Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

The politics of culture and belonging within Ethnography: Ethnography and the Politics of Display: Research into the European ethnographic different stylistic, narrative, and curatorial approaches within Amsterdam, Budapest, and Geneva

Péter, Tíria Sára

Citation
Péter, T. S. (2026). *The politics of culture and belonging within Ethnography: Ethnography and the Politics of Display: Research into the European ethnographic different stylistic, narrative, and curatorial approaches within Amsterdam, Budapest, and Geneva*.

Version:	Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License:	License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4295478

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The politics of culture and belonging within Ethnography

Ethnography and the Politics of Display: Research into the European ethnographic different stylistic, narrative, and curatorial approaches within Amsterdam, Budapest, and Geneva



Image credits: Source unknown. Image obtained online for non-commercial academic use.

Date: 2025.12.20

Museum Studies (Master)

Professor: Dr. F. A. Veys

Second reader: Karin De Wild

Written by: Tíria Sára Péter

Student Number: S2849933

Word count: 16.195

Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION 2

1.1 METHODOLOGY 6

2. ANALYSIS OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUM OF BUDAPEST, HUNGARY 8

2.1 THE COLLECTION EXHIBITION (PERMANENT EXHIBITION) 11
2.2 THE POLITICS OF CURATORIAL NARRATIVES 14

3.ANALYSIS OF THE WERELDMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS....20

3.1 OUR COLONIAL INHERITANCE AND OUR STORY (PERMANENT EXHIBITIONS) 24
3.2. THE POLITICS OF CURATORIAL NARRATIVE INSIDE THE WERELDMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM 28

4. ANALYSIS OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUM OF GENEVA (MUSÉE D'ETHNOGRAPHIE DE GENÈVE) SWITZERLAND....33

4.1 ANALYSIS OF THE ARCHIVES OF HUMAN DIVERSITY (PERMANENT EXHIBITION)....37
4.2 THE POLITICS OF CURATORIAL NARRATIVE INSIDE THE MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY, GENEVA (MEG)....41

5. THE CONTRASTED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE DISCUSSED ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUMS ON THE PRINCIPLE OF POLITICAL NARRATIVE AND CURATORIAL DISPLAY....45

6. CONCLUSION 50

APPENDICES....53

....61

....61

....61

....61

BIBLIOGRAPHY....62

1. Introduction

The presented research was initiated after a personal visit to the Wereldmuseum in Leiden, when it became apparent that ethnographic institutions within Europe vary significantly in their curatorial display and content. It appeared that the museum did not solely focus on Dutch artifacts; in fact, there are none on display. This led to the observation that cultural history affects the curatorial display and the diversity of the collection. This observation prompted the question: How does one define an ethnographic museum within Europe? Do all ethnographic institutions offer similar exhibition themes and structures?

To clarify these differences, three geographically distinctive ethnographic museums in Europe will be examined: the Ethnography Museum of Budapest, Hungary, Wereldmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands; and the Musée d'Ethnographie (MEG) in Geneva, Switzerland. The regional differentiation in the scope of the research adapts a significant layer of diversity in order to investigate differences in curatorial approaches and museum collections conceptualizing ethnography. These examples offer a broad view of how ethnographic museums in Europe portray diversity, highlighting each museum's curatorial representation in defining the scope of ethnography. Therefore, this research frames its main focus through the following question: How do the museums in Budapest, Geneva, and Amsterdam challenge and reinterpret traditional understandings of ethnography?

Firstly, to lay down the definitive collective meaning of ethnography itself, it must be understood that it has a broad and consequently vague definition regarding its specification. According to the Oxford Dictionary, ethonography is "the scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences."[1]This understanding only reflects the generalized collective meaning of ethnography; furthermore, ethnography can often appear as a state-induced narrative, ultimately shaped by the museum curators. Fundamentally, it is a constructed representation of diasporas and cultures through the history of everyday objects and artifacts. David M. Fetterman, in his book "*Ethnography: Step by Step*" defines ethnography as:

"Ethnography is about telling a credible, rigorous, and authentic story. Ethnography gives voice to people in their own local context, typically relying on verbatim quotations and

[1] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "ethnography," accessed December 20, 2025, OED Online, Oxford University Press.

a ‘thick’ description of events. The story is told through the eyes of local people as they pursue their daily lives in their own communities.”[2]

Although this definition broadens the general understanding, it does not specify which customs are highlighted or prioritized. This distinction between regional approaches will be crucial for the upcoming analysis, revealing how museum practices and narratives vary markedly among these three establishments and their recreation of both national and foreign identities through their curatorial framework. This investigation places a special focus on the curatorial narratives and methods of display, and whether they reflect any references to political undertones. Additionally, Fetterman argues that the role of an ethnographer is a historian who interprets culture through everyday objects and places them into a social context:

> “The ethnographer adopts a cultural lens to interpret observed behavior, ensuring that the behaviors are placed in a culturally relevant and meaningful context. The ethnographer is focused on the predictable, daily patterns of human thought and behavior. Ethnography is thus both a research method and a product, typically a written text.”[3]

This quote provides a significant reflection on the function of the ethnographer in forming the appropriate cultural narrative of the subject matter. However, in a museum space, an ethnographer can provide a dual role, both as an ethnographer and a curator. Hence, the form of display, composed of narrative and aesthetic organization, is framed by the professional, which ultimately offers a wider range of tools for storytelling and representation. Ethnography as a science is presented in a museum space with the intent to educate and describe historical aspects of foreign and local cultural materials. Henceforward, the role of the museum is identified by Tony Bennett in his book “*The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*” as he describes the preliminary role of the museum as:

“The public museum, as is well known, acquired its modern form during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The process of its formation was as complex as it was protracted, involving, most obviously and immediately, a transformation of the practices of

[2] David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-Step*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2019), 1.
[3] Ibid., 2

earlier collecting institutions and the creative adaptation of aspects of other new institutions — the international exhibition and the department store, for example — which developed alongside the museum."[4]

Benett introduces the main purpose of museums in general; however, the mission of an ethnographic museum was shaped similarly, encouraging a comparative analysis of cultures and reflection on their cultural importance.

It must be noted that ethnographic museums also hold a strong accountability in defining foreign and local cultures with regard to the attainable sense of past cultural memory, which is formed by the museum; hence, the essence of it is continuously evolving with regard to identity. Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier highlight the collective understanding of cultural memory by the following description:

> "Cultural memory may emerge from a catastrophic tragedy. In fact, many cultural memories often arise out of events that prove transformative, igniting recognizable shifts in the world of meaning for a people. Whether cultural memory fulfils the need to transcend certain events or to maintain a corporate identity, it passes from generation to generation through oral traditions, written accounts, images, rituals, and dramas. It is evoked around image, symbol, affect, or event precisely because it keeps alive and transforms those events of the past. They are not bound or limited to the past, but continue to give meaning to the present."[5]

This passage reflects on how cultural memory is utilized in order to define identities within the museum space. Cultural memory allows ethnographers to understand that identity shall be framed with an ethically appropriate intent, considering the source communities. Additionally, it illustrates its reflected importance regarding the concept of cultural memory, which offers a significant outlook on present-day ethnographic narratives, that accumulates to collective knowledge and interpretation. Furthermore, it is argued by Ivan Karp, an anthropologist and museologist, in his book *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, that cultural memory allows a reflection on the past that is remembered in a continuous cycle, which

[4] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 19.
[5] Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier, *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith, and Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 3.

allows generational trauma to be contemplated and emotionally affect the spectators, while offering a sense of educational properties.

"Whether cultural memory fulfills the need to transcend certain events or to maintain a corporate identity, it passes from generation to generation through oral traditions, written accounts, images, rituals, and dramas. It is evoked around image, symbol, affect, or event precisely because it keeps alive and transforms those events of the past. They are not bound or limited to the past, but continue to give meaning to the present."[6]

Henceforward, it is important for ethnographers to create a ritual of remembrance that is intended to declare past historic casualties that shaped memory-induced understanding of national identity. In this sense, cultural memory is indispensable in defining identity, and cannot be interpreted without it. Moreover, another section of this book, written by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in the chapter "Ethnographic objects," regards an intent to explain that objects that ethnographic objects are determined by their framing and how they have been separated from their social purpose as an artifact to be exhibited in an exhibition narrative.

"Objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers. Such objects are ethnographic not because they were found in a Hungarian peasant household, Kwakiutl village, or Rajasthani market, rather than in Buckingham Palace or Michelangelo's studio, but by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached, for declines make their objects and, in the process, make themselves."[7]

Thus, ethnographic objects expose meaning through curatorial narrative, which then generates the collective reference of cultural memory and identity. This process showcases how past historical events, traditions, and traumas are remembered and reinforced with a sense of contemporary definition of identities with regard to the politics of display. The following section will offer the methodological apprehension of the research to examine the differences in political display, national identity, and curatorial narrative.

---

[6] Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 10.
[7] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 361.

1.1 Methodology

The following museological research will utilize theory-based reflection and visual analysis as its preliminary evidence. It implements a qualitative, comparative methodology in order to examine how ethnographic museums create a reflection of political narratives through their curatorial display.

To illustrate the prompted differences, as previously mentioned, this case study is based on three distinctive European museums. It will explore the dissimilarities and similarities in curatorial strategies, defining identities, and political connotations. The chosen museums for illustration, the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography in Budapest, the Dutch Wereldmuseum of the Netherlands, and the Swiss Museum of Ethnography in Geneva, offer a form of geographical diversity by contrasting the Central European approach to the Western one. It must be noted that the geographical contrasts inherently expose a different political narrative and varied historical relations to colonialism. To identify the selected models of ethnographic display, there must be a strong focus on the underlying political tone and what that implies for the country's current or past state of ideological narrative regarding cultural memory.

The theoretical framework used to define museums as interpreted environments of cultural narratives, and its role in representations of foreign and local identity will be: Tony Benett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, Ivan Karp *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display; Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture; How Museums Define Other Cultures* and James Clifford's *Museums as Contact Zones.* These theories offer a qualitative understanding of museum spaces as a constructor of political displays and national identity, and their significant role in shaping and further influencing these narratives of collective interpretations.

Lastly, this research will generate an analysis of the appointed museums, which will include an examination of the exhibition texts, labels, themes, and institutional statements with a focus on how they frame history, identity, and culture. There will be an emphasized exploration of whether identity is framed as fluid, fixed, colonial, or post-colonial, and whether cultural identity is present in the museum space. Finally, this research will claim great importance to the ethical positioning of the museum regarding institutional self-critique, integrity, and collaborative intentions with the cultures that are displayed. The sources attained and utilized for this research include exhibition wall texts and catalogues, museum websites,

including mission statements, academic literature of anthropology, cultural heritage, museum studies, and personal observations.

2. Analysis of the Ethnography Museum of Budapest, Hungary

The ethnographic department at the National Museum in Budapest, Hungary, was established in 1872. János Xantus, a well-known zoologist, anthropologist, and traveler, was appointed to be the head of the ethnographic department. Prior to that year, all artworks were collected and preserved in the National Museum of Hungary without distinction of ethnographic properties. At the time of the Museum's opening, Hungary was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1867 until 1918.[8] This meant that in the founding year of the National Museum, the relevance of Hungarian identity was secondary to the Austrian culture, as German had become the official language within the monarchy. In terms of historical borders, the Austro-Hungarian Empire included different ethnic groups, as the whole entity of the Hungarian Kingdom and the Austrian Empire, which consisted of Serbians, Slovaks, Slovenians, Croatians, Romanians, Czechs, Ukrainians, Romani people, next to Austrians and Hungarians. Formation of the Empire gave a sense of stability and military strength; meanwhile, Hungary gained autonomy from the previously ruling Habsburg Empire. After losing the First World War (1914-1918), the Monarchy had been dismantled under the Peace Treaty in Versailles as a form of punishment for losing the war. This treaty is often referred to as the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, when Hungary offered autonomy to its former territories to Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Austria. After the Trianon, nineteen years later, the Second World War (1939-1945) had left the country devasted and as of 1945, Hungary had become occupied by the Soviet Union, and ultimately part of the Eastern Bloc. This meant that Hungary became a puppet state for the U.S.S.R., which indirectly controlled the governance processes within. Hungary had only become a democratic republic in 1989, which meant that it had officially gained its political independence from the U.S.S.R.

The Ethnography Museum of Budapest itself was officially formed as an individual institution in 1947. Under the influence of Soviet oppression, one of the main motivations behind the museum's individualization was the need to shape and claim Hungarian identity alongside the rising nationalism provoked by national trauma. As the Hungarian anthropologist Tamás Hofer explains, the ethnographic museum was established during a period when Hungarian aristocrats had emphasized folk culture as a way of distinguishing Hungarian from

[8] Tamás Hofer, "Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage' in Hungary and Rival Versions of National Identity," in *Hungarians between "East" and "West": Three Essays on National Myths and Symbols*, ed. Tamás Hofer (Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 1994), 35.

Austrian identity. Hence, folk culture was representative of national unity, showcasing origin and history.[9] Secondly, Hungary had a heightened need for a museum space that reflects identity and deals with the preservation of folk artifacts. To understand the exact concept of peasantry in the Hungarian cultural language, it must be recognized that the connection between agricultural life and artistic folk motives is strongly intertwined, and it shaped the core remembrance of Hungarian identity. Hence, the term peasantry (*parasztság* in Hungarian) is used to portray the social class of the rural agricultural workers. Consequently, folk art is heavily inspired by agricultural peasantry, where Hungarians refer to peasants as independent farmers and craftsmen from the villages who are part of a complex and internally diverse social class.

The Ethnographic Museum has undertaken the following tasks since its founding: collecting, archiving, protecting, researching, and curating information regarding the culture and everyday life of Hungarians and others.[10] The museum building is situated in Pest, adjacent to the renowned Heroes' Square, and was recently rebuilt in 2022 (Fig. 1). The large building offers a modern approach, allowing bypassing tourists to walk through the building without purchasing a ticket. Viewers can get a free, unobstructed overview of a huge 4,000-piece ceramic collection placed in the middle of the building (Fig. 2).[11] The building has implemented a glass façade that captures ethnographic motifs from both the museum's Hungarian and international collections. The museum collection holds around 225.000 artifacts that focus on folk culture in particular, within the realm of the Carpathian Basin, which had tainted the old regional demographic of the "old" Hungarian borders.[12]

The museum's website further reflects this specific interest within its collection's framing and focus, and states the following: "Alongside priceless relics of Hungarian folk culture, the museum houses the biggest collection in the region of ethnographic objects representing the folk cultures of distant continents."[13] Hence, the museum's curatorial emphasis in its narrative instigates a rather national identity and folk-focused institution. Meanwhile, this quote also emphasizes how the Hungarian Ethnography Museum in Budapest claims to provide a diverse range of cultures within its collection. Overall, the Hungarian

[9] Hofer, Tamás. "The Perception of Tradition in European Ethnology." *Journal of Folklore Research* 21, no. 2/3 (1984): 139. accessed December 20, 2025 http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814549.
[10] Kemecsi Lajos, *Örökség és változás: A Néprajzi Múzeum három évtizede* (Budapest: Hungarian Museum of Ethnography, 2022), 7.
[11] Hungarian Museum of Ethnography, "The Main Building," *Neprajz.hu*, accessed December 20, 2025, https://www.neprajz.hu/en/muzeumrol/the-main-building.html
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

Museum of Ethnography claims to hold various collections pertaining to different continents: 14.500 items that belong to the demographics of Oceania, 500 objects from Indonesia, 16,000 objects from Asia, 1800 items from the Americas, and 10.000 artifacts from Africa.[14] This creates the sum of 42.800 non-European artifacts, while the European collection adds up to 182.200 objects. There is a visible difference between the European collection and the non-European one. The lack of non-European objects in the museum can be due to the absence of colonization by Hungary beyond European borders. Further on, the Museum discusses its vast European collection, writing: "Compared to the Finno-Ugric and Balkan materials, the Northern and Western European collections are somewhat slighter in volume. Most objects from these areas were added to the collection without thought to conscious development of the collection as either opportune purchases or donations."[15] This quote from the museum's website clearly reflects that the Hungarian Ethnography Museum of Budapest has placed a special interest in collecting mostly cultural artifacts in Europe that have relevance to Hungarian history, throughout its dramatic demographic changes, after the Second World War. However, this heightened focus on Hungary's own culture creates a certain political statement. According to the researcher and anthropologist Nicholas Thomas, "Certain collections have been deeply studied, authoritatively published and represented through exhibitions in popular museums, while others have been neglected, kept largely in storage, and marginalized in the public cultural sphere and in art worlds that have privileged the European canon."[16] This notion of an authoritative curatorial narrative becomes problematic due to its overbearing focus on national identity, leaving other identities behind, hence creating a devaluation of those who are not part of the nation's culture. In this sense, it can be argued that the museum's collection appears rather strong in defining national identity, which excludes discussion of foreign cultures and their integration or so-called shared traces to Hungarian culture.

Throughout the summer of 2025, there were eight exhibitions on show, one temporary called *Heavy Fabric. Women – Traditional Costume* – showed the folk dresses of the German minority in Hungary. Then, The Last Hungarian Polyhistor – *Our most brilliant mind and the first among Hungarian scientists, Ottó Herman,* was an exhibition regarding Ottó Herman's travels and his important role in expanding the museum's collections. Furthermore, there was

[14] Hungarian Museum of Ethnography, "Oceania Collection," *Neprajz.hu*, accessed December 20, 2025, https://www.neprajz.hu/en/gyujtemenyek/collections-of-artefacts/international-collection/oceania_collection.html.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Wayne Modest, Nicholas Thomas, Doris Prlić, and Claudia Augustat, eds., *Matters of Belonging: Ethnographic Museums in a Changing Europe* (London: UCL Press, 2019), 27.

an exhibition about Székelys – *Patterns of heritage*, pointing out the relevant Hungarian minority living in today's Romania. The exhibition aimed to provide the national narrative of Hungarian cultural relevance in its older demographics. Moreover, there was another temporary collection exhibited, namely, *Hungary in Color* – Hidden photographs from 1862, that showcased photographic documents from this year, when Hungarian identity included several nationalities under the historical borders of the Hungarian Kingdom. While the remaining three exhibitions are all temporary, the permanent display, the *Collection Exhibition*, which offers a general insight into the museum's overall collection, is followed by the exhibition named *Ceramics of the World* - Ceramics space, which can be viewed freely when passing through the museum. Lastly, there is an exhibition named *Zoom – A change in perspectives*, which shall give the visitors an overview of connecting the dots between both foreign and folk artifacts and their origins.

Overall, four of these exhibitions were focused solely on Hungarian minorities and identities, and the rest are argued to be exhibitions of mixed cultures. The following analysis will explore the permanent *Collection Exhibition* in depth, to offer a more nuanced interpretation of the artifacts, their origins, and thematic organization, accompanied by a discussion of the underlying political narratives embedded in the curatorial narrative.

2.1 The Collection Exhibition (permanent exhibition)

The following museum observations were conducted firsthand in an in-person visual analysis, which is to reflect the visitor's experience. When perceiving the main permanent exhibition of the overall collection, named "The Collection Exhibition," it became immediately clear that the Museum's curatorial narrative and spatial organization attach strong significance to Hungarian identity.

The exhibition space consists of multiple rooms merged into one, giant, continuous space with an extensive display of artifacts. When entering the space, at first glance, the museum provides modern artifacts such as a skateboarder's shoe. Upon first glance, there are a few non-European objects placed at the start of the exhibition. Though in the center of the exhibition room, there is an emphasis on Hungarian furniture pieces. Many of these artifacts were bridal cupboards called *kelengye*, which means that they were specifically designed to

hold the bride's dowry and represent a prominent symbolic reference to Hungarian folk culture. The exhibition showcases a diverse textile collection worn by Hungarians, by different minorities in Hungary, and by Hungarian minorities outside of current borders. Further on, when moving through the exhibition, many of the non-European artifacts are merged into the Hungarian narrative, which is done abruptly, and it disturbs the curatorial narrative. In contrast to many of the other ethnography museums, there is often a clear distinction between the displays for each cultural group. Midway through the exhibition, after many clothing artifacts, different glass displays are placed more thematically with masks and statues; however, there is no specific designated area in the exhibition that would create a clear distinction between the continents. As for other European artifacts that are not connected to the Hungarian identity, they were not shown. The representation of these artworks was framed in contradiction to the older Western approaches, and the exhibition explained the problematic approach of understanding such objects as primitive.

Meanwhile, it is essential to find connections between cultures, since these objects serve as a powerful tool to unite humanity, pointing out that mankind has never stopped creating since the very beginning. The use of mixed displays, meanwhile, tries to imply interconnections; it still portrays Hungarian identity as dominant, which may leave the visitors with a sense of cultural hierarchy as if the non-Hungarian objects were supplementary to the exhibition's overall narrative. Such curatorial choices suggest that there is an underlying intention to reinforce national identity, which shifts its focus merely to Hungarian heritage over global diversity. On the other hand, the exhibition provides an excellent inclusion of Romani culture within Hungarian history, and it provides recognition for their cultural properties, within and beyond Hungarian identity. As for portraying former Hungarian territories, the exhibition was successful in referring to the minorities as Romanians and Slovaks, using both Hungarian city names and their current names. These curatorial choices help bridge the distance between the neighboring countries by recognizing them as separate from the Hungarian heritage.

Moreover, the end of the exhibition focuses merely on folk music accompanied by other folk-related artifacts, which predominantly frames Hungarian identity. In this section of the exhibition, the visitor can see more folk artifacts, such as furniture, textile pieces, and ceramics. Here, the exhibition offers a great perspective on folk art without peasantry under communist Hungary. This important distinction within the exhibition explains that the forced Soviet communism in the country formed fundamental social changes, leading to the annihilation of traditional peasant communities. The exhibition text says:

"Promoting folk culture remained a priority, but it was placed in a new ideological context. Institutions were reorganized, while centers for public education, folk art, and cottage industry cooperatives were established. These brought the organizations that produced and distributed folk art products under state control." (Fig. 3 and 4)[17]

The framing of folk culture and the need for a defined identity were necessary for Hungary in order to maintain unity between its people and a sense of belonging. However, the sociographic movement of Trianon (enforced by the winners of the Second World War, including France and Britain) on Hungary encouraged documentation of the failures and realities of rural Hungarian peasant life and called for radical transformations (Fig. 4 and 5).[18] By creating a strong significance of folk motifs and folk life in general, the exhibition creates a cohesive national identity. However, it lacks further focus on explaining the relation of Communist idealization of rural life, by preserving and promoting tradition, which simplified and glorified the harsh peasant environments.

Further on, the theme of peasantry is important to discuss the contrasting meanings of peasantry. As previously mentioned, peasantry had become the core of Hungarian rural life, which, as of today, is deeply celebrated and embraced by the people both in cities and villages. Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea argue in the *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* "Oppositions of interest between shopkeepers and customers, town and country, and landlords and peasants could be interpreted in ethnoreligious and, later, national terms."[19] Which indicates that peasantry did not mean slavery, even if it was positioned as the lower class. Furthermore, many Hungarian folk songs and recurring folk motifs on everyday objects often used symbolic references to flowers, shepherds, wheat, trees, horses, livestock, rye, and corn. The symbolic usage of such peasantry-inspired motifs had a strengthening effect on the Hungarian identity to claim unity, embracing agronomy through food, music, and the byproducts of agricultural artifacts. However, when the Soviets reformed the meaning of peasantry and enforced their socialist ideologies on Hungary, rural labor was no longer manageable. Due to the agricultural pressure regarding high expected livestock and wheat quotas were no longer sustainable for the farmers. Since

[17] *Folk Art without Peasantry*, exhibition text, The Hungarian Ethnography Museum 2025.
[18] *Trianon*, exhibition text, National Hungarian Ethnography Museum, 2025.
[19] Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, 1st ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 39, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691187792.

peasantry can refer to both a social class representing agricultural workers located in rural areas, namely farmers, and in the context of colonialization, the term also expresses the subjugation of oppressed individuals. Meaning that peasants under colonialism lacked freedom and human rights, unlike when looking at the case of an average agricultural worker. This creates a heightened dynamic dependent on when and how this word is used in a museum context. As previously mentioned, peasantry, in the realms of Hungarian culture, is most often applied as a reference to rural agricultural workers universally.

The following section will further reflect on such political dilemmas that might have strengthened this need for more coherent identity formation within the institution. Overall, the exhibition display was rich in artifacts; it did have some mentions of non-Western objects, with a significant distinction and wall text, placing foreign artworks in their original context as close as possible. Nevertheless, the exhibition stayed concentrated on Hungarian heritage and connections, dominating over other societies in its curatorial framework.

2.2 The politics of curatorial narratives

Hungarians had established their land by historical references in 1000 AD under King Stephen I and had taken over the land of today's Romania (Transylvania side), most of Slovakia, Serbia's northern regions, a huge part of Croatia, Slovenia's northern parts, Austria's eastern regions, and lastly, Ukraine's Zakarpattia region. As Hungary lost a big proportion of its prior size after the Second World War, post-communism and the subsequent political shifts have created a heightened need for a cohesive national identity in cultural institutions such as the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography in Budapest. Before the so-called Trianon Peace Treaty, signed in Versailles on June 20th, 1920. This occasion had left a lasting effect on Hungary's separation from its autonomous states, which both weakened and strengthened the need for nationalism within Hungary. Furthermore, this historical event has raised multiple issues and concerns regarding Hungarian national rhetoric in national museums and social institutions regarding the cultural conceptualization of Hungarian borders. Orsolya Putz, academic researcher, points out in her article, *Metaphor and National Identity: Alternative Conceptualization of the Treaty of Trianon,* that the separation of past lands has been seen as a strengthened demand for national identity:

"Yet the nation and national identity are so strong that they could not be demolished by the Trianon peace treaty. The survival of the nation is certain only if the government represents the rights of ethnic Hungarians and the nation works for the consolidation of national identity."[20]

Hence, there is a heightened need for the Hungarian Ethnography Museum of Budapest to reflect on the versatility of Hungarian cultural identity, to justify its overly nationalistic curatorial rhetoric. Today's borders of Hungary might differ, but it carries an imprint of separation, a form of cultural memory by representing Hungarian minorities abroad, conjointly with foreign minorities living in Hungary. Therefore, the museum functions as a social tool for shaping cultural memory. In this case, Hungarian cultural memory is being reframed by offering a national narrative that recognizes Hungary's past historical territories as of today with autonomy. This reinforces freedom and cultural independence from the old Hungarian national identity, before the treaty.

The anthropologist, Tony Bennett, argues in his book *The Birth of a Museum: History, Theory, Politics* that:

"On the one hand, culture, insofar as it referred to the habits, morals, manners, and beliefs of the subordinate classes, was targeted as an object of government, as something in need of both transformation and regulation." [21]

Hence, the museum focuses not solely on the preservation of folk culture but also enhances a sense of morally instructive narratives of the nation. Henceforth, the museum display offers a motivated narrative that is influenced and drawn by the government; therefore, it produces a biased narrative. Following this statement, the occurring interference between identity and politics within the museum is discussed by the anthropologist and museologist Sharon Macdonald:

"It was in this context of 'identity politics' that museums were subject to new critical attention. In many ways, the museum is an institution of recognition and identity par excellence. It selects

[20] Orsolya Putz, *Metaphor and National Identity: Alternative Conceptualization of the Treaty of Trianon*, vol. 11 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2019), 249, EBSCOhost.
[21] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum,* 19.

certain cultural products for official safe-keeping, for posterity and public display – a process that recognizes and affirms some identities while omitting to recognize and affirm others." [22]

Consequently, this raises the issue of a self-focused approach, which is important, but it does not communicate unity and diversity. Hence, the ethnographic institution in Budapest has a rather Hungarian identity-focused curatorial narrative.

Philip Schlesinger contemplates the power of cultural interpretation provided by museum spaces by saying: "National cultures are not simple repositories of shared symbols to which the entire population stands in identical relation. Rather, they are to be approached as sites of contestation in which competition over definitions takes place."[23]

This is reciprocated in the case of the Hungarian Ethnography Museum, where this cultural institution has become a so-called arena where the narrative of national identity is reformed, established, and then further communicated to the masses. This form of communication happens through the use of language, display, and spatial arrangements. As Macdonald further supports this statement by writing: "This is typically presented in a language – spoken through architecture, spatial arrangements, and forms of display as well as in discursive commentary – of fact, objectivity, superior taste, and authoritative knowledge."[24]

When talking about the spatial arrangements, the curators largely focused on Hungarian folk artifacts; however, it did have some references and displays to showcase foreign cultures even beyond the European continent throughout the museum space. Moreover, the presented ethnographic artifacts are notably different in quantity as Hungarian culture predominates the curatorial framework.

In the realm of Hungarian identity within the museum space, it is important to note that since the borders of Hungary were reformed, this has had an impact on the scope of national identity. As Brubaker, Rogers, Fox, Feischmidt, and Grancea write: "As nationality became an increasingly salient principle of vision and division of the social world, to use the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's phrase, political actors began to make claims in the name of putative

[22] Sharon Macdonald, "*A Companion to Museum Studies"*, (published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., in 2006.) 29.

[23] Philip Schlesinger*, "On National Identity: Some Conceptions and Misconceptions Criticized,"* Social Science Information 26, no. 2 (1987): 260-261.
[24] Sharon Macdonald, "*A Companion to Museum Studies"*, (published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., in 2006.) 4.

nations."[25] Emphasizing the conditions in which cultural representation had become deeply political. The museum space offers a selective display of many of the bordering cultures, highlighting their relation to a shared sense of heritage. However, as Bourdieu reflects on nationality, as a generator of significant alienation and distinction, adapting a form of separation between humanity. "Hungarian nationalizing policies testified to an open, assimilationist understanding of nationhood: the nation was 'joinable in time', in Benedict Anderson's eloquent words, because it was "conceived in language, not in blood."[26]

This quote suggests that Hungarian identity is rather focused on cultural assimilation through language, instead of biological inheritance and demographic borders. Hence, the curators had utilized the space by respecting the boundaries and borders of the relevant cultures that had a great impact on Hungarian cultural heritage. However, when examining the curatorial choices regarding the origins of artifacts, it can be observed that foreign cultures were presented frequently, in the historical context of remnants of the Hungarian Kingdom's past territories, predominantly Slovakia and Romania. This can communicate a more pro-nationalized narrative, reminiscent of the old historical borders, referencing how these cultures influenced and intertwined by defining past and ongoing Hungarian culture and history. On the other hand, it addresses historical events with respect to today's autonomy of the affected countries and does not claim that such artifacts preserved from past periods are inherently Hungarian. As the anthropologist Ivan Karp, discusses in his book *Exhibiting Cultures: The poetics and politics of museum display*: "The multiple gazes found within and among cultures make far more complicated the great debates of the museum world"[27] pointing out that indeed, creating a narrative around identity, can hardly be presented in a non-biased approach, since the narrative aligns with the country's historic experiences and its very own form of cultural memory. Therefore, one of the curator's responsibilities appointed by the Ethnography Museum of Budapest is to create an emphasis on collective remembrance regarding Hungary's specific exhibition narrative of historical effects and subsequently significant influence on society. As Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier define cultural memory in *The Concept of Cultural Memory:*

[25] Brubaker, Rogers, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea."Chapter 1. The National Question in East Central Europe". *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 27-55.), 30. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691187792-008
[26] Ibid., 42.

[27] Ivan Karp, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 19.

> "Thus, memory is transmitted by people in their historical, social, and political context. In any given culture, it is the social group that carries forth, from generation to generation, that which they choose to pass on and, perhaps, that which they are not conscious of passing on. In some cases, memory is a distinctly political phenomenon, and requires analysis— possibly the most important aspect of political understanding."[28]

This is why the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography deliberately utilizes a curatorial narrative that is heavily influenced by the government's ideological concept of cultural memory. Furthermore, Karp discusses in his article, *How Museums Define Other Cultures* that it is very challenging for such museum spaces, especially for those that place special focus on their own culture and identity, to keep a neutral tone when creating the curatorial narrative:

> "No genre of museum has been able to escape the problems of exoticizing and assimilating inherent in exhibiting other cultures. That includes museums that restrict themselves to examining diversity within their own societies. The same museums that make the products of others into a minor digression in the history of modern art, also treat the art and artists of their own traditions the same way."[29]

Therefore, it can be observed that there is a lack of diverse discussion around culture, and it reflects a strong imprint of hierarchical representation of culture. Overall, it becomes clear that the museum space holds the institutional power to shape collective identity. Tony Bennett, in *The Birth of the Museum: history, theory, politics,* Sharon Macdonald, in *Memorylands: heritage and Identity in Europe,* Philip Schlesinger, in *Media, the Political Order and National Identity,* Pierre Bourdieu's reference, in *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, by Brubaker, Rogers, Fox, Feischmidt, and Grancea and lastly, Ivan Karp in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* and *How Museums Define Other Cultures* are all addressing different approaches to national narratives that are being constructed, reproduced, authorized, and framed by the museum. Hence, Bennett's

[28] Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier, "1. The Concept of Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith, and Identity* (New York: University of Texas Press, 2007), 7, https://doi.org/10.7560/716636-004.
[29] Ivan Karp, "Defining Culture," *Museum Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (1994): 14, https://www-jstor-org.leidenuniv.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/3109026.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A220d67137c9410177d6964387c425609&ab_segments=0%2Fspellcheck_basic_search%2Ftest&initiator=&acceptTC=1.

ideology of the "exhibitionary complex" highlights the effect of influencing a population through curated visibility.[30] Moreover, Macdonald had reflected through identity politics that such ethnographical institutions are a reflection of cultural recognition; meanwhile, the curatorial narrative can also create tension by focusing on or embracing some ethnic minorities less.[31] Schlesinger had discussed that national culture generates a site of contestation, meaning that cultural memory cannot be utilized and presented through an unbiased narrative, since history holds feuds, trauma, and losses.[32] Meanwhile, Bourdieu reflected that the borders offer ideological separation between identities, which is caused by the different cultural memories of each country that claims it as its own.[33] Finally, this idea is further contemplated by Karp when considering the inclusion of placing multiple gazes, such as those of the visitors, the curators, the states, and the represented minorities and communities.[34] Hence, these theoretical frameworks generate a clearer understanding of the Hungarian Ethnographic Museum's narrative, as partial, referencing its nationalistic narrative, as intended and influenced by the government, and further shaping and affecting the rhetoric of national identity.

[30] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum,* 19.
[31] Sharon Macdonald, "*A Companion to Museum Studies*," (published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., in 2006.) 4-29.
[32] Philip Schlesinger*, "On National Identity: Some Conceptions and Misconceptions Criticized,"* Social Science Information26, no. 2 (1987): 260-261.
[33] Ivan Karp, "Defining Culture," *Museum Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (1994): 14, https://www-jstor-org.leidenuniv.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/3109026.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A220d67137c9410177d6964387c425609&ab_segments=0%2Fspellcheck_basic_search%2Ftest&initiator=&acceptTC=1.
[34] Brubaker, Rogers, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea."Chapter 1. The National Question in East Central Europe". *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 27-55.), 30. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691187792-008

3.Analysis of the Wereldmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

The Wereldmuseum Amsterdam was founded in 1926.[35] The formerly known as Tropenmuseum is located in the eastern part of Amsterdam.[36] This building was originally designed to be part of a larger Dutch colonial institute. [37]The institution was commissioned by several ministries, including the Ministry of Colonies. The museum was divided into three departments: The Trade Museum, Tropical Hygiene, and Anthropology, each with its own dedicated space and collection.[38] The colonial institute emphasized the need for such a museum to collect and cultivate cultural awareness about the overseas territories, which was subsequently also utilized as a form of territorial propaganda. When the museum building had been constructed and the institution came to life, it is important to note that the Dutch government was embracing a strongly colonial narrative, mirrored in the building's artistic exterior. As a result, forced imposition of the Dutch identity became more widespread in the colonies, including the Dutch East Indies, Suriname, and the Caribbean colonies such as Aruba and Curacao, and interfered with their cultural attributes, habits, and population. Furter on, when discussing the Second World War, Wereldmuseum's website points to the importance and effect of past historical events as:

> "The Colonial Institute was the headquarters of the German Grüne Polizei. Owing to the enormity of the building, an extraordinary situation arose that the resistance also operated from the institute. A radio was hidden in one of the temple moulds in the Temple Room of the museum. After the war, the Colonial Institute changed its name to the Indies Institute."[39]

This specification was implemented in 1945, since the institution had cultivated a profound interest in Indonesia, which had initiated a change in name to the Indies Institute. In 1949, the Netherlands granted sovereignty to Indonesia, and later the museum became the Tropenmuseum, which meant that the museum provided an extensive exploration of the

[35] Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, "History of Wereldmuseum Amsterdam," *Amsterdam.Wereldmuseum.nl*, accessed*[December 20th 2025]*, https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/about-wereldmuseum-amsterdam/history-wereldmuseum-amsterdam.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

"tropics". By terminology, this term does qualify as a colonial framing, to point towards the Dutch East Indies (today's Indonesia), Suriname, the Caribbean Islands, and some African and Asian trading posts ruled by the Dutch Empire. This meant that tropics was an overarching word to reflect on the Dutch colonies as one unified entity. The institution's website states:

> "From the 1990s the museum rearranged the various departments. It organized high-profile temporary exhibitions using new exhibition techniques. In 2014 the museum merged with the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden and the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal to form the National Museum of World Cultures. From then it fell under the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and the collection formed part of the National collection. From 2023, the museums will continue under the name Wereldmuseum: Wereldmuseum Leiden, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, Wereldmuseum Berg en Dal, and Wereldmuseum Rotterdam."[40]

The Wereldmuseum, since 2014, is formed by four distinctive museum spaces in various cities, creating more space and institutions to work and gain the ability for more representation and limit the number of non-shown or "unused", uncurated works. The Wereldmuseum has a total of 450.000 objects and 600.000 photographs. The division of artifacts per continent is presented on the exhibition wall text *Collecting Worldwide*: North America, 2724, Central America, 13,356, South America, 13,592, Caribbean, 4248, Surinam, 9926, West Africa, 23,128, Africa, 28,643, Indonesia, 114,616, Japan, 33,533, China, 18,585, Western New Guinea, 33,725, Europe, 5567, Alaska, Canada, Scandinavia, and Siberia, 4008.[41] (Fig. 7) When observing the presented data, it can be said that the least number of artworks were found in North America, and the most in Indonesia, as it was one of the Netherlands' biggest colonies.

When observing the building from outside, to this day, the building portrays multiple scenes of colonial representation of slavery (Fig. 8). Since the building was established during deeply colonial times, this is reflected visibly by the scenery depicted on the façade. Many of the scenarios depicted on the front of the buildings showcase enslaved people working, carrying goods, and ultimately being victims of the Dutch colonial system, specifically from the East Indies[42] (Figs. 9, 10,11, and 12). There is an obvious power imbalance between the

[40] Ibid.
[41] *Our Colonial Inheritance*, wall text, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, 2025.

[42] Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, "A building full of stories," accessed *[2026.01.12]*, https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/building-full-stories

non-European figures and the European ones, creating a visual imagery regarding hierarchy. Since the museum building was funded by Dutch companies and private parties tied to the colonial governance.[43] It is certainly a questionable decision made by the institution to keep such imagery as an obvious reference to the past. The Wereldmuseum of Amsterdam possibly made this decision, to not erase the past, and hence mark this period within Dutch cultural memory, carrying the past to the present.[44]

As the museum's main task is to utilize certain objects and depictions that were shaped in colonial times, and to curate these objects in order to shed light on past historical power imbalances and opt for a change by revisiting cultural memory with institutional and national integrity.[45] Today, the museum takes it as its mission to showcase the diversity of the world, which creates a lesser focus on solely white Dutch identity. The museum specifies its scope by the following text:

> "At the locations of the Wereldmuseum, you will learn more about how people live worldwide and how people are shaped by the world. Past and present. Because with more knowledge of the relationship between past and present, you can better understand the world of today. The Wereldmuseum encourages thinking about what it means to be human. What is our connection with the world around us? How do we relate to each other?"[46]

Hence, the museum has induced a large change from transitioning the past's colonizer gaze to one that is successful in embracing institutional integrity and offers an inclusive approach. The institution wishes to define and create connections by transforming cultures into a state of collective appreciation, instead of focusing on division. Naturally, this allows the museum to avoid having a framework that would place a special focus on Dutch culture solely. It is important to note that the museum does not feature Dutch artifacts due to its commitment to offering a specialized focus on non-European cultures, presenting items acquired through colonization. The museum places a special focus on connecting and educating diverse

[43] KIT (Royal Tropical Institute), "Introduction: Entangled in History," *Witness in Stone*, *[2026.01.12]*, https://witnessinstone.kit.nl/introduction-entangled-in-history/.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, "Why This Exhibition about *Our Colonial Inheritance*," accessed *[2026.01.12], Wereldmuseum Amsterdam*, https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/our-colonial-inheritance/why-exhibition-about-our-colonial-inheritance.
[46] Ibid.

identities, while showcasing its historical relations to its colonial past. The museum defines colonialism as:

> "Colonialism is the occupation and the exploitation of (overseas) regions through settlement. Central to this process is political domination and the social and economic exploitation of the indigenous population. To this day, colonialism is perpetuated in our ways of seeing, language, culture and religion."[47]

Here, the institution clarifies and recognizes that the colonial gaze had been infused into the European curatorial framework and everyday life, which shall be taken into account when defining the narratives concerning such artifacts. By foregrounding provenance, colonial violence, and the voices of neglected communities, the museum succeeds in contradicting the traditional Eurocentric curatorial narratives.

The exhibition space is composed of six main exhibitions: Things that matter, *Our Colonial Inheritance, Our Story, Ekow Nimako: Building Black Civilizations – The Nile 3025 CE, Made in China, Unfinished Pasts: Return, Keep or…?* Alongside these exhibitions, there is one family interactive exhibition named *Raad van de Raaf* and one memorial altar by Manuwi C. Tokai. As many of the exhibition names are pointing towards colonial themes, there is also a relevant reference to regret, such as *Unfinished pasts: return, keep or..?* This is an exhibition that deals with one of the most commonly discussed arguments around the looted objects and whether they should be returned. The historian, Gyan Prakash, writes in his book *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements:*

> "We live of course, in a world not only of commodities but also of representation, and representations—their production, circulation, history, and interpretation—are the very elements of culture. In much recent theory the problem of representation is deemed to be central, yet rarely is it put in its full political context, a context that is primarily imperial."[48]

Therefore, the Wereldmuseum in Amsterdam initiates and reinterprets a curatorial framework for colonized objects through establishing a connection between distant cultures by

[47] Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, "What Colonialism?," *Our Colonial Inheritance*, accessed December 20, 2025, https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/our-colonial-inheritance/what-colonialism.
[48] Prakash, Gyan. *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements (Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History)*. Edited by Gyan Prakash. 1st ed. Princeton, N.J: (Princeton University Press, 1994) 34, doi:10.1515/9781400821440.

placing them in a reconstructed cultural memory that aims to bridge the gaps. Moreover, the institution declares the historical presence of Dutch colonial interference with past colonies and aims to provide a morally rightful representation to the colonized entities, not only by an accurate illustration of culture, but by commemorating the experience of colonized cultural memory. The following section will further explore two of the permanent exhibitions in depth to create a visual guide of the ongoing narratives implemented in the museum space.

3.1 Our colonial inheritance and our story (permanent exhibitions)

After conducting a personal reflection of the museum experience, the following section will be based on visual cues and individual interpretation. This section will showcase two of the permanent exhibitions, with a special relevance to colonial materials. Firstly, it is important to clarify that peasantry in the Dutch context is to be understood as unpaid labour that is imposed on colonial victims and essentially dehumanizes them by withdrawing their personal rights over themselves. Hence, here, when referring to peasantry, it solely reflects slavery, not agricultural life in general. As previously mentioned, the museum had stated its mission of continuity by connection and remorse. As one of the wall texts had captured this motivation by

"The Wereldmuseum Amsterdam is a state of flux and change, as is society. In the old days, the museum was meant to convey colonial glory. Nowadays, the museum shows the historical collection from different perspectives. In doing so, it invites reflection and social discussion."[49]

Furthermore, this reflects not only the motivation behind the display and rhetoric of the curatorial narrative, but it also generates contemplation within visitors to further interpret and link emotional understanding of today's Dutch cultural memory.

The exhibition named *Our Colonial Inheritance* is an exhibition that showcases and emphasizes the colonial background of each artifact. The opening wall text at the exhibition states the following:

[49] *Our Colonial Inheritance*, wall text, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, 2025.

"*Our Colonial Inheritance* shows how small numbers of colonisers were able to impose this exploitative system of rule and extraction onto a far greater number of colonised people. It explores the resilience of the colonised as they fought against the system."[50](*Fig. 13)*

This reflects how the museum space provides a voice for those who had been dreadfully oppressed by the Dutch government and dedicates a form of remembrance by marking these events as a powerful image of resistance. This exhibition had a strong intent to educate the spectators about past and present political and human injustices, ultimately affecting collective memory and apprehension. Further, the exhibition text states that colonizing powers had frequently dominated the rulers and governors of each colony. The following presented wall text argues that:

> "Within the colonial system, the categories of oppressor and oppressed were not always evident or easily separable. Local rulers, even though they were under duress, cooperated with the colonial administration. This enabled them to retain some of their power. A judicial categorisation of colonial society into constituent ethnic groups maintained their unequal status."[51]

This explains that to fight back, the colonial system was ultimately impossible due to the colonizing powers often interfering with the local powers, which restricted and oppressed the societies to the utmost. Hence, it took great courage for any victim to try to fight by protesting or refusing to follow a command.

One artwork in particular commemorated the South African uprising in Soweto in 1976, which was made by Gavin Jantjes, named Freedom Hunters, and made in 1977 (*Fig*. 14). Many children, men, and women had advocated for Afrikaans to become the official medium in schools for issuing instructions. any had been brutally murdered by the police on June 16th and June 18th. This artwork is an example of many to point out the emotional resistance and response to colonial oppression, which is preserved through a more appropriate gaze, where the institution is showcasing its accountability for past historical violence. Another artwork that portrayed such meaningful and emotional menage regarding colonization is Julian Sinzogan's artwork named Gates of Return II. (*Fig.15*). This artwork depicts ghost ships and

[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

their spiritual returns of enslaved ancestors, which creates a powerful imagery of the victims; hence, this artwork creates a visionary path of psychological and cultural return for those whose lives have been taken unrightfully. This work also emphasizes the historical engagement with colonial trauma and diaspora. Moreover, this artwork, being presented as part of the display, reflects how the institution handles emotional and cultural consequences. Additionally, artist Mounir Samuel had established a privilege pyramid, which worked as an interactive artwork, that required the visitor to create their own personal privilege pyramid (*Fig.*16). This artwork helps the spectators to reflect on their system of hierarchy through their own lens, correlated to their personal values. However, this pyramid offers an illusory mirror on how such aspects of privilege still exist in our modern-day thinking, and it echoes into present systems of inequality, urging the viewers to further contemplate their very own sense of prejudiced thinking. Since the colonial aspects had been deeply sewn into the everyday Western and European gaze, which is reflected in objects or subjects that are found naturally in our environments, for instance, when one drinks coffee or adds spice when cooking, it projects colonial attributes that had been socially normalized as of today. Therefore, when thinking of past and continuous colonial gaze, it might not be as apparent to the spectator without drawing attention to the embedded cultural significance of such instances.

When observing the exhibition titled *Our Story*, it becomes relevant that the museum utilizes its space and narrative by creating an institution that declares the historical effects and traumas of colonization. The visitor must obtain a widened range of understanding of the Dutch cultural memory regarding its past violence against the colonized entities. This exhibition section provides the viewer with factual information regarding the foundation of the institution, and it also provides answers to ethical questions raised, such as the acquisition of the presented artifacts:

> "The museum has acquired objects through various means. Some were brought, others were donated, and sometimes stolen. All within the context of colonial oppression, trade, military actions, scientific projects, and missionary work." (Fig. 17)[52]

This quote is taken from the curatorial narrative displayed on the exhibition's wall text, and it showcases how the museum takes accountability for the past historical cruelties. By emphasizing and problematizing the Western colonizer gaze, the museum initiates a stance for

[52] *Our Colonial Inheritance*, wall text, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, 2025.

communal apprehension and integrity, to declare as its institutional mission. Furthermore, this not only informs the spectators but also succeeds in educating the masses on ethical viewing of the presented artworks and displays. Another important clarification that this exhibition made was regarding the storage of human remains:

"The Wereldmuseum has decided to remove most human remains from its exhibitions. These are stored respectfully in our depot, and we are researching their history so that they can possibly be returned to their country of origin." (Fig. 18)[53]

Similarly to this statement regarding ethical responsibilities of ancestral remains, they also clarify their standpoint on returning objects:

> "The collection of the Wereldmuseum is part of the national collection. Objects from that collection have occasionally been returned to their country of origin. In 1985, 4.5000 pre-Hispanic shards were returned to Aruba. In 2023, 485 objects were returned to Indonesia, including the so-called Lombok treasure and four large stone sculptures." (Fig. 19)[54]

This section further showcases the institution's input on returning items, which reflects national reinterpretation and a recognition of trauma that has impacted people and the preservation of culture and identity in the past and present colonies. It is to be reflected that the Wereldmuseum of Amsterdam not only aims to showcase accountability but to further connect the people and unite them through education, and to provide a voice through visual representation to the oppressed.

Overall, the museum undoubtedly declares its rough history, and it is remorseful over it; further on, the institution tries to strengthen its vision on unity and shared history by trying to reconstruct the ideology behind what ethnography means in a more diverse context. Due to its diversified context, it allows the spectators to shift their focus onto humanity and ethical issues, which is ultimately an invitation to embrace differences through education and curatorial narrative.

[53] *Our Story*, wall text, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, 2025.
[54] *Our Story*, wall text, Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, 2025.

3.2. The politics of curatorial narrative inside the Wereldmuseum, Amsterdam

When examining the political environment of the Wereldmuseum in Amsterdam, it becomes apparent that it embodies a post-colonial attitude in its curatorial narrative and display. As previously stated, there is a strong power relation between the government's ideological views and the national narrative that transpires within the institutionalized context of the curatorial framework. Hence, these objects not only communicate aesthetic beauty, but are also closely connected to identity. According to Karp, there are four existing processes of identity development in museum-community relations: Firstly, "identities are defined by the content and form of public-culture events such as exhibitions and performances."[55] Secondly, "identities are subjectively experienced by people participating in public culture, often in ways conditioned by their other identities and experiences."[56] Thirdly, "expressions of identities can contain multiple and contradictory assertions – that is, there can be more than one message in a single expression or performance of identity – and the same is true for the experience of identities."[57] Lastly, "Identities are rarely, if ever, pure and uncontaminated by other identities, because they are usually fabricated from a mix of elements."[58] Karp suggests that the curatorial frameworks of exhibitions have a huge impact on how cultures are essentially shaped, due to the institution's choice of what constitutes ethnographic or colonial material. Moreover, Karp discusses that identity is experienced subjectively by the spectators, meaning that each experience is generated through the visitor's personal lens and identity. In his third fragment, there is a reflection regarding the museum's curatorial narrative, which can simultaneously showcase cultural heritage and colonial exploitation. Lastly, Karp declares that identities cannot be viewed as pure or uncontaminated, which underscores the idea that identity is hybrid and continuously formed. In the case of the Wereldmuseum of Amsterdam, the Dutch government had taken the initiative to establish an institution that communicates and reflects on past historical violence. Furthermore, Karp argues that:

[55] Ivan Karp, *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 20.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

> "Other aesthetic traditions take shape in cultural settings outside of such art museums as MOMA. There are, for example, aesthetics that use political or religious criteria in judgments about what is good and bad. In some aesthetic traditions, the experience of viewing an object may be more than just a sensory reaction to the visual, just as aesthetic idioms may be applied to objects and actions normally excluded from the realm of museums."[59]

In the case of the Wereldmuseum, it becomes evident that it tries to provide more than just aesthetic beauty, and there is an emphasized focus on the representation of cultural memory linked to each artifact. Further on, Karp argues that it is challenging for museum spaces to keep a fully unbiased curatorial narrative that does not connotate any form of political, cultural, or religious judgment. The following quote by Karp showcases how the framing of artifacts and their relations in current times essentially influences the collective apprehension of the spectators:

"This would have its parallel in the new research in anthropology and history, in what is coming to be called the 'History of the Other' or the 'Anthropology of the Imaginary,' which is less about the examination of people's everyday lives than an examination of how images and ideas about imaginary and unknown worlds come to appear real and even effect what is real."[60]

By illustrating this parallel between the *History of the Other* and the *Anthropology of the Imaginary*, Karp emphasizes that museums are fundamentally shaped by curatorial representation rather than by unprejudiced reality. As ethnographic museums often rely on social theoretical frameworks, visual material, and historically constructed identities to generate their curatorial narrative, this is possibly further perceived and contextualized by an audience that is not acquainted with the presented material. Henceforward, the museum representations can appear as authentic and authoritative, generated by curatorial display and institutional framework. Ultimately, the curatorial narrative leaves a significant impact on how different cultures are perceived and comprehended within society.

---

[59] Ivan Karp, "Defining Culture," *Museum Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (1994): 13, https://www-jstor-org.leidenuniv.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/3109026.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A220d67137c9410177d6964387c425609&ab_segments=0%2Fspellcheck_basic_search%2Ftest&initiator=&acceptTC=1

[60] Ibid.

Moreover, this issue can be further problematized through the perception of the gaze in terms of museology within the Wereldmuseum. Eva-Maria Troelenberg and Melania Savino's book, called the *Images of the Art Museum: Connecting Gaze and Discourse in the History of Museology* contemplate the idea of Western gaze defined by Norman Bryson as:

> "Norman Bryson has argued that the relation between vision and the gaze also spells out a relation between a centralized viewpoint and a larger 'expanded' field. Interestingly, he develops this argument by interrelating Western and Japanese philosophy. Even the thinking of seminal critical theorists of vision, such as Sartre or Lacan, he claims, 'remains held within a conceptual enclosure', where vision is still theorized from the standpoint of a subject placed at the center of a world."[61]

Bryson introduces the idea that the issue of representation does not solely rely on the curatorial narrative. Additionally, he points out that European museums often rely on a centralized viewing subject positioned as the center of the world, which creates a dominant and controlled gaze. Furthermore, the gaze is generated through reinterpretation by the spectator's personal lens of an expanded visual field in which the gaze is not anchored to a solitary authoritative object. This argument proposes that there is often a hierarchical relationship between the viewer and the artifacts on display.

On the other hand, it must be noted that politically speaking, the museum had declared the Netherlands' violent past as ethically evolving, which is visibly distinguished in the museum's curatorial narrative. The academic writer Vittoria Caradonna, has reflected this sensibility in her article *All the things happening outside of the museum push me back in: thinking through memory and belonging in Amsterdam's Tropenmuseum* regarding curatorial narrative that reframes past understandings of cultural memory:

"With these insights firmly planted in my mind, I recognise that the museum's willingness to engage with the topic of colonialism and slavery and decolonisation/decoloniality is in itself a victory – and not a small one, since the subject is largely still absent in the Dutch school curriculum also, the fact that the exhibition focuses on a critical perspective on the heritage of

[61] Eva-Maria Troelenberg and Melania Savino, *Images of the Art Museum: Connecting Gaze and Discourse in the History of Museology* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 8, https://doi-org.leidenuniv.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/9783110341362

slavery, emphasising the idea of contemporariness instead of locking colonialism in the past, shows considerable tenacity from the curatorial team"[62]

By framing colonialism as an ongoing concern rather than portraying it as a closed historical period, the museum prospers in challenging dominant narratives that distance the present from the violence of the past. This framework points out that the museum's curatorial narrative can be both reproductive and resistant to institutional power hierarchies. However, Caradonna also acknowledges that:

"The commemoration of colonialism and slavery in institutional settings, cannot thus be separated by a precise history of discounting the 'human cost' of such progress: for instance, the role of the activists who are now routinely invited to lend their voice, and thus credibility, to the institution would be, until not too long ago, omitted from the museum's narrative."[63]

This dual perspective presented by Caradonna reinforces the idea that institutional change is neither linear nor complete. While museums as of today may engage with the colonial past, obtaining a critically acclaimed tone towards past historical violence, they continue to operate within frameworks generated by former silences. Cardonna's reflection thus aligns with Karp's ideologies regarding curatorial narratives as inherently opposing, while it remains simultaneously enabling ethical progress, reflecting on historical power imbalances.

All in all, it can be said that, since Dutch identity is no longer framed as singular or homogeneous, but rather creates a shared construct, it produces a heightened need for representation of people and victims of colonized lands. However, it must be noted that even if the institution focused on ethical reframing successfully, the past narratives and the continuous narratives are dependent on the political state of the government. As of current times, post-colonialism has been implemented and reinforced by the governing system, which created a space to amplify previously excluded voices. It must be taken into account that the government does not offer qualitative attributes on the entire spectrum, such as the implemented budget cuts institutions face. Spectators interpret curatorial narratives affected by institutional and political structures, deliberating on Karp's notion of contradictory identities

[62] Vittoria Caradonna, "'All the Things Happening Outside of the Museum Push Me Back in': Thinking through Memory and Belonging in Amsterdam's Tropenmuseum," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 28, no. 1 (2022): 69, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2021.1910064
[63] Ibid., 67

and Bryson's critique of the centralized gaze. Lastly, Caradonna reflected the significant sensibility of national remorse and the intent of reframing cultural memory.

4. Analysis of the Ethnography Museum of Geneva (Musée d'ethnographie de Genève) Switzerland

The subsequent museum analysis will be conducted with a specific focus on the Ethnographic Museum of Geneva, in Switzerland, often referred to as 'MEG', which is the French abbreviation of the institution's name Musée d'ethnographie de Genève. Switzerland identifies itself as a confederation that operates as a multilingual and multicultural state, with four official languages: French, Italian, German, and Romansh (a Latin-based language only spoken in Switzerland). Hence, the formation of national identity is rather diverse through regional distinctions; therefore, cultural plurality has been embedded in the Swiss political agenda. This means that diversity has been considerably present, presumably identity is not solely linked to one cultural group in specific. This strengthens coexistence rather than assimilation and shows that identity is not fixed by only one cultural aspect, which is why there is a strong regional autonomy across its cantons. Swiss identity in this sense is more civic than ethnic, formed more by a political coherence than a singular cultural origin.

Although Switzerland did not have formal overseas colonies, it was still significantly participating in trading, scientific research, and ethnographic aggregation. Even though colonialism may not appear as evidently as by other Western powers, Switzerland still followed the circulation of colonial knowledge, which enabled the museum to acquire colonized supplies, which is why the museum collection does not solely consist of European ethnic artifacts as cultural material.[64]

The museum was founded in 1901, initiated and constructed by the city; however, its collection was assembled before the birth of the institution.[65] The first artworks presented in Geneva with an ethnographic intent were the wonders of art and nature, which were ultimately presented as a cabinet of curiosities.[66] Further on, they were relocated to the Academic Museum, established in 1818 by Genevan scientists.[67] In the year 1863 and onwards, Hippolyte Jean Gosse recognized a need for reorganization in order to create a more specific focus towards today's understanding of ethnography.[68] In 1901, the institution was officially

[64] Claire Brizon, *Collections coloniales : À l'origine des fonds anciens non européens dans les musées suisses* (Geneva and Zurich: Seismo, 2023), https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/91728.
[65] Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, "Historical Milestones," *MEG.ch*, accessed December 20, 2025, https://www.meg.ch/en/about-us/historical-milestones
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

recognized as an ethnographic museum, and it was simply called the Ethnographic Museum of Switzerland.[69] Moreover, the ethnographic collections were split from the archaeological collections and further enhanced through donations from the Museum of Missions and private individuals.[70] The museum space became exclusive to only ethnographic artifacts in the year 1910.[71] Henceforth, Eugène Pittard was appointed as the curator and director of MEG, making a significant contribution to scientific and educational practices by leading an evolving museum with a more modern approach.

The architectural value syndicates that the museum's visual appearance reflects modernity through a minimalistic and sharp-edged exterior (Fig. 20). The new building opened its doors for visitors in 2014, offering a captivating modern outlook, consisting of five distinctive floors. MEG declares its architectural motivation in shaping its building as:

> "After many unfulfilled dreams of building a larger museum, Geneva finally decided in 2014 to offer its tercentenary collections a modern building at boulevard Carl-Vogt 65, on the esplanade of the old museum. Testifying to traditions that are sometimes past or still alive, ethnographic objects can appear as archives of human diversity itself caught up in the movement of history."[72]

The building not only serves as a container for ethnographic artifacts, but it also offers an architectural response to the continuously evolving nature of ethnography. This quote further reflects that the state of the ethnographic collections is connected to traditional habits that may no longer exist, or are ongoing, both generating a form of archives that emphasizes diversity through history. Hence, the institution's exterior design mirrors an essence of a conceptual shift of modernity that is aligned with the cultural framing of the objects in a political, historical, and social outlook with institutional integrity. The Museum states on its website that: "MEG is a place of debate, exchange, and critical reflection in which the arts, sciences, philosophy, culture, history, and politics."[73] The institution strengthens this argument regarding its scope of curatorial vision, since it displays human diversity as a dynamic representation instead of a fixed narrative. The MEG's website further addresses the importance of diversity applied to cultural narratives, with institutional integrity: "The Museum

[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

proposes reflections that start from a local perspective and open up to realities that are played out on a global scale, such as the question of the Anthropocene."[74] The so-called "Anthropocene" is the idea that human-induced activities are primarily shaping our environments and society, by constantly altering the ecosystem, the process of colonization, capitalism, and climate change.[75] This showcases the museum's attributes of creating a diverse narrative that declares its mission of an evolving, modernistic approach when defining culture and identity. The museum's website writes: "This plurality of fields of exploration makes it possible to address themes related to the main contemporary issues, such as social or racial inequalities or global climate change." [76]Henceforward, the museum focuses on modern social issues, which stem from historical and cultural memory and the generational outcome of Anthropocene.

Additionally, the museum declares its significant mission to create a space that reflects both global societal and environmental issues.[77] The institution also declares its relationship and contribution to the Western colonial past, and collaborative processes and sustainability as its primary focus.[78] The *Strategic Plan 2020-2024,* published by MEG, offers a document that outlines the museum's cultural integrity and appreciation with a heightened focus on decolonization as: "MEG is undergoing a profound transformation to keep pace with these global trends, and has set the following strategic objectives to be achieved by 2024: Decolonize the Museum."[79] Such aspirations are deemed admirable and reflect post-colonial intent in order to reshape cultural memory through a more ethical gaze. Moreover, MEG deliberately states its museological motivations on its website:

> "Strengthen the Museum's role as a platform and partner for local and international collaborations. Diversify and include new audiences. Inspire creative processes. To become a reference museum on sustainable development."[80]

This then also creates a strong sense of education by strengthening the narrative of unity, and by centering diversity, it also generates a strong focus on unity within humanity. This is

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, "Strategic Plan 2020-2024," *MEG.ch*, accessed December 20, 2025, https://www.meg.ch/en/about-us/strategic-plan-2020-2024.

essentially needed in a state like Switzerland due to its multiculturalism, where identity cannot be linked to a fixed language.

The museum preserves an entire collection comprising 75,000 objects and 200,000 books.[81] Furthermore, the collection is divided into seven different aspects: Europe, 20,000 objects, Africa, 17,000 objects, Asia, 14,000 objects, Americas, 12,000 objects, Oceania, 5,000 objects, Ethnomusicology, 2,300 objects, and 21,000 audio recordings, and Visual anthropology, about 100,000 photographic materials.[82] This makes the overall count of cultural material that the museum preserves 191,300 ethnographic documents. Regarding the foreign materials in the collection, the MEG's collection management policy states the following: "In the matter of its policy for managing collections, the City of Geneva and the MEG on its behalf formally recognizes the collective rights of the indigenous peoples and local communities concerning their traditional knowledge and associated traditional cultural expressions."[83] This remark reflects an integrated appreciation and historical acknowledgment when offering curatorial representations of foreign ethnographic artifacts with respect to their origins and intended cultural meanings and purposes. The collection management policy further contemplates representations of indigenous art as:

"If need be, a questionnaire will accompany all offers of acquisition so as to determine the nature of the collective rights of indigenous peoples and local communities concerned regarding traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions."[84]

From this quote, it becomes apparent that the museum acknowledges that ownership and interpretation of foreign cultural artifacts must be curated with responsibility to the communities and cultures it represents. By this, the museum ensures that such objects are formally presented and not misappropriated.

The museum currently offers its visitors three distinct exhibitions on show. Namely, the *Archives of Human Diversity* (permanent exhibition), *Encounters*, and *Afrosonica - Soundscape.* The permanent exhibition showcases more than 1000 objects, generating a cultural encounter and the historical narrative of six continents for the spectators.[85] The

[81] Ibid.
[82] Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, Collection Management Policy (Geneva: Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, 2022), PDF file,10.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, "Renewal," *The Archives of Human Diversity*, *MEG.ch*, accessed December 20, 2025, https://www.meg.ch/en/exhibitions/archives-human-diversity/renouvellement.
[85] Ibid.

Encounters exhibition appointed twelve people to choose an object from the collection and explain what drew them to it. Lastly, the *Afrosonica* – Soundscape exhibition deliberately explored the role of music within African societies and diasporas and shows the significance of music by interconnecting people. The following paragraph will provide an in-depth analysis of the exhibition *Archives of Human Diversity and Encounters*.

4.1 Analysis of The Archives of Human Diversity (permanent exhibition)

Due to the inability to visit the Museum of Ethnography of Geneva in person, this analysis relies on publicly sourced documentation and secondary sources, which constrain the direct experience of the visual appearance of the exhibitions. The permanent exhibition inside the MEG was named the *Archives of Human Diversity*. Subsequently, the name reflects the institution's recognition of the diverse properties of culture as a material. It indicates that the exhibition implies and provides a set of cultural objects that are presented on the terms of inclusion and unity. This exhibition was inaugurated in 2014, when the building was officially reopened after the renovation.[86] The exhibition is divided into six distinct displays, and it introduces six of the seven continents: Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania, and both North and South America, presented as the Americas; additionally, it includes a designated section of Swiss culture within Europe and an extra segment regarding ethnomusicology.[87] The exhibition displayed had been renewed in 2024 with the intent of preservation. However, as many of the presented objects are susceptible to deterioration, their fragile state required a change.[88] The change was also induced by their intention to create a more focused curatorial narrative on decolonization.[89] Moreover, the museum declares its ideology on the origins of the artifacts as: "Through collaborations initiated with source communities, some of these objects may eventually return to their countries of origin, while others will create opportunities to reflect on their nature, their use, and the respect they are afforded as sensitive objects."[90] The institution

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

suggestively tries to offer an ethical response to the items that were misplaced from their origins, with an intent to curate the objects with respect to their original cultural environment.

The exhibition can be viewed freely by the spectators' personal choice of route within the museum space. The six presented pathways are: Asian pathway, Americas pathway, Europe pathway, Africa pathway, Oceania pathway, and the Ethnomusicology pathway (Figs. 21, 22, 23). Starting with the Asian pathway, the museum defines its narrative as: "This region of the world, often romanticized by the West for several centuries, is presented in a way that juxtaposes an objective view of the major Eastern cultural areas with the way in which the European gaze has appropriated these spaces. Fascination with the Orient became a significant motif in Western arts and literature as early as the 18th century."[91] This statement highlights the institution's dual approach by displaying the Asian continent as appropriate to their cultural environments, and framing, meanwhile, it also acknowledges the limitations arising from the perspectives that formed the Western understanding of the region. Furthermore, by explicitly discussing the restriction of the European gaze, the museum showcases an intermediary in their curatorial narrative, in order to urge the spectators to look beyond the biased representation of Asian/Orientalist stereotypical cultural apprehension. Further on, the exhibition shows a wide range of long-forgotten Asian ceramics which were researched by an ethnologist and ceramist named Horace van Berchem (1904- 1982).[92] The display also has a strong focus on Asian religious movements, with sacred artifacts that hold a deep historical importance. Secondly, the Americas pathway conducts a specific focus on indigenous art.[93] The museum reflects on its gaze on the Americas as: "In the museum's imagination, the Americas have often been associated with great pre-Columbian civilizations and their spectacular pyramids, the bison hunts of the northern 'Plains Indians,' and the hunter-gatherers of impenetrable Amazonian forests. However, Indigenous peoples of the continent now invite us to challenge these representations, to listen to new stories, and to reflect on how to care for these collections at the MEG."[94] This passage suggests that the museum comprehends its tendencies of past oversimplification and exoticizing tendencies, while also reflecting a shift towards an ethical collaboration of working with indigenous communities to create a culturally appropriate narrative. As the museum puts great attention to the colonial past, this approach is exemplified in the artwork Tïntukai (Deforestation) made by Guyanese artist Ti'iwan Couchili in 2020.[95]

[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

This artwork embodies the historical event of illegal gold extraction, which is a significant contributor to environmental issues by deteriorating the living conditions of residents living along the Amazon.[96] Thirdly, the Europe pathway, which predominantly focuses on Swiss ex-votos, which is a Latin term translating as "according to the promise made". They are related Christian sanctuaries[97]. These artifacts express gratitude to the divine beneficiary for answering a prayer, which then not only referred to the act of offering but became synonymous with the objects.[98] This section also displays a small collection of painted canvases and tablets depicting an event or object of the received grace from Switzerland.[99] Showcasing the diversity of the country and its languages and religions. Fourthly, looking at the Africa pathway, there is a clear demonstration that the museum is working closely with the people of the represented communities. The museum stated that in 2013, a Malian sociologist, Youssouf Tata Cissé, visited the institution.[100] He pointed out that: "The masks are, above all, cultural objects crafted with seriousness, named like human beings, consecrated as deities or spirits of ancestors, and revered as such. Whoever does not know the origin of a mask, the myths, songs, and dances specific to it, knows nothing of that mask."[101] He also emphasized that many of the presented artifacts had been poorly documented; hence, the artifacts could not be reflected in the curatorial narrative to their full socio-cultural value and symbolic significance.[102] Moreover, the museum states its recognition and motivation, which led to the reconfiguration of the display:

"The reworking of certain display cases also quietly expresses the essential and constructive criticisms that have been conveyed to the MEG over the past decade, which the Museum wished to fully respect. Thus, sacred and funerary objects containing relics have been removed from their pedestals and are now isolated." [103]

This passage explains how the museum had regenerated its approach by removing funerary and sacred artifacts to respect their cultural sensitivity, and provides an ethical response to the concerns raised by the presented communities. Fifthly, the Oceania pathway,

[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.

which shows its significance as part of the exhibition due to its display of human remains that ultimately raised multiple ethical concerns.[104] This ethical concern was recognized by MEG as:

"The most significant change concerns the presentation of human remains. In 2014, during the reopening of the MEG, some objects made entirely or partially from human remains were exhibited. Their presence was justified by the fundamental aspect of their ritual use and because it provided insights for understanding their culture of origin."[105]

The institution explains that such artifacts are displayed in order to showcase the representational use for ritualistic purposes to provide a more in-depth understanding of their properties linked to cultural memory. But the museum had understood that such displays are ethically sensitive and potentially distressing, hence it was necessary to reframe these objects in the light of contemporary museological morals. Therefore, not so long ago, the museum changed its viewpoint and stated on its website:

> "For the reopening of the permanent exhibition in 2024, the MEG has decided to continue exhibiting human remains only after obtaining permission from the community of origin. Exchanges have begun with four museums and cultural centers from French Polynesia, Papua New Guinea, the Indonesian province of Papua, and Vanuatu regarding the presentation of six human remains." [106]

Overall, this change in curatorial display demonstrates a shift towards collaborative illustration and understanding of such ethically troubling artifacts with the intent to respect origins and source communities. Lastly, considering the Ethnomusicology pathway consists of two large displays with musical instruments.[107] The museum has stated its limitation regarding its curatorial narrative as: "However, this design approach has evident limitations, particularly because the classification does not do justice to indigenous conceptions of what a musical instrument represents locally."[108] The museum reflects its lack of comprehension of indigenous

[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

instruments and is motivated to achieve and acquire a better understanding of the cultural importance to create a more inclusive curatorial representation.

"It also imposes significant museological constraints: the radical option of emptying the display case to create a new narrative is not feasible at the moment, so the only possible modifications are to replace one specific type of instrument with another."[109]

The aforementioned constraints exemplify the practical challenges faced by the museum in adapting to create a more culturally inclusive display, showcasing that changes must be intended.

All in all, this exhibition illustrated an understanding that museological adjustments had to be made to achieve a more inclusive curatorial narrative. When discussing the Asia and Americas pathways, it became clear that the museum recognized its position and influence in the past because of the Western gaze. It also attempted to incorporate cultural context and critical overviews, to encourage the spectators to engage with the presented cultural materials in a more thoughtful retrospective. The Oceania pathway raises ethical concerns regarding the display of artifacts that consist of human remains, which prompted a collaborative dialogue with the countries of origin, which led to a change in the display. Finally, the Ethnomusicology pathway showcases that the curatorial framing of objects must always be presented to their fullest potential of cultural background in order to obtain an ethically well-outlined narrative that respects its homeland and its people. Collectively, the previously mentioned examples demonstrate MEG's ongoing commitment to the ethical portrayal of distinct cultures and people by keeping a critical overview and understanding the importance of accurate cultural representation in a museum space.

4.2 The politics of curatorial narrative inside the Museum of Ethnography, Geneva (MEG)

Determining the curatorial narrative in terms of politics reveals that the institution takes a strong stance on a decolonizing narrative and is committed to portraying an inclusive dialogue through its displays. The museum's aspiration to reflect inclusivity might also be encouraged due to its own diverse population; henceforward, national identity is not tied to static or

[109] Ibid.

dependent on language barriers or cultural affiliations. This might have affected the general curatorial framework and prompted a rather shared and more inclusive undertone regarding its political apprehension. It is important to note that the museum acts as a conductor of social narratives that holds the responsibility of cultural presentation that serves educational purposes, but can also raise ethical issues regarding representation. The anthropologist, cultural theorist, and historian James Clifford discusses power relations within museum spaces in his book *Museums as Contact Zones* as follows: "The museum, like the archive, is not simply a place for the collection and preservation of objects but a site of power relations."[110] The museum acts as an institution of education and representation, which essentially has the capability to mirror a sense of political undertone, with a possible correlation to the sources of funding, often involving the government. However, this must not be applicable in terms of all museum spaces, as they can apply a subversive curatorial tone. The narratives inside the museum space also reflect the state's political ideology in the case of the MEG. This is denoted in the references to past mistakes of positioning and aligning with the Western gaze as its model for curatorial narratives. Another perspective is offered by Clifford, who defines museums as contact zones: "By a 'contact zone' I mean a space of colonial encounters, where people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict."[111] Hence, colonial approaches are necessary for such institutions to portray historical casualties in order to keep educating the spectators with emotional and cultural memory linked to it, so that the trauma is re-experienced, generating emotional responses and further ensuring that such tragedies do not get forgotten. Clifford further contemplates the power of shaping curatorial narratives as: "What changes when museums are viewed as contact zones is the status of curatorial authority."[112] This shows why MEG is open to ethical recommendations of their form of cultural representation from the source community, and if needed, there is a tendency to change the display or narrative to fit the correct ethical circumstances. Clifford continues to argue the importance of involvement regarding cultural knowledge linked to artifacts: "In contact zones, indigenous peoples are not merely sources of objects or information, but active participants in the production of meaning."[113] Hence, the museum incorporates its institutional critique into its display, based on the acquired knowledge from the symbolized societies.

[110] James Clifford, *Contact Zones: Museums, Cultures, and Colonial Encounters* (London: Routledge, 1997), 2.
[111] Ibid., 4.
[112] Ibid., 6.
[113] Ibid., 7.

Moreover, Clifford argued that "Exhibitions become arenas for the negotiation of identity, memory, and history."[114] This straightforwardly links museum display to the politics of identity by reflecting the authority museums play in shaping one's collective understanding of the importance of realistic cultural representation within the curatorial narrative. Similar to Clifford, Karp introduces the idea that foreign cultures are prone to being misrepresented in museum spaces:

> "Exhibits of exotic art and cultures are as much an arena of discourse about the other as editorial cartoons or travel books. However, because they draw on the authority of museums and the public's goodwill toward museums, exhibitions have a greater legitimacy than forms of popular culture defined as less highbrow. But all forms of communicating about the other use the organizing principles of difference and similarity to produce their imagery."[115]

Therefore, a realistic representation is indispensable to an ethically appropriate form of education with a strong focus on inclusivity, as such an institute's core mission is to unite and affect people through the use of cultural memory-induced artifacts shaped by emotional and historical narratives. On the other hand, Karp, focuses on the communicative power of exhibitions, claiming that "All exhibitions, in fact all representations of the other, simultaneously exoticize and assimilate, but some museums often emphasize both exhibiting devices within the same setting."[116] This idea illustrates that museums can concurrently emphasize cultural differences and normalize it for their visitors, which highlights the importance for an institution like MEG to cautiously balance ethically appropriate depiction with educational ambitions.

Overall, MEG's curatorial narrative reflects a commitment and a political undertone of decolonization, inclusivity, and ethical representation of cultural diversity, possibly affected by Switzerland's culturally diverse population. Drawing on Clifford's concepts of museums being utilized as "contact zones", the institution claims its historical injustices towards the affected communities, and it also incorporates feedback from these communities in order to create a more culturally appropriate representation within its curatorial narratives. Since

[114] Ibid., 9.
[115] Ivan Karp, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 11.
[116] Ibid., 13.

exhibitions act as arenas where identity, memory, and history are defined, the museum partakes the role of the educator in shaping collective cultural memory. Correspondingly, Karp also emphasized that displaying foreign cultures contrasts a power relation, where the institution opts for defining forms of representation, which can both exoticize and assimilate; hence, cultural demonstration must be curated with respect to the source community[117]. In conclusion, these perspectives underline the necessity for MEG to stay ethically informed and open to critique to provide an inclusive approach that can be engaged by the spectators both emotionally and intellectually.

[117] Ivan Karp, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 11-13.

5. The contrasted differences between the discussed Ethnography Museums on the principle of political narrative and curatorial display

When observing the analytical reflections of the previously declared differences between the specified Ethnographic Museums, it becomes apparent that each institution is utilized as a political display of identities. Firstly, the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest imposes a display that is predominantly focused on Hungarian identity in the realms of peasantry and folk culture.

As the Hungarian museum was officially established as a separate ethnographic institution in a newly designated building, previously allocated to the Palace of Justice, back in the Soviet year of 1973. The museum narrative possibly reflected a similar curatorial form of display and historical narrative, comparable to the Ethnographic Museum of Moscow. In the book *A New Turn in Russian Ethnography: Science and Cultural Politics at Moscow's First Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867* by Mariam M. Kerimova and Maria V. Zolotukhina, they discuss the first ever exhibited ethnographic display in Moscow. Correspondingly, the book explained that:

> "The main area/space of the exhibition (first department) consisted of three sections. The first one presented dummies of aboriginal peoples stressing the vast expanses of Russia – from Alaska, Siberia and the outskirts of the European part of the Russian North to the Caucasus and Crimea, the Baltic States, Central Asia. The Eastern Slavs Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians made up the second section and Western and Southern Slavs of Central and South-Eastern Europe constituted the third section."[118]

This quote offers a relevant insight into a similar political display between Moscow and Budapest, regarding creating a strong narrative of the mainland, and both had a deepened focus on the past landmarks. This demonstrates an intent of declaration of such past lands as politically important and culturally significant to the mainland. Meanwhile, neither Russia nor

[118] Mariam M. Kerimova and Maria V. Zolotukhina, "A New Turn in Russian Ethnography: Science and Cultural Politics at Moscow's First Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 31, no. 2 (2022): 118, https://doi.org/10.3167/ajec.2022.310207

Hungary was recognized as a colonial power in the sense of Western colonialism. However, their curatorial narrative and display had portrayed a similar model of territorial control and cultural hierarchy within state-centered contexts. The historian and academic, Corinne Geering, writes in her article *Integration and Collaborative Imperialism in Modern Europe:* "In the case of the museum in Moscow, as well as those in Leiden and Paris, mentioned earlier, the exhibitions showcased overseas colonial territories in the newly established museums not as a distinct space but as a part of the empire."[119] Hence, the narrative could imply that these past territories are imperative and are framed with a political undertone of historical continuity, symbolic ownership, denoting that such lands remain inherently tied to Hungary, as in the presented case of past Russian colonies. Bulgarian anthropologist and historian, Nikolai Vukov, underlines this statement in his book named *Ethnoscripts and nationographies: imagining nations within ethnographic museums in East Central and Southern Europe* by arguing that: "This reflected a peculiar policy of time and space – one that posed a given 'nation' along an indefinite teleological axis and onto a concrete geographic territory where it was seen as if having lived forever."[120] Henceforward, the museum, with or without intention, communicates that past landmarks are continuously representative of today's Hungarian national identity. He further discusses that: "Most of the museums of ethnographic heritage of the communist period maintained a strongly ethnocentric and sometimes overtly nationalist discourse."[121] This was likely triggered by the need to define identity under Soviet induced state control, and the significant production of folk artifacts under communist ideologies regarding peasant/rural life, in the context of Hungary. Furthermore, the effective definition of identity in terms of ethnology meant: "Each of these exhibitions was inherently political, and the very discourse of the nation was a political construct."[122] Meanwhile, politics appears as an undertone of the curatorial narrative, which can be clearly reflected through the display and focus of the exhibitions.

Observing the Wereldmuseum and MEG's post-colonial representation with a focus on diversity, in contrast to the Hungarian Ethnography Museum, it can be said that the Hungarian

[119] Corinne Geering, *Integration and Collaborative Imperialism in Modern Europe*, chapter 9, accessed via Bloomsbury Collections, 170, https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/monograph-detail?docid=b-9781350377370&tocid=b-9781350377370-chapter9

[120] Nikolai Vukov, "Ethnoscripts and Nationographies: Imagining Nations within Ethnographic Museums in East Central and Southern Europe," in *Great Narratives of the Past: Traditions and Revisions in National Museums*, ed. Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodenstein, and José María Lanzarote Guiral, EuNaMus Report No. 4 , 337, (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2011), http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078.

[121] Ibid., 339.

[122] Ibid., 341.

display focuses on Hungarian identity predominantly, which can be due to their limited access to overseas artifacts from their collection. Thus, both the Netherlands and Switzerland contribute to ethnographic representation similarly with a political undertone, but a different outlook. Both institutes had emphasized their specific focus on diversity by declaring their mission to unite people and to create an ethical narrative around humanity as one. Meanwhile, the Netherlands had largely exhibited colonial objects, due to its violent historical past, the museum operates with a sense of remorse, and it claims to widen the scope of Dutch national identity by offering the affected colonies a sense of belonging in the Dutch cultural memory. Corresponding to Wereldmuseum, MEG implies its indirect participation in colonial activities, which had been declared as a mission statement of the museum, as its positioned gaze and curatorial narrative expresses institutional responsibility and integrity for culturally appropriate representation. The two institutions had taken the initiative to work closely with the represented cultures in order to avoid further misrepresentation or biased curatorial narrative. This initiative showcases a big step towards overcoming past ethically concerning issues; additionally, both museums have discussed whether foreign artifacts should be given back to their place of origin. Such discussions must take place to keep a morally appropriate approach to handling and displaying foreign artifacts. This is further contemplated by Iris Van Huis, Sigrid Kassik-Krogerus, Tuuli Lähdesmäki, and Liliana Ellena in their book *Dissonant Heritages and Memories in Contemporary Europe* as:

"Sociocultural setting and narration are also crucial parts of heritage. Scholars in heritage studies have emphasized how heritage is not a material thing, but rather an act of communication a cultural process, and a performance dealing with the assertion and mediation of historical narratives and collective memories, and the cultural social values that underpin these Heritage only emerges when something is narrated, defined, and/or treated as heritage in the "right" sociocultural context."[123]

This reference applies as a significant insight in emphasizing that the appropriate sociocultural context must be provided when presenting foreign heritages regarding display and curatorial narrative, which plays an important role in shaping collective understanding. In terms of

[123] I. van Huis, "Contesting Cultural Heritage: Decolonizing the Tropenmuseum as an Intervention in the Dutch/European Memory Complex," in *Dissonant Heritages and Memories in Contemporary Europe*, ed. T. Lähdesmäki, L. Passerini, S. Kaasik-Krogerus, and I. van Huis, Palgrave Studies in Cultural Heritage and Conflict (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 7, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11464-0_8

defining national identity within the Wereldmuseum, it is constructed through the understanding of the colonial past that demarcates today's Dutch identity. Meanwhile, in MEG, this essence of national identity is portrayed partially through colonial remorse, and it also reflects its own identity with a designated Swiss display. It must be noted that Swiss identity already consists of a multi-cultural society, hence identity is not fixed, but rather fluid. Michael M.J. Fischer, philosopher, explores in his article *Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory* that:

> "The search or struggle for a sense of ethnic identity is a (re-)invention and discovery of a vision, both ethical and future oriented. Whereas the search for coherence is grounded in a connection to the past, the meaning abstracted from that past, an important criterion of coherence, is an ethic workable for the future. Such visions can take number of forms: they can be both culturally specific and dialectically formed as critiques of hegemonic ideologies."[124]

This quote explains that identity is drawn by past historical events and memory, but it shall transcend and ethical vision towards the future, which has the capability to challenge dominant ideologies such as the state's systematic comprehension. Furthermore, Fischer argues that identity is constantly being shaped:

"What the newer works bring home forcefully is, first, the paradoxical sense that ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual and that it is often something quite puzzling to the individual, something over which he or she lacks control. Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned; it is something dynamic, often unsuccessfully repressed or avoided."[125]

Henceforward, this passage illustrates that by composing coherent descriptions regarding cultural memory, museums like MEG and the Wereldmuseum reflect how ethnic identities are remembered, subjugated, and understood. On the other hand, the Hungarian Ethnography Museum focuses on a rather fixed and nation-centered framework of identity.

---

[124] Michael M. J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory," in *Writing Culture*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 196, https://doi-org.leidenuniv.idm.oclc.org/10.1525/9780520946286-011.
[125] Ibid., 195.

In summary, the three distinctive ethnographic museums demonstrate how curatorial narratives utilize a political definition of identity and memory. The Hungarian Ethnography Museum has a specialized focus on folk culture and historical continuity through a nation-centered display and curatorial narrative. In contrast, the Wereldmuseum and MEG position themselves within a post-colonial narrative, with the intent of diverse ethical collaboration and critical representation of the past. These contradictory methodologies reveal how ethnographic museums take an active part in forming a collective understanding of culture and identity by offering a more fluid and inclusive representation of identities.

6. Conclusion

Conclusively, this research has examined the significantly different curatorial narratives and political displays of ethnographic museums within the European diaspora. These differences had been explored through the Hungarian Ethnography Museum of Budapest, the Wereldmuseum of Amsterdam, and the Museum of Ethnography in Geneva, and the conducted study had illustrated that there is a substantial difference between the distinct museum places.

As of collections, all ethnographic collections had exposed more than the culture presented within the museum space; however, only the Hungarian Ethnography Museum had a visible focus regarding national identity as its preliminary focus through its permanent exhibition. It also lays a particularly strong focus on folk art and peasant life, in terms of agricultural and everyday artifacts. This heightened focus on such materials and themes could be affected by the Soviet-induced oppression of the Second World War, when the society was forced to engage in agricultural production and rural values to support state revenue and industrialization over urbanism. Due to Soviet oppression and the effect of Trianon, the nation had to define the scope of national identity, to create a sense of belonging and unity in a politically fractured state. Within this framework, the emphasis on peasant life and folk culture can be seen as serving the broader economic relevance of the Soviet-induced state. Since the museum had been constructed under Soviet rule, it follows a similar curatorial narrative to Moscow's first ethnographic exhibition by demonstrating a strong similarity in offering a strong focus on national identity and past landmarks of the country. As per the ethical declarations of the Hungarian Museum, regarding colonial activities or state-encouraged oppression towards minorities had not been declared. However, the museum had successfully given space to Romani culture to be presented as part of the exhibition, weaving it into national identity, which communicates a great shift towards inclusion for a society that repeatedly experiences systematic exclusion. This constructs a narrative for the museum towards a more diverse and inclusive approach regarding Romani minorities.

Looking at the Wereldmuseum of Amsterdam, its exhibitions and all the presented museum materials consisted only of foreign artifacts. This is due to its violent colonial past and the history of the museum's establishment, which was initially created to showcase and preserve solely colonial artifacts. However, the museum had taken accountability for its unethical past, and the new purpose of the museum space is to create a narrative of unity and to showcase the diversity of the human species in general. The museum declares its space an

institution that utilizes cultural memory in order to create space for the oppressed, and to allow people to further contemplate such ethical issues, such as whether these artifacts can be returned and, if so, how that process should be initiated and then achieved. The museum also declares to widen the narrative around Dutch identity by showcasing how the affected people become a part of it. It also explains how colonialism is implemented into our everyday life, for instance, coffee and spices, which are essentially an outcome of colonial activities. The museum tries to imply that there is an intention to revolutionize the Western gaze by showing remorse and telling the story of the oppressed, through the use of appropriate cultural memory. Allowing trauma to unfold, to be digested, and to further stay present in collective consciousness. This essentially frames Dutch identity in terms of being a colonial power.

Finally, observing the Ethnography Museum of Geneva, it becomes apparent that this exhibition had an equally shared focus on all continents based on its display. This museum also implied that its main intention was to showcase diversity. Since Switzerland is a multi-cultural state, there is a heightened need for such narratives as there is an explicit understanding of identity being rather fluid. The museum had declared Switzerland's indirect partake in colonial activities, which is why the museum space offered more foreign artifacts compared to the one in Budapest. Similar to the Wereldmuseum, MEG implies that they had been working closely with people who are being presented inside the museum space in order to achieve a realistic representation of the artifacts based on cultural memory. Although MEG had included its own cultural heritage as part of the permanent exhibition, which denotes that there is an equal attention in the curatorial display regarding diversity. The museum had also implicated ethical concerns regarding their display of artifacts, considering human remains, which they are prompting to work ethically by collaborating with the source communities. The museum's undertone of post-colonial aspect exemplifies the political properties regarding display and narrative, which serve educational purposes for present and future generations about both European and foreign/overseas identities.

Taken together, these three case studies have demonstrated that ethnographic museums function as political arenas in which cultural memory, identity, and power relations are negotiated through display. The research had pointed out that nationality and heritage do not possess a fixed definition, and they are defined by the curatorial narrative and political display. The essence of fluidity in defining identity allows a continuous reinterpretation of cultural memory, ethical concerns, and contemporary social values.

This research is limited by differences in access to the entity of the collections and the inability to conduct a real-life visual observation in person. Thus, these constraints also

emphasize the importance of institutional representation and curatorial narrative in shaping, affecting, and educating society. Ultimately, this thesis argues that ethnographic institutions play a significant and crucial role in how societies perceive themselves and others. By offering a critical narrative regarding history and political implications, MEG and the Wereldmuseum reflect a tendency to apply change by offering a more inclusive, ethically considered environment, while the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography highlights the enduring power of nation-centered identity within their political display. Considering all arguments, it is up to the future generations to decide what shall be the cultural focus of an ethnographic institution and what that entails about the ongoing political narratives.

Appendices



Figure 1: Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, Hungary. Photo: József Molnár/ Napur Architect Ltd. (Image published on Architecture Master Prize Project.



Figure 2: Ceramics of the World, Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, Hungary, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 3: Folk art without peasantry, Wall text, Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, Hungary, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter

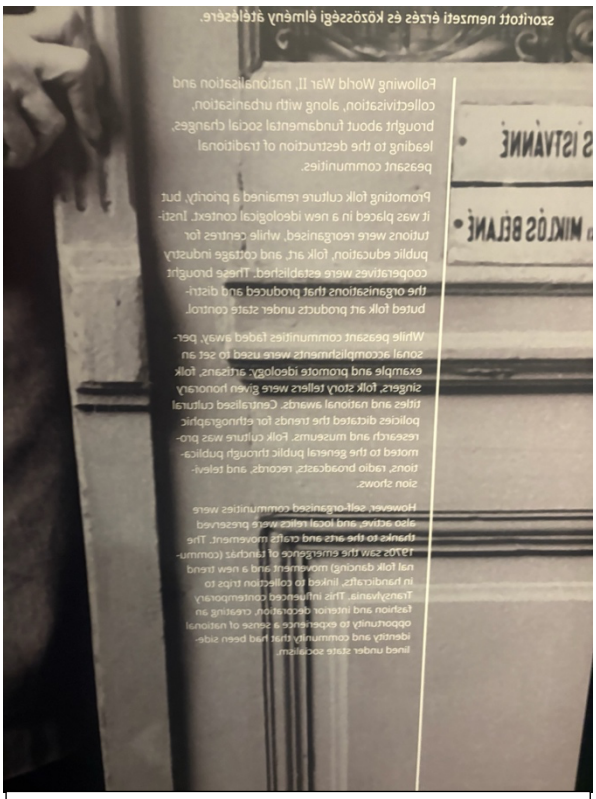


Figure 4: Folk art without peasantry, Wall text, Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, Hungary, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 5: New boundaries, Trianon, Wall text, Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, Hungary, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter

Photo: Tíria Sára Péter

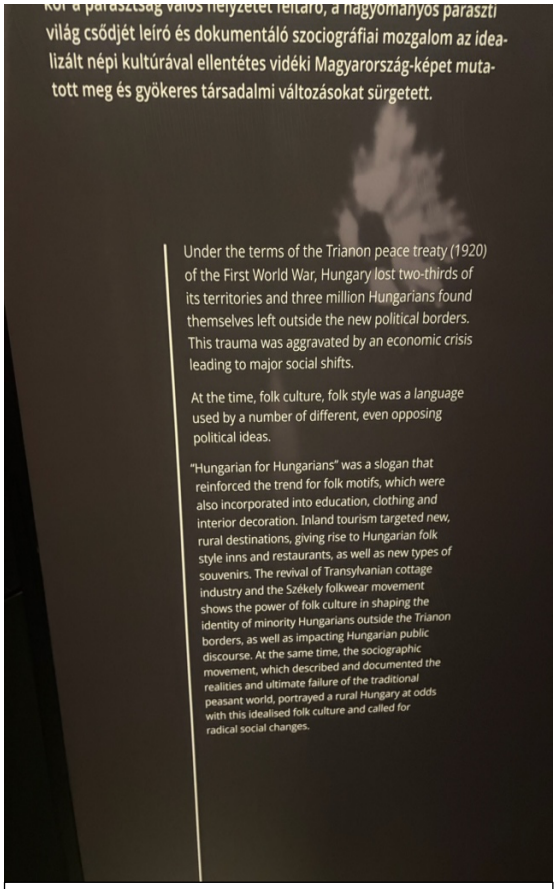


Figure 6: New boundaries, Trianon, Wall text, Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, Hungary, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 7: Wereldmuseum, Wall-text, *Our colonial inheritance,* Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 8: Wereldmuseum building, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 11: Wereldmuseum building, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 12: Wereldmuseum building, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 9: Wereldmuseum building, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 10: Wereldmuseum building, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 13: Wereldmuseum, Our Colonial Inheritance, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 14: Freedom Hunters, Gavin Jantjes, 1977, Wereldmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 15: Gates of Return II, Julian Sinzogan, Benin 2009, Collection Wereldmuseum TM-6411-1

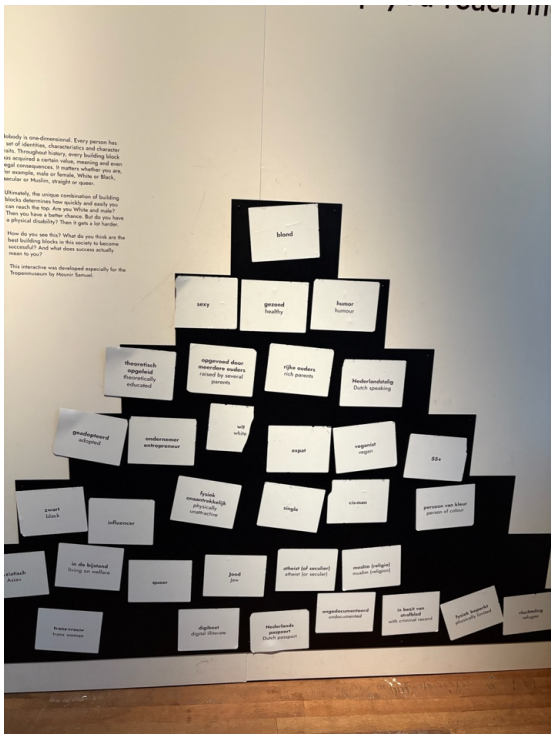


Figure 16: Pyramid of Privilege, Mounir Samuel, Wereldmuseum, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 17: Wereldmuseum, Our Story, Wall text, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 18: Wereldmuseum, Our Story, Wall text, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter

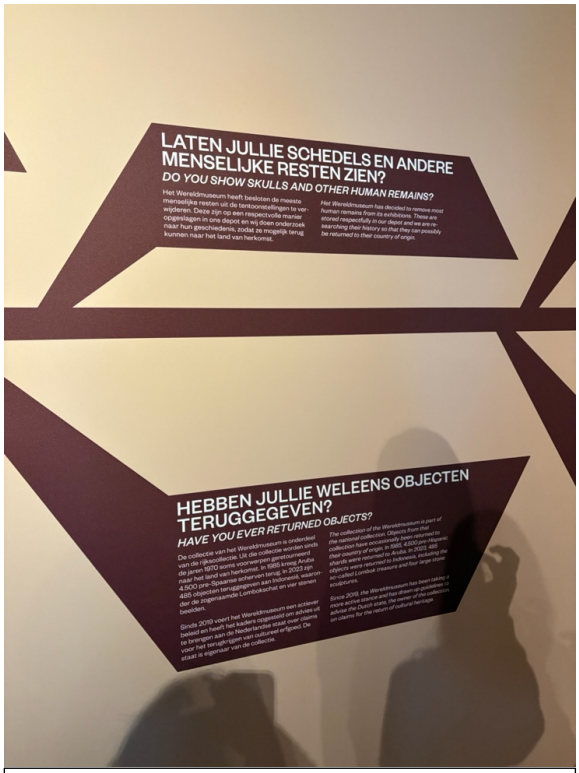


Figure 19: Wereldmuseum, Our Story, Wall text, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025. Photo: Tíria Sára Péter



Figure 20: MEG's building, Geneva, Switzerland, 2014, Video snippet, filmed by Ange Leccia, for Atelier Brückner

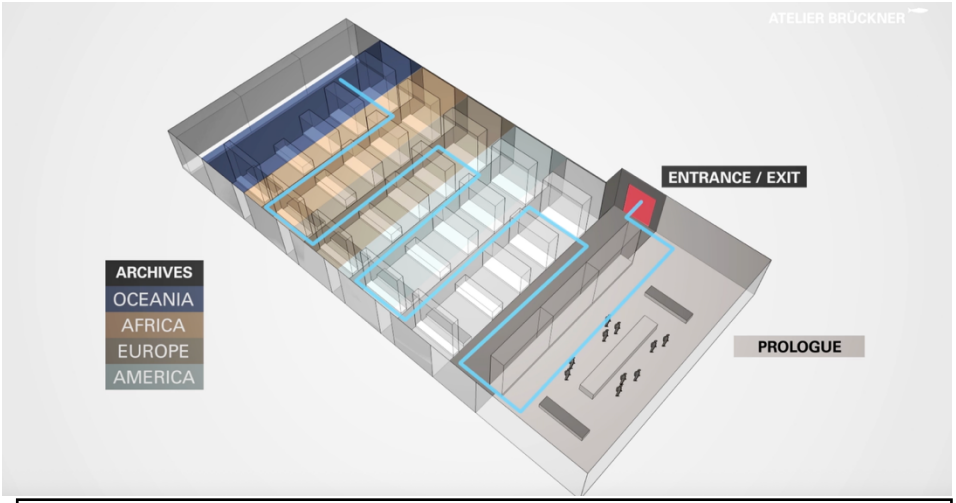


Figure 21: MEG's building, Geneva, Switzerland, 2014, Video snippet, filmed by Ange Leccia, for Atelier Brückner



Figure 22: MEG's building, Geneva, Switzerland, 2014, Video snippet, filmed by Ange Leccia, for Atelier Brückner



Figure 22: MEG's building, Geneva, Switzerland, 2014, Video snippet, filmed by Ange Leccia, for Atelier Brückner

Bibliography

Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Brizon, Claire. *Collections coloniales: À l'origine des fonds anciens non européens dans les musées suisses*. Genève; Zurich: Seismo, 2023. https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/91728

Brubaker, Rogers, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea. *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. 1st ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691187792.

Caradonna, Vittoria. "'All the Things Happening Outside of the Museum Push Me Back in': Thinking through Memory and Belonging in Amsterdam's Tropenmuseum." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 28, no. 1 (2022): 59–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2021.1910064.

Claire Brizon, *Collections coloniales : À l'origine des fonds anciens non européens dans les musées suisses* (Geneva and Zurich: Seismo, 2023), https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/91728.

Clifford, James. *Contact Zones: Museums, Cultures, and Colonial Encounters*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Fischer, Michael M. J. "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory." In *Writing Culture*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 194–233. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. https://doi-org.leidenuniv.idm.oclc.org/10.1525/9780520946286-011.

Grancea, LianaVE, Margit Feischmidt, and Jon Fox. "Chapter 1. The National Question in East Central Europe." In *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, 27–55. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691187792-008.

Hofer, Tamás. "The Perception of Tradition in European Ethnology." *Journal of Folklore Research* 21, no. 2/3 (1984): http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814549.

Ivan, Karp. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

Kerimova, Mariam M., and Maria V. Zolotukhina. "*A New Turn in Russian Ethnography: Science and Cultural Politics at Moscow's First Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867*." *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 31, no. 2 (2022): 118. https://doi.org/10.3167/ajec.2022.310207.

KIT (Royal Tropical Institute), "*Introduction: Entangled in History*," *Witness in Stone*, accessed [day month year], https://witnessinstone.kit.nl/introduction-entangled-in-history/.

Modest, Wayne, Nicholas Thomas, Doris Prlić, and Claudia Augustat, eds. *Matters of Belonging: Ethnographic Museums in a Changing Europe*. 2019.

Poulot, Dominique, Felicity Bodenstein, and José María Lanzarote Guiral, eds. *Great Narratives of the Past: Traditions and Revisions in National Museums*. EuNaMus Report No. 4. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2011.

Prakash, Gyan. *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*. Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History. Edited by Gyan Prakash. 1st ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400821440.

Rodriguez, Jeanette, and Ted Fortier. "1. The Concept of Cultural Memory." In *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith, and Identity*, 7–14. New York: University of Texas Press, 2007. https://doi.org/10.7560/716636-004.

Tamás Hofer, "Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage' in Hungary and Rival Versions of National Identity," in *Hungarians between "East" and "West": Three Essays on National Myths and Symbols*, ed. Tamás Hofer (Budapest: Museum of Ethnography, 1994)

Troelenberg, Eva-Maria, and Melania Savino. *Images of the Art Museum: Connecting Gaze and Discourse in the History of Museology*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110341362.

van Huis, I. "Contesting Cultural Heritage: Decolonizing the Tropenmuseum as an Intervention in the Dutch/European Memory Complex." In *Dissonant Heritages and*

Memories in Contemporary Europe, edited by T. Lähdesmäki, L. Passerini, S. Kaasik-Krogerus, and I. van Huis, 7. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11464-0_8.

Vukov, Nikolai. "Ethnoscripts and Nationographies: Imagining Nations within Ethnographic Museums in East Central and Southern Europe." In *Great Narratives of the Past: Traditions and Revisions in National Museums*, edited by Dominique Poulot, Felicity Bodenstein, and José María Lanzarote Guiral, EuNaMus Report No. 4. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2011. http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=078.

Wall text, Wereldmuseum. "*Our Colonial Inheritance."* 2025.

Wall text, Wereldmuseum. "*Our Story."* 2025.

MEG (Musée d'ethnographie de Genève). *Collection Management Policy*. Geneva: Musée d'ethnographie de Genève, [year], 10, PDF file.

MEG (Musée d'ethnographie de Genève). "*About MEG*." Accessed December 20, 2025. https://www.meg.ch/en/about-us/about-meg.

MEG (Musée d'ethnographie de Genève). "*Historical Milestones*." Accessed December 20, 2025. https://www.meg.ch/en/about-us/historical-milestones.

MEG (Musée d'ethnographie de Genève). "Renewal." *The Archives of Human Diversity*. Accessed December 20, 2025. https://www.meg.ch/en/exhibitions/archives-human-diversity/renouvellement.

MEG (Musée d'ethnographie de Genève). "Strategic Plan 2020–2024." Accessed December 20, 2025. https://www.meg.ch/en/about-us/strategic-plan-2020-2024.

Wayne Modest, Nicholas Thomas, Doris Prlić, and Claudia Augustat, eds., "*Matters of Belonging: Ethnographic Museums in a Changing Europe*" *(*London: UCL Press, 2019),

Wereldmuseum Amsterdam. "History of Wereldmuseum Amsterdam." Accessed December 20, 2025. https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/about-wereldmuseum-amsterdam/history-wereldmuseum-amsterdam.

Wereldmuseum Amsterdam. “What Colonialism.” Accessed December 20, 2025. https://amsterdam.wereldmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/our-colonial-inheritance/what-colonialism.