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The Cosmopolitan Museum

Adam Kuper

London School of Economics

Between 2014 and 2018, funded by the European Union's 'Creative European Programme', leaders of ten European ethnographic museums met to discuss a new kind of Museum of Other People, one that would come to terms with the legacy of colonialism and take account of large-scale migration to Europe from Africa and the Middle East. Pioneered in Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany, this came to be known as the World Culture Museum. It is not a Museum of Other People, because it includes Europe on equal terms, at least in principle, although in practice Europe is present, if at all, only in the form of folk traditions. So what makes a World Culture Museum different from a Museum of Other People?

Keywords: *colonialism, cosmopolitan museum, European ethnographic museums, Museum of Other People.*

2014–2018 m., finansuojant Europos Sąjungos programai „Kūrybiška Europa“, dešimties Europos etnografijos muziejų vadovai diskutavo apie naujo tipo *Kitų* tautų muziejų, kuriame būtų atsižvelgta į kolonializmo palikimą ir į didelio masto imigraciją į Europą iš Afrikos ir Artimųjų Rytų. Švedijoje, Nyderlanduose, Austrijoje ir Vokietijoje pradėtas kurti muziejus šiandien žinomas kaip Pasaulio kultūros muziejus. Tai nėra *Kitų* tautų muziejus, nes bent jau iš principo jis lygiaverčiai apima ir Europą, nors praktiškai Europa jame figūruoja tik su liaudies tradicijomis, jei apskritai figūruoja. Taigi kuo Pasaulio kultūros muziejus skiriasi nuo *Kitų* tautų muziejaus?

Raktiniai žodžiai: *kolonializmas, kosmopolitinis muziejus, Europos etnografiniai muziejai, Kitų tautų muziejus.*

The number of museums in the world grew from 23,000 to 55,000 in the four decades to 2018. Some 4,000 opened in China alone (Temples of Delight ... 2018). Attendance at the 20 most-visited museums in the United States peaked at almost 50 million in 2019. The Louvre, the most popular museum in the world, had 10.2 million visitors in 2018, an increase of 25% over 2017. In

London, the British Museum and Tate Modern each recorded some six million visitors, about three-quarters of whom were tourists. In 2020, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, attendance at the hundred most visited art museums in the world fell by 77%, but visitor numbers picked up once restrictions were lifted (Visitor Figures... 2021). In 2021, the museum industry in the United States turned over \$15.4 billion, a 19% increase over the previous year (Statista Research Department 2022).

But despite the boom, all is not well. The great metropolitan museums, situated at the heart of multicultural, globalised, tourist-ridden cities, have been slow to reassess their role in the post-colonial world. Most troubled of all, museums of world ethnography and prehistory, Museums of Other People, confront existential challenges. Topping the list are demands for the return of treasures seized in imperialist campaigns in the 19th century. More broadly, almost any colonial-era acquisitions in European and North American museums may be viewed with suspicion.

‘It is still commonly presumed in the media that ethnographic artefacts were mostly looted,’ writes Nicholas Thomas, Director of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University. ‘While some objects, including famous ones such as the Benin Bronzes were indeed seized in the aftermath of violence, the bulk of what is in anthropological collections was obtained through purchase or exchange’ (Nicholas 2016: 85–86, 92). Claims are nevertheless lodged to furnishings, regalia, weapons and armour, carvings and masks that were collected more than a century ago from kingdoms and empires that have since vanished from the map. Who is making these claims, and in whose name? Do the remote descendants of pre-colonial African rulers, whose ancestors were in many cases local imperialists, slave-owners and slave traders, really have an overriding claim to ancient sites and to artefacts now held in foreign museums? The alternative may be to transfer disputed property to national museums, but account must be taken of special circumstances, including corruption, smuggling, political upheavals, civil wars, authoritarian rule, and the current sad state of many historical monuments and collections.

Attacks on the right of Museums of Other People to own, display and interpret their collections may be simplistic. But there are good grounds for more informed and sober criticisms. These museums are sitting on a huge reserve of the world’s treasures. The bulk of their holdings have never been publicly exhibited. The rest are in store, often far from the prime location of the museum itself, and accessible, if at all, only to scholars. Museums should set up lending libraries to service other museums. A programme of rotating loans, expertly curated, would foster the development of local expertise. Alliances of museums could set up collaborative travelling exhibitions.

While demands for restitution command the headlines, the crisis of the Museum of other People is also, perhaps yet more fundamentally, an intellectual crisis. The Museum is charged with disseminating racist and imperialist propaganda. Even if that broad-brush indictment may be countered, relativised or put into a historical context, more insidious questions must still be addressed. Can we (Europeans, let us say) grasp the world-view, the rituals, the customs, the arts of people with whom, it may seem, we have little in common, and who have reason to suspect us of racism, or at least condescension? Can we, should we, translate their ideas into our own terms? Some argue that the very act of observing and classifying others is a power play. If that is so, it may be impossible, in good faith, to undertake ethnographic research. But would you accept a stranger's self-representation on trust? After all, how many Europeans are able to provide reliable information on their country's history, literature, arts or religions?

And so claims for the restitution of artefacts shade into another controversy. The crux is competing claims to expertise: scholarship versus inside knowledge. Who gets to select items for exhibition, to make up and tell the story of an object or a display, to compose a descriptive label for a mask or a ritual artefact, to write a guide to a gallery? Can only the Native understand the Native? It is an article of faith in the international indigenous peoples movement that shamans have a special insight into the origin, ownership and powers of certain artefacts. Some museums do their best to accommodate this special knowledge, but shamans are not a good substitute for expert curators.

Above all, these museums have been slow to adapt their thinking. Battered by a decade of controversy, curators are shell-shocked, defensive, secretive. And yet collections of everyday artefacts, cult objects, musical instruments, masterpieces of craftwork, relics of ancient civilisations, beginning with pieces acquired by Captain Cook and his companions, built up generation after generation by missionaries, scholars, collectors and dealers, still fascinate connoisseurs and captivate museum goers. They open a door to other lives, even other worlds.

The question remains: is a Museum of Other People viable in the 21st century? Should it be made over as an identity museum, or repurposed as a museum of art, specialising in ... whatever ... 'primitive', or 'non-European', or, more expansively but in no way logically or defensibly, that colonial ensemble 'African, American and Oceanian Art'. Art museums appropriate masks, busts, representations of gods and demons and rebrand them as sculpture, or reimagine ethnographic assemblages as art installations. These are admired, even wondered at, by visitors. However, art museums do not provide a context, and probe what these artefacts mean to the people who make and use them.

Unfortunately, the Museum of Other People does not always do much better. Fear of controversy freezes innovation. Curators sometimes buckle and allow

activists to dictate terms. But if they are to take the initiative, museums really must undertake a renewal of sclerotic permanent exhibitions and put a stop to bland temporary exhibitions that pander to sponsors or sell out to collectors and dealers. More broadly, they need to work out what they are about. *What are they museums of?* Might there be a place for a cosmopolitan museum, an institution that is not a simple propaganda tool, one that transcends local, or ethnic or national identities, tracks exchanges across political frontiers, brings out connections, makes comparisons, and does not lapse into empty generalities about the human condition?

Between 2014 and 2018, funded by the European Union's 'Creative European Programme', leaders of ten European ethnographic museums met to discuss a new kind of Museum of Other People, one that would come to terms with the legacy of colonialism and take account of large-scale migration to Europe from Africa and the Middle East. Pioneered in Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany, this came to be known as the World Culture Museum. It is not a Museum of Other People because it includes Europe on equal terms, at least in principle, although in practice Europe is present, if at all, only in the form of folk traditions. In fact, disappointingly but unsurprisingly, most World Culture Museums simply bring together established ethnographic museums and museums of Asian art. So what makes a World Culture Museum different from a Museum of Other People? ('It is all about people' is the feeble formula of Vienna's *Weltmuseum*.) (Plankensteiner 2018).

The project of a World Culture Museum was pursued most seriously in Sweden. The government wanted to shake up the nation's museums and encourage them to take account of the diversity of what had once been a remarkably homogenous population. In 2016 a plan was floated to merge three Stockholm museums to form a World Culture Museum. An acrimonious public debate erupted about what was meant by World Culture. The official government gloss was 'cultures originating outside Sweden' (Harding 2020: 334). Si Han, curator of Chinese art at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, protested: 'To gather all the non-European museums under one roof is real us-and-them thinking, pretend-multiculturalism' (writing in *Svenska Dagbladet*, 4 November 2016, cited by Harding 2020: 339).

Drawing on local resources, a Museum of World Culture was established in Gothenburg, Sweden's second city. When an American sociologist, Peggy Levitt, paid a visit, she found that 'the staff constantly debated what *world culture* meant.' The director of the museum, Jette Sandahl was struggling to combine cultural relativism with the Declaration of Human Rights. She explained to Levitt:

When you heard Swedes talking about cultural diversity, they meant ethnicity or religion [particularly Islam]. I took all that off the table. I went straight to the UNESCO positions on cultural diversity and to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and used them to build the mission statement for the museum ... UNESCO says that all cultures are equal and make equal contribution, but I cheated on this. There are cultural practices that I don't like, that I don't value equally, such as female-genital cutting. The UNESCO statement is valueless, but we corrected this by coupling it with the UN definition, which speaks to another basic core human value. If you just have the UNESCO statement, you are a cultural relativist, but if you add the Declaration of Human Rights, there are certain things that are unacceptable (Levitt 2015: 18).

So the Gothenburg World Culture Museum is relativist, except when it comes to stuff the curators don't like. This is not a cosmopolitan programme. It smacks rather of old-style 'development' projects that take for granted the superiority of western (read 'civilised') values.

The classic Museum of Other People featured a kind of people who, it was imagined, lived as their ancestors had done, enclosed in an unchanging ethnically pure province, unaware of other ways of life or a wider world. And yet even people living on remote islands are familiar with other ways of doing things. So were their ancestors. Studies of material culture trace such connections back tens of thousands of years. Imitation, reaction, adaptation, all the forms of what is sometimes disapprovingly described as cultural appropriation, are far more common than successful resistance to foreign influences, however heavily policed. The myth of one person, one tribe never made much sense. The local cannot be curtailed off from the global. Every human society is hybrid, a dynamic amalgam of traditions and populations. We are all cosmopolitans.

If modern society had a bird totem, as many more traditional societies do, it would surely be the magpie. We borrow music, fashions, technologies, ideas. Virtually every African is, at least, bilingual, and usually at home in several languages. Yet even stubbornly monolingual Brits and Americans are tempted to try fusion cuisine, to listen to 'world music', to dabble in Chinese medicine or Tibetan mysticism. Most people in the world depend on the WorldWideWeb, worship at the temples, churches and mosques of world religions, and from time to time consider making a move, from a village to a city, from one city to another, to another country, to another continent.

There is, of course, a difference between an insider's experience of a way of life and the understanding that an immigrant, or an ethnographer, might achieve. Some might object that the cosmopolitan is an overbearing outsider who claims to know more about us than we do ourselves. And yet few insiders

are objective or even well informed about local cults and political arrangements. Most natives struggle to recognise the significance of unspoken conventions and taken-for-granted prejudices. It would be absurd to suppose that your average Londoner understands more about her city, its history, its ethnic complexity, its informal customs, than a qualified researcher, who might come from Paris, or Bombay, or Singapore, and whose findings are tested by expert criticism of sources, methods and logic. So we do need experts. A sense of history, a comparative perspective, a broader angle of vision, enrich the appreciation of human interconnections.

In this world of connections and competing and complementary perspectives the great metropolitan and university museums should be out there, confident of their mission, playing to their strengths, offering a global perspective. We must imagine a Cosmopolitan Museum, one that transcends ethnic and national identities, makes comparisons, draws out connections, tracks exchanges across political frontiers, challenges boundaries: a museum set in the shifting sands of the past and the present, but which is informed by rigorous, critical, independent scholarship. It will make room for challenging perspectives and contrasting points of view, as long as these are backed by research rather than appeals to mystical insight or to the authority of identity. Visitors to the museum will be invited to cast off the blinders of solipsism. Free to enjoy the prizes and surprises of unexpected juxtapositions, they may hope to experience what Hermann Melville called the shock of recognition: 'For genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round' (Melville 1850).

Adam Kuper is a visiting professor at the London School of Economics. He is a Fellow of the British Academy, a member of the Academia Europaea, and D. Phil., Honoris Causa, University of Gothenberg. The Royal Anthropological Institute awarded him the Rivers Memorial Medal and the Huxley Medal. He is listed in *Who's Who*, *Who's Who in the World*, *Who's Who in America* and *Debrett's Distinguished People of Today*. His most recent books are *The Museum of Other People* (Profile Books, 2022), *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The British School in the Twentieth Century* (fourth radically revised edition, Routledge, 2014), and *Incest and Influence: The Private Life of Bourgeois England* (Harvard University Press 2009).
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Kosmopolitinis muziejus

Adam Kuper

Santrauka

Per keturis dešimtmečius iki 2018 m. muziejų skaičius pasaulyje išaugo nuo 23 000 iki 55 000. Vien Kinijoje jų atidaryta apie 4000 („Temples of Delight“ ... 2018). Dvidešimties labiausiai lankomų muziejų JAV lankomumas 2019 m. pasiekė aukščiausią tašką – beveik 50 mln. lankytojų. Luvre, populiariausiame pasaulio muziejuje, 2018 m. apsilankė 10,2 mln. lankytojų – 25 proc. daugiau nei 2017 m. Londono Britų muziejuje ir Tate muziejuje užfiksuota po maždaug 6 mln. lankytojų, iš kurių maždaug tris ketvirtadalius sudarė turistai. 2020 m., pačiame COVID-19 pandemijos įkarštyje, lankytojų skaičius šimte lankomiausių pasaulio meno muziejų sumažėjo 77 proc., tačiau panaikinus apribojimus lankytojų skaičius ir vėl išaugo („Visitor Figures 2021“). 2021 m. muziejų pramonės JAV apyvarta siekė 15,4 mlrd. dolerių, t. y.

19 proc. daugiau nei ankstesniais metais (*Statista Research Department* 2022). Tačiau, nepaisant pakilimo, ne viskas yra gerai. Didieji muziejai, įsikūrę daugiakultūrių, globalizuotų, turistų gausiai lankomų miestų centruose, nesukalbėjo iš naujo įvertinti savo vaidmens pokolonijiniame pasaulyje. Daugiausia problemų patiriantys pasaulio etnografijos ir priešistorės muziejai – *Kitų* tautų muziejai – susiduria su egzistenciniais iššūkiais. Pirmą vietą sąrašė užima reikalavimai grąžinti XIX a. vykusių imperialistinių kampanijų metu užgrobtas kultūros vertybes. Kalbant plačiau, įtariai gali būti vertinami beveik visi Europos ir Šiaurės Amerikos muziejuose esantys kolonijinės epochos metu įgyti objektai. „Žiniasklaidoje vis dar įprasta manyti, kad etnografiniai artefaktai dažniausiai buvo pagrobti, – rašo Kembridžo universiteto Archeologijos ir antropologijos muziejaus direktorius Thomasas Nicholasas. – Nors kai kurie objektai, įskaitant tokius garsius, kaip Benino bronzinės skulptūros, iš tiesų buvo konfiskuotos kilusio smurto metu, didžioji dalis to, kas yra antropologinėse kolekcijose, buvo įgyta perkant arba mainų keliu“ (Nicholas 2016: 85–86, 92). Nepaisant to, reiškiamos tuščios, įrodymais nepagrįstos pretenzijos į baldus, regalijas, ginklus, šarvus, raižinius ir kaukes, kurie buvo surinkti daugiau nei prieš šimtmetį iš karalysčių ir imperijų, nuo to laiko išnykusių iš žemėlapių. Kas ir kieno vardu šias pretenzijas reiškia? Ar tolimi ikikolonijinės Afrikos valdovų palikuonys, kurių protėviai daugeliu atvejų buvo vietiniai imperialistai, vergų savininkai ir prekiautojai vergais, tikrai turi viršenybę pretenduoti į senovines vietas ir artefaktus, šiuo metu saugomus užsienio muziejuose? Alternatyva galėtų būti ginčijamo turto perdavimas nacionaliniams muziejams, tačiau reikia atsižvelgti į ypatingas aplinkybes, taip pat į korupciją, kontrabandą, politinius sukrėtimus, pilietinius karus, autoritarinį valdymą ir dabartinę apgailėtiną daugelio istorinių paminklų ir kolekcijų būklę.

Klasikiniame *Kitų* tautų muziejuje buvo vaizduojami žmonės, kurie, kaip buvo įsivaizduojama, gyveno taip, kaip gyveno jų protėviai – izoliuoti nekinančioje, etniškai grynoje teritorijoje, nežinantys apie kitus gyvenimo būdus ar platesnę pasaulį. Tačiau net ir atokiose salose gyvenantys žmonės pažinojo kitą pasaulį. Tokie buvo ir jų protėviai. Materialiosios kultūros tyrinėjimai rodo, kad tokie ryšiai siekia dešimtis tūkstančių metų. Imitavimas, reakcija, prisitaikymas – formos, kartais nepatikliai vadinamos kultūriniu pasisavinimu, yra daug dažnesnės nei sėkmingas pasipriešinimas svetimai įtakai, nors ir kaip griežtai ji būtų buvusi kontroliuojama. Mitas apie vieną žmogų, apie vieną gentį niekada neturėjo prasmės. Lokali vieta yra pasaulio dalis. Kiekviena žmonių visuomenė yra hibridinė, dinamiška tradicijų ir žmonių samplaika. Mes visi esame kosmopolitai.

Jei šiuolaikinė visuomenė turėtų totemą paukštį, kaip turi daugelis tradicinių visuomenių, tas totemas tikrai būtų šarka. Mes skolinamės muziką, madas,

technologijas, idėjas. Beveik kiekvienas afrikietis yra bent jau dvikalbis, dažniausiai namuose jis kalba keliomis kalbomis. Tačiau net ir užsispyrę vienakalbiai britai ir amerikiečiai yra linkę išbandyti skirtingų virtuvės stilių virtuvę, klausytis „pasaulio muzikos“, domėtis kinų medicina ar Tibeto mistika. Dauguma pasaulio žmonių yra priklausomi nuo pasaulinio interneto, lankosi pasaulio religijų šventyklose, bažnyčiose ir mečetėse, ir kartkartėmis pagalvoja apie galimybę persikelti gyventi kitur – iš kaimo į miestą, iš vieno miesto į kitą, į kitą šalį ar kitą žemyną.

Žinoma, yra skirtumas tarp vidinės gyvenimo būdo patirties ir supratimo, kurį gali pasiekti imigrantas arba etnografas. Kai kas gali paprieštarauti, kad kosmopolitas yra įkyrus pašalietis, kuris sakosi žinąs apie mus daugiau, nei mes patys. Vis dėlto tik nedaugelis pašaliečių yra objektyvūs ar net gerai informuoti apie vietinius kultus ir politines santvarkas. Dauguma vietinių sunkiai suvokia neverbalizuotų papročių ir savaime suprantamų prietarų reikšmę. Būtų absurdiška manyti, kad vidutinis londonietis apie savo miestą, jo istoriją, etninę sudėtingumą, neformalius papročius supranta daugiau, nei kvalifikuotas tyrėjas, kuris gali būti atvykęs iš Paryžiaus, Bombėjaus ar Singapūro ir kurio išvados yra pagrįstos ekspertine šaltinių, metodų ir logikos kritika. Taigi, mums reikia ekspertų. Istorijos jausmas, lyginamoji perspektyva, platesnis požiūris praturtina žmonių tarpusavio ryšių suvokimą.

Šiame sąsajų, konkuruojančių ir viena kitą papildančių perspektyvų pasaulyje didieji didmiesčių ir universitetų muziejai turėtų tikėti savo misija, išnaudoti savo stipriąsias puses ir pasiūlyti pasaulinę perspektyvą. Kosmopolitinį muziejų turime įsivaizduoti tokį, kuris peržengia etninės ir nacionalinės tapatybės ribas, lygina, ieško sąsajų, seka mainus už politinių sienų, meta iššūki sienoms. Tai muziejus, stovintis ant kintančios praeities ir dabarties smėlyno, bet besiremiantis griežtais, kritiškais ir nepriklausomais moksliniais tyrimais. Tokiame muziejuje bus vietos iššūkių kupinoms perspektyvoms ir prieštarangiems požiūriams, jei jie bus paremti moksliniais tyrimais, o ne apeliuojant į mistines išvalgas ar tapatybės autoritetą. Muziejaus lankytojai bus kviečiami nusimesti solipsizmo akinius, jie galės laisvai mėgautis netikėtų sugretinimų atradimais ir staigmenomis, tikėtis patirti tai, ką Hermanas Melville'is vadino atpažinimo šoku: „Nes genialumas visame pasaulyje žengia išvien, ir vienas atpažinimo šokas apsuka visą ratą“ (Melville 1850).