved for animal predators and the exhibition depicted "Bushman culture" in the "ethnographic present" without telling the time when the depicted people actually lived (Coombes 2003: 227).

⁷Description of the exhibition is taken from Coombes 2003: 230-242.

However, the visitors did not interpret the exhibition according to Skotnes expectations. Many Khoisan representatives saw the exhibition as a “dehumanizing portrayal of their people” (ibid. 238). While, some white visitors did not like Weinberg’s photographs of Bushmen as they saw them as an inappropriate displacement of Bushmen from their “natural environment”. Obviously, it is hard to challenge visitors’ stereotypes, since their expectations are not shaped only by personal memories about “the culture exhibited” (as was the case with the Khoisan people), but also with memories about the previous exhibition and their experience with museums as trustworthy representatives of the “true past” (cf. Lowenthal 1998).

Visitors usually expect a coherent representation of the past. Crane (2004), for example, describes the exhibition of “the masterpieces” of Pacific Northwest Native American jewelry and art at the University of British Columbia where visitors were confused and angry because tags in the displays asked them to think about “why that artifact was being included in a ‘masterpieces’ exhibit” (ibid. 318). As Crane (ibid) explains,

“what transpired in the guestbook of the Vancouver museum was a collision between personal expectations, based on memories of the museum’s past, and the present museum’s intentional obliteration of the line demarcating institutional authority from visitors’ experience” (ibid. 320).

Another interesting example of representing otherness in the museum is the photograph exhibition, *Okiek Portraits* of the people living in west-central Kenya, made by anthropologist Corrine Kratz shown in Kenya and the United States between 1989 and 1997 (Kratz 2002).⁸ The use of photographs has a special place in museum practice, since they are “implicated in the late twentieth-century condition of hypervisuality” (Willis 1995: 77), which gives the credibility of ‘reality’ and ‘authentic’ as powerful ‘windows on the past’. The use of such a realistic medium, as the author of the exhibition explains, was to challenge stereotypes about African cultures as homogenous and timeless in America, and the Okiek as backward in Kenyan society itself (Kratz 2002).⁹ There were several strategies for that aim: one was the inclusion of only colour photographs and juxtapositions of popular African scenes with photographs showing Okiek daily activities in contemporary western clothes. Additionally, the photographic archive was provided to give different perspectives of the same events and frameworks for the individual photographs that were arranged in a “life cycle”, with emphasis upon the initiation ceremonies. In order to personalise the images displayed and

⁸ The exhibitions were shown in different places in the United States and some changes were made in order to fit into the exhibition space, but the overall narrative remained unchanged (Kratz 2002).

⁹ This exhibition is different from those described above as it does not compare the previous exhibition practice of the same people with the new one, since there were no previous photographs of the group in question.

give a voice to the Okiek themselves, captions were used consisting of conversations between Okiek who saw the photographs and gave comments about the people depicted. However, the photographs were taken according to the aesthetic of western realistic portraits and arranged in the classical anthropological grand narrative of the life cycle, which takes a comprehensive God-like view of point.

Kratz describes different reactions to the exhibitions in Kenya and the United States. Kenyan intellectuals completely ignored the author's attempt at 'personalized images' and saw it as proof of a rich national tradition opposed to the coming modernity depicted in the Okiek's use of western goods.

The survey that Kratz conducted about visitors' understanding of the exhibition displays at the Carlos Museum at Emory and Michigan State museums, corresponds with her observations at other exhibitions and shows that usually sympathetic interpretations rarely challenged dichotomies between the west and others, and modernity and tradition.¹⁰ Generally, visitors' reactions in the United States concentrated on either "individual people, scenes, and personal interactions" (ibid. 182) that reminded them of older people in the villages (category of others in the home country) or on "remote culture" currently passing through the modernization process. Especially interesting were reactions about female circumcision mentioned on one of the panels, but not shown in the photographs. This debate was prominent in the United States during that time, thus informing visitor's expectations and shaping the way they "read" the exhibition.

However, I think the Kratz exhibition makes it difficult to challenge stereotypes and that the subtitle given to the exhibition in the Carlos Museum; "A Kenyan People Look at Themselves" (ibid. 197) is misleading. The Okiek people gave comments about how they remembered others, quite accurately assuming that Western people would prefer photographs with their traditional dress, but they did not take the photographs themselves. Only the perspective of the anthropologists was shown, without focusing on the personal experience of any of the Okiek giving us a coherent grand-narrative of the classical ethnographies.¹¹

Representing "Ourselves"

It is commonplace within contemporary social theory that tradition is not an ontological reality that simply exists, but that it has to be constructed. In this part

¹⁰ It is interesting to see how different exhibition spaces sometimes can alter visitors' interpretations connecting the exhibition with other parts of the museum or 'reading' it in 'the wrong direction' (Kratz 2002).

¹¹ A good contrast is the "Cultural Encounters" exhibition in Brighton (UK) in 1996 whose authors aimed to deconstruct the process of research behind the exhibition and show the researcher him/herself in that process (Hallam 2000).

of the essay, I will try to show how history could be turned into tradition through museums' displays.

The idea of heritage can be traced back to the Victorian area, and the 'heritage boom' can be found in different countries at different times (cf. Boswell and Evans 1999, Kammen 1991, Lowenthal 1998, Merriman 1991). The production of heritage can take many different forms and my concern in this part of the paper will be how 'people' (their 'cultures') that until recently had been represented by others, are now represented by themselves (or at least by their official representatives).¹²

Kaeppler (1992) argues that in most European museums Hawaiian objects are exhibited as "curious objects we happen to have" (p. 465). But, this same method of exhibition persists in the Hawaiian museums themselves. As Kaeppler explains,

"the manner in which the [objects] are exhibited emphasize the romantic notion of an uncontaminated "other" – a Hawaii that does not exist today and probably never did. This false image, perpetuated by museums that present an essentially timeless past, does not address the concept of change or the reason for it" (ibid. 468).

Hawaiian museums' representations of tradition focuses on the Hawaiian monarchy (that has actually emerged in Hawaiians' contact with the West) (ibid). Although, representative objects of immigrant groups are displayed at the whole third floor, the core of the collection of the most important Hawaii museum, the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu, are the possessions of princess Pauahi and "recently deceased Princess Ruth Ke'elikolani" (Kaeppler 1996: 22). In addition, the Museum's traveling exhibitions had as its main objects monarchy regalia displayed in the center of the exhibition room and separated from other objects in order to stress their importance (ibid).

Similar idea of heritage could be found in the Nigeria museums. According to Dr Gella, Director of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments Museums in Nigeria, Nigerian museums have to show Nigerian national tradition and heritage (Kaplan 1996b).¹³ MONTA, for example, the most impressive in the Jos museum complex, is an open-air, 120-acre museum that holds indigenous architecture from all parts of Benin as one of the important "indigenous achievements of the past".¹⁴

¹² I am aware that it is far from true that all 'people' are equally represented in the museums of their home-countries and that many ethnic minorities are left unrepresented or represented by others.

¹³ Kaplan describes a wide range of Nigerian museums, and I will mention a few that I found the most paradigmatic for all of them.

¹⁴ This museum has interesting parallels with the Eastern Europe museums that I will discuss at the end of the paper.

The biggest Nigerian museum, the National Museum Lagos displays “the progression of tools and metalworking in Nigeria from the Stone Age on, from gathering and hunting to farming communities” (ibid. 54). What differs here from the colonial presentation of African culture is that objects are displayed in an order representing the progress of Nigerian culture itself, instead of placing it at one stage of the evolutionary scale with Europe at the top.

Other characteristics of the museum’s displays, such as the “absence of tribal names from the labels” (Willet 1994: 172) clearly reflect Nigerian national politics. Kaplan (1996b) writes that on the ground floor, is The Crafts Village with a series of traditional African houses, each devoted to a different craft (beadwork, hairdressing, goldsmith, etc.) Museum objects in this section are not classified according to “ethnic criteria” (Nigeria has more than 250 official recognized ethnic groups, ibid), but under an unspecified category of “Nigerian traditional culture”, thus erasing all tensions between different ethnic groups (culminating not so long ago in the Civil War).

The National Museum, Benin has a very similar arrangement of objects. As, Kaplan (ibid. 58) puts it,

“The overall organization of the museum literally illustrates the theme of national unity. As visitors move from the ground, to the first, to the second floors of the building, they are gradually exposed to a widening horizon of cultures – from local and state, to national levels – within a single building that seems to embrace all of Nigeria”.

In the national ideology, ethnicity and territory are supposed to belong to each other (cf. Irvin and Gal 2000). Furthermore, in order for ethnicity to develop into a nation it has to have its own territory (Smith 1986).

Many ethnographic museums in Central and Eastern Europe have national costumes at the core of their exhibitions.¹⁵ The Difference between casting models of colonial museums and Eastern European dolls in national costumes, are not as big as it seems. While colonial museums used precise measurements that would prove ‘racial difference’ and then presented natives in their ‘natural state’ of nakedness, Eastern European museums used national costumes as visible proof of national identity without which Romanian peasants would look exactly the same as Ukrainian.¹⁶ In order to present nations as something that have always “been there” (as races were, also) (cf. Anderson 1991, Smith 1998), national costumes and other ‘material good’ are sometimes presented as timeless without any depiction of change and sometimes without dates of origin. Ethnicity is seen as founded in the ‘traditional culture’ that contains the ‘national essence’ unspoiled by ‘modernisation’. In this approach ethnicities are understood as en-

¹⁵ All observations of the Eastern European museums are based on personal visits. For references, check the web sites of the museums listed at the end of the paper.

¹⁶ Compare visitors’ preference to the Okiek pictures in traditional dress, as they “best express their character” (Kratz 2002: 209).

during entities based on common “cultural characteristics” that “persist through generations and through a variety of social form(s)” (quoted in Banks 1996: 18). “Common characteristics” embodied in “material” and “spiritual” culture (which includes, among other things, language and religion) are distinctive from those of other “ethnicities” and could be “scientifically” traced. National costumes seem to somehow embody national identities, inscribing onto the very bodies of the people who belong to it and bringing the notion of ethnicity and nation very close to the notion of race, seen as an identity that people carry by their very birth. In those terms, costumed dolls are parallel to the representation of the different “native people” in the colonial museums where wax dolls were displayed to show ‘physical characteristics’ as a scientific proof of different races (Coombes 2003).

Ethnographic museums in Eastern Europe organize display of costumes according to geographical areas and excluding other “ethnicities” that live in the same thus stressing national unity (varieties are emphasized, but as regional, not ethnic).¹⁷ In that respect, the Museum of the Romanian Peasant is a good example where Romas is the only ethnic group that is mentioned and represented separately as they do not live in the same regions that Rumanians live (or other ethnicities fro that matter). Thus, in the museum’s second floor two last rooms are named: “together” and “Romas” with figures in all regional costumes in the former, and Romas costumes in the latter.

As ethnicities are seen as separated and bounded units, some of their characteristics are seen as more important for ethnic “essence”, than other ones. Religion is presented as a national unifying aspect in the Eastern European museums (compare the Ukrainian Easter eggs), as regalia are in those in Nigeria and Hawaii. Specificity of the same process in the Belgrade Ethnographic museum is reflected in the particular selection of unity characteristics and the curators’ understanding of their scientific validity. Thus, in the main panel of the previous permanent exhibition in the Ethnographic Museum Belgrade it is explained that, “the aim of the exhibition” is to:

“show unity of the Serbian people, [who] gathered around sacred objects in places which, for centuries, have emitted the spiritual power of their ethnic and cultural being. The Peć Patriarchate was the centre of spirituality to which the Serbian people from the whole South Slav area turned to”.¹⁸

The unifying role of the Serbian church was further presented with a replica of the drinking-fountain from Dečani Monastery in Kosovo. A central glass showcase contains costumes from South Serbia, Kosovo and North Macedonia

¹⁷ There are some expectations, such as for example ethnographic museums in St. Petersburg that have exhibitions organized in both regional and ethnic principle.

¹⁸ Original translation.

and above it is a frieze with photographs of Serbian monasteries from the whole former Yugoslav territory – from Croatia to Macedonia.¹⁹

However, it has hard to conclude how the museums' ideology of "national unity" is perceived by these museums' visitors. In the last ethnographic example I will give, members of the communities represented create museum exhibitions that were well received by the visitors. The subject under discussion is the Migration Museum in Adelaide, Australia that has a community access gallery available for the exhibition of the communities living in the area (Simpson 2000). The creations of the exhibitions are completely left to the communities. However, as Simpson writes, "members of the community will often wish to show only the positive aspects of their cultures, and many present or expect a romanticized version of the past" (ibid. 69). For example, a Ukrainian community showed national costumes arranged together with photographs of the national dance performed by contemporary dancers in folk festivals.²⁰ As Simpson (2001: 69) explains,

"this same phenomenon can be seen in a number of museums established by immigrant communities, in exhibitions which recreate elements of the traditional lifestyle left behind, but speak little of the immigration experiences or new lives of immigrants after settling in their adopted country".

But, the displays in question are not just products of nostalgia as Lowenthal (1998) argues. Creators of the exhibitions obviously used as models ethnographic museums from their home-countries that emphasised national costumes, arranged objects according to their functions and sometimes gave examples of the "craft houses" (as we see in the Laos Museum), or typical households (usually arranged by geographic areas).

Therefore, museum exhibitions are not only shaped by memories, but shape memories as well. The idea of history and tradition is firmly shaped by museum practice – for the organizers of the Adelaide museum exhibitions it could be said that tradition are things displayed in ethnographic museums.²¹

¹⁹ Zagreb Ethnographic Museum had a very similar stress on the Catholic religion in its exhibitions in the 1990's (www.etnografski-muzej.hr). For the more detailed discussion see Simić 2006.

²⁰ In another Ukrainian immigration exhibition, at the Milwaukee Public Museum, the dominant artifacts, apart from national costumes, were decorated Easter eggs (Simpson 2001), which is also the case in the Ukraine Museum in New York where *pysanky* are a central part of the permanent exhibition (ukrainianmuseum.org).

²¹ I do not argue that Ethnographic museums alone shaped this idea, they are just one part of the whole range of "tradition inventing" processes.

Conclusion

For the many curators in the ethnographic museums race and ethnicity are natural and self-evident concepts that can be objectively studied through the international museum modernist practice. This consists of a “system of conservation, storage, air-conditioning, and (the absence of) a computerized catalogue for the collection” (Bouquet 2004), leading to a huge classification process that is supposed to define “ethnic or racial differences.” However, the great “Modern Constitution,” as it is called by Latour (1993) - pure science, separated from the political world - actually never happened, and the museum project is just one more modernist project that has “failed.”²²

However, even if it is a part of an imagined ideal modernity practice, as Latour describes it, there is no single version of modernity, but rather multiple modernities - alternative versions developed in different parts of the world (cf. Harvey 1996, Rofel 1999). And although modernity as constructed in different museums considered in this paper was based entirely on the modernist principle, the kind of modernity they were ‘failing’ to produce could be very different from each other, or the ideals of modernity as they are imagined to be in the commonly understood (Western) European modernist project.

Further more, criticism of undeveloped countries’ ‘production of history’ through museum practice is a risky job. It could be argued that ‘strategic essentialism’ embodied in the museums’ history creation is a necessary part of the establishment of a previously oppressed national identity. Thus, it is far easier to be ‘deconstructively’ postmodern in western museology practice, and discredit the ‘modernist’ museum practice of developing countries as biased and traditional. Following the same logic, developing countries museum practices can “never be modern” since when they started to produce their own museums the modernism they use had already been abandoned.

However, the picture is far from “black and white” and anthropologists could be good advisors in the critical deconstruction of museums’ displays, not just in “anthropological” museums, but in museums in general. As Geertz states, “we are not in the business of anthropology to capture primitive facts in faraway places and carry them home like a mask...” (cited in Wolf 1992: 127) and our representation of ‘self’ and ‘others’ should be lead by an understanding of the construction process embodied in the representations themselves.

²²“Modern Constitution” assumes proper mediation of elements separated *scientifically* into the social (political) and material (natural) (Latour 1993).

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 The Ukraine Museum in New York ukrainianmuseum.org.

Резиме

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„КАКО УХВАТИТИ ПРОШЛОСТ“: АНТРОПОЛОШКИ ПРИСТУП МОДЕРНИСТИЧКОЈ ПРАКСИ ПРОИЗВОДЊЕ ИСТОРИЈЕ У ЕТНОГРАФСКИМ МУЗЕЈИМА

Једна од општеприхваћених улога савремених музеја је да чувају предмете “материјалне културе” који имају „друштвени значај” постајући тако званичне институције јавног памћења. Међутим, производња историје у музејима је парадоксалан процес, јер се измеђањем објеката из њиховог *оријиналној контекста* у циљу њиховог очувања у *оријиналном* стању, предметима одузима њихова „временска димензија”, док у исто време музејске поставке распоредом предмета покушавају да дочарају историјски контекст из којег су ти исти предмети изузети да би постали део музејске збирке. Главни предмет овог рада је управо проблем временског (не)лоцирања „прошлости” у антрополошким, етнологским или етнографским музејским поставкама, при чему се појам историје не користи у свом ужем значењу линеарног смењивање прошлих догађаја, већ се историја разуме у ширем смислу „прошлости” уопште, тј. као (идеолошки) дискурс о томе шта се догодило пре „садашњости”. Имајући на уму ову дефиницију, кроз различите примере музејског представљања „нас” и „других”, покушаћу да установим начине на које је прошлост репрезентована и какве су реакције оних који су на тим изложбама презентовани као представе кустоса о њиховој прошлости.

Кроз критичку анализу музејских репрезентација „културе“, покушаћу да предложим теоријске позиције које могу да користе антрополози у циљу критичке деконструкције музејских поставки, не само оних у антрополошким/етнографским музејима, већ у музејима уопште. Као што је то лепо дефинисао Герц, ми нисмо у антрополошком послу да прикупљамо чињенице о примитивном животу и носимо их кући као егзотичне маске, напротив наша репрезентација себе и других треба да буде вођена разумевањем процеса кроз које су те репрезентације изграђене.

Марина Симић је докторанткиња и асистенткиња на Одељењу за социјалну антропологију Универзитета у Манчестеру, Велика Британија. Дипломирала је на Београдском универзитету на Одељењу за етнологију и антропологију (Филозофски факултет) и Катедри за српску и општу књижевност са српском књижевношћу (Филолошки факултет). Магистрирала је на Одељењу за социјалну антропологију Универзитета у Манчестеру. Објавила је више стручних радова у земљи и иностранству и две књиге песама. Поља њеног интересовања су: идентитет, (анти)национализам, језик, репрезентација, антропологија фолклора, проблеми модерности, антропологија политике (посебно „замисљање државе“).