Questioning Heritage: Colonial Ideologies in Contemporary Museum Practice

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I, Jessica Lindiwe Draper, hereby declare that:

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(ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university

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As the candidate's Supervisor I have approved this dissertation for submission

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Abstract

The research problem to be explored in this study is to what extent colonial ideologies continue to influence museum society and contemporary museum practices. The museological display of non-Western, and specifically African material cultures will be investigated. This study will enter into a dialogue with the construction of the 'Other', both in a colonial context and within museological paradigms. The evolutionary nature of culture and heritage will be emphasized, with particular prominence given to the dangers of exhibiting cultures as static and objectified.

The Exhibitions **Congo. The Colonial Era** (Royal Museum of Central Africa, Tervuren) and **Zulu heritage: the history and culture of the Zulu people** (Msunduzi Museum, Pietermaritzburg) are used as case studies, as both displays raise questions of appropriation and the display of 'Other'. These exhibitions are analysed and then contextualized within existing museological research.

Current debates located in post-colonial discourse, notably those of Edward Said, are discussed in relation to the display of African material culture. In discussing museum exhibitions and readership, the writings of Hooper-Greenhill and Kaplan are considered. An understanding of heritage is generated in relation to the theories of Lowenthal.

The paper concludes that by combining a 'contrapuntal' (Said) view of the histories surrounding an artefact, with the acknowledgment of the viewer's lived experience in accordance with Reader-Response criticism, one would create a basis from which the viewer could begin to question and engage with cultural representations of the 'Other'.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

This dissertation will examine two displays of African material culture in which questions of appropriation and the display of 'Other' are raised. These displays will be analysed and then contextualized within current museological research. These displays are:

- **Zulu heritage: the history and culture of the Zulu people** (The Msunduzi Museum in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa)

- **Congo. The Colonial Era** (The Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren, Belgium).

The above exhibitions are contextually similar in that they both display artefacts of African material culture. Ideologies surrounding Western traditions, such as language, culture and museum practice have generated an historical tendency to view Africa from a distance. This tendency establishes all things African as foreign or 'Other' (Said 1995), often through categorization, labelling and archiving. Here 'Western' refers to Eurocentric ideals surrounding culture and history employed throughout Europe and North America, rather than providing a reference to geographical location.

Museum displays that continue to classify African artefacts as belonging to 'primitive' cultures, which are static within social evolutionary processes, generate misconceptions and perpetuate Western ideologies of Africa as 'Other'. African perceptions of history, religion, heritage and culture are stifled and subjugated by the authoritative voice of Western museological practice. The question of heritage is an important facet in South African contemporary society as we are renegotiating a history of conflict and division. This paper will therefore also be addressing the way in which museums contribute to these perceptions of heritage.

The museum is a social institution dedicated to the collection and archiving of objects which have been identified as culturally significant for purposes such as conservation (Dubin 1999). Through this archiving, museums act as repositories of knowledge. This research suggests that contemporary museological practice has a social obligation to look towards developing

and reworking such exhibitions, in light of newly emerging understandings of heritage, in order to allow previously silenced voices to speak.

This research will examine hierarchical structures of knowledge, power and classification within a museum context and explore how these structures inform the representation and display of African material culture. The hypothesis is that it is possible to develop exhibitions of African material culture that move away from objectification and encourage learning and discourse rather that appropriation and misrepresentation.

The first chapter of this dissertation will set out a research methodology appropriate to the study of the display of African material culture. A theoretical framework will be established in chapter two. Museological paradigms will be contextualized, and an understanding of what museums are and where they came from will be generated. Museum ethics will then be explored, which will lead to a discussion concerning audience response.

As the noted exhibitions involve reflections on colonization, a definition of colonization will be expanded on in chapter three. This understanding will then be considered together with colonial and post-colonial discourse in museological practice. Questions surrounding the construction of 'Other' and how 'Other' functions in a museum context will then be raised and discussed.

The next chapter will contextualise this research in the case of the two exhibitions titled **Zulu heritage: the history and culture of the Zulu people** and **Congo. The Colonial Era**. The analysis of these exhibitions will be conducted around three main focal points:

Museums and the display of non-Western Cultures
Museums, as institutions, are public forums, and in many cases, are the only contact contemporary Westernized society has with non-Western, and specifically African culture. For this reason, museums participate in the construction of 'Other' through the collection and display of artefacts of this nature. A central question at this point is whether these displays succeed in creating an authentic image (an image which is valid from the perspective of those

being represented) of the culture displayed? If so, is this valid and contextually sound image accessible to a viewer outside of the culture being displayed?

Another aim of museums is that of educating the public (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 4). This education process is too often approached as the transmission of facts to the passive viewer (1994: 16). If a possible subtext, be it historical, cultural or geographical, is not taken into account, any negative connotations that may underlie the display in question interfere with the audience's ability to construct an accurate perception of the culture to which the artefact originally belonged. Museums are therefore constantly under pressure to prevent these misconceptions, and have, in most cases, taken measures to make new, as well as existing, exhibitions acceptable. Part of the following research is to explore some of these measures and their applicability.

Museum structure as archive

Museums have a history of hierarchical structure and have been the centres for the preservation and classification of knowledge (Dubin 1999). For example, one of the motivations of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren was to preserve African material culture as they felt that the westernization of the continent would soon render many African cultures extinct. In accordance with Foucault's perceptions of the archive, this possession of knowledge translates into power (Merquior 1985). The question that should be addressed in museological practice today is exactly whose knowledge and whose power is represented by museums and why? If traditional Western perspectives are adopted, displays of African material culture are likely to perpetuate the colonial ideals of adaptation, adoption and appropriation. African artefacts could thus be used to represent and reinforce the colonial perspective of Africa as 'Other'.

Artefacts within the museum structure

The third focal point of this paper is to question the migration of artefacts of African origin, and their placement in museums all over the world, such as the RMCA, or the Pitt Rivers museum in Oxford. This is in relation to the previous focal points of displaying non-Western culture and a definition of archive. By displaying these African artefacts in Western

museums, does the museum merely perpetuate colonial imposition by appropriating and then classifying cultural objects of subjugated nations? On the other hand, museums have the social function of conserving important knowledge for future generations, so by not displaying African culture, what comment would museums be making about its importance?

The conclusion of this paper will be focussed on the outcomes of my research and analyses, for the purpose of validating the study.

Chapter 1: Research Methodology

Researchers in the social sciences have used a variety of research methods, the two main threads being qualitative and quantitative perspectives. This chapter will discuss these methods in detail in order to find an appropriate methodological approach to apply in the research to follow.

As noted in the Introduction to this paper, my three specific focus points will be the presence of colonial representations which still exist in the display of non-Western, and specifically African, material culture; how the museum functions as an archive; and then how artefacts function within the museum structure. To align this paper with a particular research method it is necessary to explore different types of research.

1.1 Types of Research

Gray defines research as "the exploration of some phenomenon in a systematic and rigorous way" (2003: 57). Gray also places research specifically in the field of academia, labelling it "an activity engaged in by academics whose key activity is to further intellectual development within their particular field of study" (2003: 57). Research is thus a means of progression, with the main objective being to aid growth and better existing paradigms. Another aspect of research is to ensure that these existing paradigms are constantly questioned and re-evaluated in order to ensure the continuation of validity. Progressive research is encouraged in academic spheres, however it is important to acknowledge that these 'new ideas' always stem from the reformulation of former models.

Gray also states that the outlook on method is possibly not as extended in humanities as it generally is in more scientific fields of study (2003: 4). However, in areas such as the Visual Arts, this lack of definite distinction has "formed an important strand" (2003: 4) in research of this nature. This flexibility allows a diverse application of theories, which themselves could originate from any number of different disciplines. For example, in dealing with the display of the material culture of non-western communities in the Western construct of the museum, it

may be necessary to consult texts that deal with issues of 'Othering', such as *Orientalism* (1995) by Edward Said.

In the text, Said speaks of 'Othering' as a paradigm created by the west to demystify cultures that do not correlate with the preconceived notions of what 'normal' is. Although Said is not himself concerned with the Visual Arts in particular, this text can be used to help anyone conducting research that deals with culture groups outside of their own cultural sphere. By combining a variety of theoretical approaches, it is possible to gain a broader understanding of a single topic. This method is usually applied in qualitative research.

Although studies in the Visual Arts generally require a qualitative research methodology, Peter Caws (in Glassner *et al* 1989) states that qualitative and quantitative research methods "do not divide up a territory, they both cover it, overlapping almost totally" (1989: 26). It is thus important to gain a deeper understanding of both methods in any category of research.

1.2 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research methods can briefly be described as research in which information is gathered in the form of measurable systems of classification such as integers, indices or numbers. The quantitative researcher will commonly use "statistical types of data analysis" (Durrheim *et al* 2006: 47). This method of data collection is historically favoured by social scientists, as it is an inherently objective means of researching a specific topic.

In quantitative research, a definitive question is asked, such as 'Does a plant need sunlight to grow', in order to collect data that will result in an equally definitive answer, such as 'Yes, a plant needs sunlight to photosynthesize and therefore grow'. To ensure a valid outcome, the researcher will anticipate hazards which may cause the strength of the outcome to be questioned. The researcher, or scientist, will create control experiments and comparative situations to avoid vagueness or 'loopholes' that could erode the conclusion of the project. In the case of the example, the researcher would most likely place a number of plants in a light tight space and expose another set of plants to the sun for a predetermined period of time. To further eliminate possible questions, the researcher may use several different kinds of plants or

expose different groups of plants for varying periods. The researcher will use specialized tools to quantify aspects of the study such as the amount of light each plant is receiving, and record the data using graphs, equations and so forth.

Quantitative research methods mostly apply in research areas that may be classified as pure sciences (such as biology, hydrology, chemistry, biochemistry etc), however other modes of research include a more subjective approach, as some information cannot be fully explored using integers and figures. An alternative strategy to quantification is qualitative research.

1.3 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that information is generated in the shape of "observations that are recorded in language" (Durrheim *et al* 2006: 47). These observations are then interpreted closely in order to "identify and categorize themes" (2006: 47).

In the Visual Arts, for example, a researcher may be required to attend exhibitions and conduct interviews with those involved in curating it in order to find out what their specific aims were and what messages they were intending to convey. Such qualitative surveys might then be correlated with quantitative surveys of those visiting an exhibition to determine to what extent the exhibition succeeded in its aims.

According to Durrheim *et al*, qualitative methods can be categorized into three main themes, namely Naturalistic, Holistic and Inductive. These are briefly defined below as:

- **Naturalistic Qualities**

Qualitative studies could be deemed Naturalistic due to a tendency to be largely open ended. This type of research is essentially an unassuming study of reality and everyday situations, conducted without a predetermined answer to the hypothesis.

- **Holistic Qualities**

Qualitative research may be Holistic in that the topic under scrutiny is viewed as comprising of many separate facets which unite to make the combined whole. For example, a researcher in the Visual Arts may attend an exhibition and then analyze this exhibition in terms of different theoretical constructs such as hermeneutics, race and gender studies, or even philosophy. These different theories together will allow the investigator to reach an informed analysis.

- **Inductive Qualities**

Inductive research is research which focuses on specific details in order to categorize and create a web of interrelation, allowing questions to be open ended (Durrheim *et al 2006*). This means that the analysis may result in no definitive conclusion, only a variety of opinions and possibilities on a single topic.

In this way, qualitative research tends to be less restricted than quantitative research and encourage open debate. This paper will have predominantly inductive qualities as my main objective is to initiate the opportunity for constructive discourse around aspects of museological practice. There are advantages and disadvantages of working with either quantitative or qualitative methodologies.

1.4 Qualitative vs. Quantitative Methodologies

As noted by Smith, quantitative methods are often the most comfortable for many researchers as we human beings are intrinsically a "counting species" (Glassner *et al* 1989: 32). Smith views this international and timeless obsession, particularly of the West, to measure and quantify as a phenomenon which seems to have "pervaded the lives of many of our forebears" (Glassner *et al* 1989: 31). Part of what allows us to understand the world around us is this quantification and classification. We create a system of binary opposites, such as male-female, homosexual-heterosexual. These binaries make it possible to label people and objects by deduction, that is we know that someone is male because they are not female, or homosexual because they are not heterosexual. In qualitative research, these definitions may

be expanded, presenting one with liminal or interstitial spaces, such as in gender research where transgender and bisexual are also considered valid categories.

It must once again be noted that qualitative and quantitative methods are not mutually exclusive. There are times when the boundaries between the two distinctions become blurred. For example, statistics and equations may be used to record the general opinions of a sector of a population. This level of interaction introduces the need for a certain degree of qualitative methodology as the units of measurement are now being taken at a human scale of subjectivity.

Similarly, if a curator is preparing for an exhibition he/she will of course make sure that the exhibition is hung in an aesthetically appealing way and that the lighting is correct, both qualitative processes. However, the curator may also conduct statistical research to try and predict the amount of people to expect, or the average price of each painting, all quantitative processes. Based on the information thus far, this dissertation will be utilizing predominantly qualitative methods. It is thus important to explore the limitations that may be encountered along the way.

1.5 Limitations of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a valid and detailed methodology to adhere to when researching in the Visual Arts. However, there are a number of complications that occur when a researcher undertakes a subjective role or standpoint in an investigation.

Ensuring that any conclusions drawn throughout the duration of a research project are valid often becomes problematic. There are a number of tools available to the qualitative researcher to control these possibilities. One such method is that of triangulation as discussed by Durrheim *et al*.

Triangulation is not the adoption of one specific method, but rather "has come to refer more generally to the use of multiple perspectives against which to check one's own position" (2006: 380). Durrheim *et al* categorize triangulation into four groups:

- Data triangulation is a means of allowing a researcher to conduct the study by consulting several different sources to ensure that there is correlation between them.

- Investigator triangulation uses a number of different investigators. This method is also useful to help eliminate some of the difficulties, such as bias and subjectivity of the researcher (to be expanded on later). As a number of different individuals are cross-examining each other, these dangers are considerably reduced.

- Theory triangulation is the combination of many theories in the study of one problem, adopting the more holistic aspect of qualitative research.

- Methodological Triangulation sees the introduction of several varying methodologies against which to check any data collected. However, sometimes in qualitative research this triangulation is not sufficient to create validity within the body of research.

Another form of ensuring the validity of qualitative research is standpoint investigation. Occasionally the researcher cannot avoid their own subjective position within their own socio-political climate. In this situation, a standpoint methodology may be adopted to acknowledge, rather than negate subjectivity and bias. This term refers to a type of research in which a decisive and definite position is taken by the researcher, that is, the researcher will align him/herself to a particular philosophy such as Marxism or Feminism. This position is made clear to the reader and substantiated throughout the course of the research.

For example, for the purposes of this paper, I will be drawing my standpoint from a multitude of established positions, mostly founded on post-colonial theory. By making the reader aware of this position, any subjectivity or bias can be identified and taken into consideration. As a white female living in post-Apartheid South Africa, I acknowledge that the analysis of collected data will be influenced by my own lived experience. I further acknowledge that I am not emic to that part of African culture that is traditionally presented by the display of indigenous African artefacts within the selected exhibitions. However, African culture is continually evolving and, through the establishment of discourse and dialogue, I will be exploring my own subjectivity and agency as a researcher.

My South African identity together with my studies in museum practice has, for me, fore-grounded issues surrounding the display and representation of African material culture. Having visited a number of museums involved in the display of African artefacts as part of my research, both nationally and internationally, I have become particularly interested in involving myself in the generation of new ideologies (Kaplan 1999, Hooper-Greenhill 1994, Karp *et al* 1991) which can be applied to such exhibitions.

Standpoint research is often used to defend the side of minority groups in a particular society aiming to prevent marginalization. Although it is unlikely that any research will be completely free of the researcher's aims and objectives, standpoint approaches run the risk of being single minded. This paper aims to avoid this single minded approach by exploring points at which matters of agency, subjectivity and representation can be used to analyse established paradigms of museological classification.

Although it is not strictly necessary for a researcher to adopt one mode of interpretation and follow it dogmatically throughout his/her paper, it does become important that these views be acknowledged. In order to arrive at an ethically sound conclusion, the researcher must be aware of what perspectives he/she chooses to adopt and why. By constantly disclosing the researcher's social position or standing, the researcher highlights his/her own role in the potential fallibility of the project. Conflicting hypotheses should also be explored and validated to create a balanced conclusion that acknowledges its unstable nature. A useful and common method in achieving this end is, once again, that of triangulation. The need for researchers to generate validity has led to the development of an ethical code.

1.6 Research Ethics

Another important aspect of any research is the ethical code that the researcher uses in the process of data collection. There is no mandatory requirement of an official ethical review in the social sciences in South Africa, so the responsibility lies solely on the individual researcher to "self-regulate" (Gregory *et al*, 2005). There are, however, often protocols which may take the form of documentation that a researcher may be required to complete while

conducting a study at a specific institution. The aim of such protocols is usually to assist the researcher in considering his/her methodology.

For example, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will not accept the submission of a Masters thesis without the applicant first completing an ethical clearance form in which all intentions must be outlined. The applicant must answer questions such as how they intend to protect the anonymity of participants. This ethical clearance form prescribes that any human subject involved in the research process must be doing so by their own free will and that informed consent should be obtained by the researcher. Furthermore, the subject's humanity and integrity, physical, emotional and mental, must not be adversely affected. An ethical clearance form of this nature not only serves to protect all participants, but also "potentially legitimates" the research (Gregory *et al* 2005).

Simply conforming to a code of ethics does not by default render the research ethical. Research is "contextually sensitive", thus researchers must ensure that they are "flexible and reactive, but above all, accountable for [their] actions" (Gregory *et al* 2005: 149). Qualitative research in particular has the ability to change drastically from the original hypothesis. Although it is necessary to attempt to foresee any potential problems before the researcher undertakes a project, the changing nature of the process requires that the researcher maintain an ethical outlook at all times. This will help to prevent the validity of the project being jeopardized.

Brew (2001) states that valid research or knowledge can be created by following a set of rules and values. However, these rules may not be a list of 'dos' and 'don'ts', but rather "ideas about what constitutes professional academic practice" (2001: 50). Brew suggests that everyone possesses their own personal standards, no matter what the extent of their academic training. Modern social science research has become more and more flexible, and no longer holds itself to a list of specific rules. Brew has developed a system of three 'guidelines' as an alternative means of achieving validity, namely "Look again" (2001: 58), "relevance" (2001: 59) and "unbending intent" (2001: 101).

"Look again" requires that the researcher must be aware of the process and focus on the journey rather than the destination. The researcher must "continually go around the experiential research cycle, progressively deepening [his/her] understanding" (2001: 58). In the same way, museum workers should view each exhibition as just one step in a continuing debate. It is through the process of re-working exhibitions that authentic representations will emerge.

"Relevance" means that all data must be viewed as relevant information, making the correlations and interrelations unavoidable. The researcher remains open to fresh insight. In a museum context, this means that museologists would be continually bringing in new or previously unavailable information that may have a profound impact on the image of the object that is conveyed.

"[U]nbending intent" has the obvious implication that the researcher should never give up and should continue to wade through difficulties until a resolution is found. This once again applies in the display of non-Western cultures as there may not be one 'true' or valid representation, but rather a multifaceted network of possibilities. Researchers should remember that "truth and validity are not necessarily achieved at all stages nor are they an outcome. They are instead processes to aim for." (2001:101)

If these guidelines are used in conjunction with an argument that follows a logical and consistent progression, where all claims are justified and referenced, the probability of the research reaching a valid conclusion increases considerably.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore research methodologies in the social sciences, specifically the Visual Arts, in order to formulate an appropriate system of data collection for this paper, "Questioning Heritage: Colonial Ideologies in Contemporary Museum Practice".

Through the investigation of these pre-existing methodologies, it has become clear that this research will use a predominantly qualitative approach and will also be using post-colonial

theory. As the research is particularly located within qualitative research, there may not be one final outcome or conclusion that can be drawn from the information gathered. For this reason, the main focus of this paper will be the process. This project aims to accumulate data in order to generate a valid body of research, with the anticipation of raising some important issues that need to be addressed in the display of non-Western, and specifically African Art in museums today. The following chapter will engage the reader in an in depth discussion of some theoretical literature surrounding these concerns.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Survey

2.1 Contextualization of Museological Paradigms

In order to understand the issues surrounding displays and exhibitions in a museum context, it is necessary to understand what museums are, both as institutions and as physical spaces, and how they came about in the first place.

Flora E. S. Kaplan traces the origin of the museum back to " the ancient western world, where art was first shown as the booty of conquest in the splendour of private villas" (1999: 41). Some objects were also displayed and studied in the *mouseion*, or "[communities] of scholars, in the city of Alexandria" (*ibid.*). Subsequently, institutions such as churches and palaces began to hoard items considered to be valuable in order to "celebrate the power of the gods and kings and to finance wars for the glory of spiritual and earthly kingdoms" (*ibid.*).

The concept of the museum thus arose from the collecting of items and artefacts that were of interest and considered valuable to those who could afford them. Steven Dubin (1999) speaks of "sixteenth- and seventeenth-century *Wunderkammer* [wonder-rooms]" (1999: 5). These *Wunderkammer* were owned by individuals belonging to the elite high society and were crammed with seemingly unrelated objects that caught the eye of the owner or collector.

The museum as an institution thus emerged as an establishment that represented the cultural superiority of Empire, creating "new bases for regional and national identity and for unity" (Kaplan 1999: 41). In this way, museums became more refined in their definition as units that collected with the intention of providing information and knowledge for the public, as well as to preserve and document this knowledge. The industrial revolution caused an exponential growth in scientific interest, exploration and knowledge (Sagasti 2004: 10), aiding in the assertion of Empire as a powerful entity.

It is possible to describe a museum in many different ways, however the current definition made available to the public by the International Committee of Museums (ICOM) in 2001 is that a museum is "a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of

its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for the purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of the people and their environment" (ICOM Statutes, article 2, para. 1).

From this definition, it follows that a museum must ideally represent all spheres of public life in the community it claims to represent. It should also ideally be free, as far as possible, from political influence and promote learning and pride, both personal and national. In this way, museums can be powerful tools for countries undergoing transformation. For example, by endorsing the values of the post-1994 South Africa (equality, freedom and democracy), as opposed to those of Apartheid (segregation and discrimination), museums become instrumental in the regeneration of a positive national and social identity.

The problems associated with exhibiting the material culture of non-Western, and specifically African communities are particularly apparent in South Africa. South Africa is a multicultural society, claiming eleven national languages and respective culture groups. It is therefore important to represent all of these communities in the museum system as a whole if a complete picture of our country and our heritage is to be reflected (Dubin 1999).

Heritage is an illusive, diverse term and its definition is not uncontested. David Lowenthal describes the term as being, or rather seeming to be, "incommensurable" (1985: 37). For the purposes of this paper, heritage refers to a tangible history, that is, objects that provide links to the past. Lowenthal states that the "perceived identity of each scene and object stems from past acts and expectations, from a history of involvements" (*ibid.*). This research suggests that material, as opposed to non-material, heritage can be defined as those artefacts that act as visual triggers, causing one to recall this history of involvement, reaffirming our sense of identity and belonging. By containing objects and information of this nature, museums contribute to this sense of identity. However, by archiving and preserving those parts of history that would maybe rather be forgotten, museums broaden the definition of heritage as being contentious, including the good as well as the bad within an historical context.

In what Lowenthal calls literate societies, archives bear witness to the fact that traditions and customs have been "eroded by time and corrupted by novelty" (1985: 41). This may be one of the factors contributing to the reluctance of contemporary society to let go of social fictions (ie. 'colonialism was a noble cause') by displaying artefacts in a way that contradicts these beliefs. The process of displaying these artefacts of heritage in a way that reflects an 'authentic' representation is therefore a convoluted problem, as by altering this heritage, one alters accepted perceptions of history.

Lowenthal suggests that the "ability to recall and identify with our own past gives existence meaning, purpose and value" (1985: 41), and that "even traumatically painful memories remain essential emotional history" (1985: 42). It is therefore important to recount the past, through the display of heritage related objects, accurately, enabling one to construct an authentic sense of one's past and formulate a valid identity.

Preserving heritage and history also creates an opportunity for escapism because "in yesterday we find what we miss today", yesterday is "a time for which we have no responsibility and when no one can answer back" (1985: 49). For example, presenting African culture as 'primitive' "promises a supposed innocence and purity unspoilt by later sophistication" (1985: 55). This functions as an essentialist platform from which 'civilized' or modern viewers can reflect with nostalgia upon a culture that is static and stationary. Making the past static gives a sense of stability because the past is over, unlike the present which is continually changing and evolving.

Since "we need a stable past to validate tradition, to confirm our own identity, and make sense of the present" (1985: 263), displaying a history and heritage in a way that allows it fluidity and flexibility rather than displaying it as static and stable unbalances the viewer's identity momentarily and requires that he/she re-evaluate his/her established knowledge systems. This could once again account for the reluctance of museums to let go of past precedents.

The tendency in readership of museological displays is to long for the simplicity of how things used to be in a romanticized version of the past. This paper suggests that museum display

should therefore be used as a point for reflection, discourse and discussion, where it becomes possible to acknowledge the past, good and bad.

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, museums act a repository of information concerned with the archiving of culturally significant artefacts. Merquior takes up Foucault's perception of the archive as "a machine generating social - as opposed to linguistic - meaning" (Merquior 1985: 81). This system of classification is a means of asserting power, enabling "the submission of bodies through the control of ideas" (Merquior 1985: 90). Museums employ these methods of archiving and classification, thus contributing to established power dynamics that reflect a polarity of the dominant and the subservient. These binaries are maintained by exhibitions that perpetuate previous eras in which notions of hierarchy are present.

Museums have a plethora of collected objects, usually housed in huge archives to which the public does not have immediate or easy access. Visitors to a museum are presented with only the objects that the curators have chosen to display. In this way they ultimately control what aspects of certain cultures the visitor can engage with. To create a valid body of knowledge, the curators should employ Brew's guidelines of 'look again', 'relevance', and 'unbending intent' discussed previously in 'Research Ethics'.

By 'looking again', the curators must remain aware of the process of selection and how the resulting display is constructed. By highlighting the journey and not focussing on the end result, the viewer is more likely to experience the sense that the display is only a representative collection, rather than the full extent, of the cultural objects that the museum holds.

With regard to Brew's concept of 'relevance', curators should bear in mind that all the objects are, in fact, important to the culture to which they belong. As it is seldom possible to display the entire collection, the chosen pieces should embody the entire culture. 'Unbending intent' applies to the perseverance of curators in the case of displaying non-Western artefacts. Curators should view each exhibition as a movement towards an answer rather than the

answer itself. By continually evaluating and revising displays, problems that arise in current displays can be re-addressed in future endeavours.

The need for South African museums to begin the process of "[redeeming] the discipline's tarnished reputation as a product and perpetuator of the colonial process" (Coombes in Carbonell: 231) is highlighted by the current socio-political, post-Apartheid climate. This can be applied internationally as well. For example, the Royal Museum for Central Africa bears the task of providing an open, discursive platform where Belgium, as a formerly colonialist nation, can begin to deal with the atrocities committed in Congo while under Belgian rule (Conrad 1960, Hochschild 2002).

Karp describes museological exhibitions as "privileged arenas for the presenting of images of self and 'Other'" (Karp in Karp and Lavene 1991:15). For this reason, it is imperative to visit and revisit the complex web of ethical implications involved in the display of non-Western cultures, and indeed all cultures. One way in which museums manage these concerns is by adhering to a code of ethics.

2.2 Museum Ethics

In addition to his writing in this field, the Executive Council of ICOM appointed Edson to be instrumental in re-evaluating the already noted official definition of the museum offered to the public (http://icom.museum/pdf/E_news2004/p4_2004-2.pdf : ICOM News no. 2 2004).

Edson (1997) describes ethics as being essentially represented by the equation $x = y$, where x is the situation and y is the response. Thus, situation x should always generate response y. This is, however, a much too simplistic view and has caused "many people to deny the possibility of a universal code of ethics" (1997: 6).

A code of ethics must therefore be viewed as more complicated than a simple output equation. It should be seen as a means by which a museum, or in fact any institution, can "raise the level of professional practice" (1997: 6).   Edson states that in the case of the museum in particular, "this goal is achieved by helping to maintain the professional status of the museum

community, and by strengthening the role and responsibilities of the museum in society" (1997: 6). It is for this reason that it becomes particularly important to pay attention to the way in which a museum, intentionally or unintentionally, represents any society through the display of cultural artefacts.

Edson also places the responsibility of ethical conduct on the individuals that make up the museum community. If each person follows the museum code of ethics, the museum as a whole should, by default, function ethically as well. This once again applies specifically to the display of social culture. It is not always possible to follow any code to exactness, as different circumstances will entail "contextual decision making" (1997: 7). However, Edson states that "the conduct of all museum workers should be to reach a maximum level of museological perfection within the constraints of their environment" (1997: 7).

For the purpose of displaying social culture, it is not realistic to assume that there is a finite formula that one could apply to generalize or standardize an exhibition of this nature. The fact that the artefacts being displayed, have been appropriated and re-contextualized in a museum environment, is already a 'constraint'. Curators should rather endeavour to communicate an image of the culture in question which is valid and contextually sound, as I suggested in the introduction to this paper.

Edson contends that these ends may be achieved through discretion at the time of selection, that is, by employing only those who already have a strong ethical standing. This ethical standing can be reinforced, and corrected where necessary, by training and education of museologists. Those museologists who are already influential in the museum world can continue to achieve this goal by "staying current with institutional and community expectations" (1997: 8). Due to the changing nature of society and the rapid evolution of technology, ethics is a matter that must be reconsidered at regular intervals in order to ensure that pre-existing paradigms still apply in current situations. The same code of ethical excellence must therefore be exercised in the formulation of any exhibition that the museum endorses.

2.3 Museum exhibitions and readership

Hooper-Greenhill (1994) writes extensively on the constructs of power involved in museums and how these relations affect audiences and their response to exhibitions. She speaks of the need for museums to acknowledge the audience as actively participating in the interpretation of museum exhibitions.

If a display can engage viewers in a reciprocal dialogue, the viewer is more likely to come away with a positive outlook. It is through this positive participation that information becomes accessible to the audience. This is therefore another important aspect to consider in the display of African material culture. If no dialogue is made available to the viewer, no learning process is activated and the exhibition serves only to offer the viewer static interpretation, leaving him/her unchanged and uninformed.

One way in which the acknowledgement of the viewer's active role is already occurring is in the movement of audience research away from quantitative methods towards more qualitative facilitation. Quantitative methods, such as surveys or questionnaires, are lacking in that the majority of participants are people who visit the museums regularly, and in that they are conducted within the confines of the museum. If one accepts the museum as a generator of social meaning, then this type of study is inadequate as it excludes a portion of the population (those who do not visit museums regularly), thereby impeding the social role of the museum. By catering for an elite, educated audience, the museum and its workers reinforce unequal power relations.

Hooper-Greenhill uses hermeneutical interpretation models to show that each visitor employs their own lived experience when engaging with an exhibition. If this exhibition does not fit with the viewer's pre-existing thought processes, the display has no effect other than to discourage discourse in the social sphere. She suggests that museologists have the power to change these unfulfilling experiences through the use of what she dubs the "cultural model" of exhibition building, in which the audience's active role is considered. Hooper-Greenhill calls this process the "democratization" (1994: 4) of the museum, destabilising imperial power relations which may have been present before.

Kaplan (1999) speaks of the imperial idea of museums as a kind of propaganda intended to alter public perception, of themselves as well as of others. The use of museums in this manner is clearly demonstrated in the Royal Museum for Central Africa, which King Leopold II used as a tool to paint the Congolese people as 'savages' crying out for civilization. Kaplan calls for exhibitions depicting non-western cultures to be constructed through emic measures (from inside the specific culture group being exhibited). She highlights the Western domination of museum interpretation and proposes that museologists move towards a more accurate, internal representation of non-Western cultures through this "democratization".

Both Hooper-Greenhill and Kaplan emphasize the systems of power associated with the Western paradigm of the museum. However, both authors also recognize that this hierarchical system of exhibition is beginning to change. Hooper-Greenhill states that museums are beginning to "[break] down the long-established monolithic singular narratives that privilege dominant perspectives" and that they are "introducing multiple perspectives that give sub-groups and difference a voice" (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 23). Kaplan uses several examples of exhibitions that are inclusive of emic perspectives and shows how these specific exhibitions have been successful.

As previously discussed, the recognition of the audience's active role in the interpretation of an exhibition could be a useful tool in ensuring that a display of African material culture is accessible to Westernized viewers. Kaplan, on the other hand, focuses on the accurate presentation of the 'subject culture' being portrayed, requiring museums to allow for a more emic representation. Both viewpoints are relevant and instructive for the purposes of this research. This paper suggests that by allowing for an internal voice as well as acknowledging the audience's lived experience, a more rounded and comprehensive representation can be achieved.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to examine some of the theoretical literature surrounding the history of museums, the display of artefacts in museums and museum ethics in order to

generate an understanding of how museums function. Through this examination, a number of authors, whose writing will be applied throughout this paper, have been identified.

With regards to the democratization of the museum, both Kaplan and Hooper-Greenhill will be used to substantiate this writing. I have also begun to construct a definition of what I understand by the term heritage, using the writing of Lowenthal to demonstrate my position.

The following chapter will speak of imperial power relations and colonial theory as part of this relationship.

Chapter 3: Colonial and Post-Colonial Theory

This chapter aims to clarify notions of colonial as well as post-colonial theory, explore how 'Other' is constructed within these paradigms, and then contextualize this research in the museological display of non-Western cultures.

Museological displays reflect colonial ideologies in that they involve both the appropriation and the representation of a culture, specifically in the case of the display of African material culture. This research will therefore involve the questioning of these ideologies, how these ideologies enabled colonizers to subjugate Africa and how they continue to permeate aspects of contemporary society.

Colonialism is defined by Said as "the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (1994: 9). He says further of colonialism that it is almost always a result of imperialism, or "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" (*ibid.*). This was a common trend in nineteenth century Europe with Britain, Portugal, France and Spain being the main protagonists. These colonizing nations relied on institutionalizing the imperial belief that they were inherently dominant and superior to the nation they were colonizing. Many of these 'superior' nations also used religious and perceived humanitarian ideologies to legitimate this invasion.

Rich, for example, outlines the late nineteenth century Victorian stereotype of indigenous African culture which portrayed 'blacks' (*sic*) (1990: 12) as both "savage and bestial figures who needed to be controlled at all costs", and "passive and helpless beings in need of missionary care and protection" (*ibid.*). Thus the Eurocentric belief that Britain must pay its duty to Christianity and humankind and save the indigenous people from what Europeans perceived as uncivilized ways.

Colonization also functions on the basis that knowledge is power. By force of arms, and still more by teaching the indigenous cultures that they were inferior to the new settlers, the new settlers became dominant. Eurocentric (or Western) ideologies were imposed and enforced

and new colonial hegemonies emerged. These ideologies included the imposition of Western political structures and religious beliefs. Missionary stations were often the first settlements in a previously indigenous area. The mistreatment of the missionaries, real or supposed, was often used as grounds on which a king, such as King Leopold of Belgium, might send in reinforcements. These reinforcements most often took the form of military personnel, who seized control of the indigenous population by brute force if necessary.

As this paper is specifically concerned with the display and collection of material culture of African nations, it is important to take a closer look at the history of Africa with regard to colonization. Throughout the 1400's, Portuguese travellers explored the West coast of Africa in search of the source of the Nile river. In 1491, Portuguese priests and emissaries made the ten-day expedition to Mbanza Kongo (capital of the Kingdom of Congo) and marked "the first sustained encounter between Europeans and a black African nation" (Hochschild 2002: 8).

A form of slavery was already practiced within African indigenous nations, consisting of war prisoners, people who were unable to pay their debts or people considered to be criminals. These 'slaves', however, were given the opportunity to earn their freedom. Europeans quickly adapted this idea and began to trade with the African Chiefs, in exchange for human cargo. These people were originally set to work in Brazilian mines and coffee plantations but by the 1600's, were spreading as far as the British colonies in North America as part of the Atlantic slave trade. The rest of Europe had joined the slave trade by the end of the 1500's and by the late 1800's, with the exception of Ethiopia, most of Africa had been colonized by European settlers.

The great "European rush into Africa" (Ranger 1983:211) coincided with the beginning of the 'invention' of European traditions, such as religion, class and industry. These invented traditions provided the European settlers in Africa with the perfect tool to "define and justify their roles, and also to provide models of subservience into which it was sometimes possible to draw Africans" (Ranger 1983: 211). Traditional African practice, however, was found to be so far from that of European imperial rule that the British administrators began the process of "inventing African tradition for Africans" (1983: 212). The indigenous African population

was now provided with a clearly defined set of rules into which they had to insert themselves. Ranger speaks of the socializing of African people into these hegemonic power constructs, much like one socializes a toddler at day-care so that they are able to function within societal conventions.

Africa became a popular destination for people of a lower class in their homelands as it was a new beginning with new possibilities of improved social standing. For example, a simple farm-working peasant in Britain, the bottom of the class distinction, could exchange this place on the social ladder for that of a land owner superior to all black African people in a colony. With the effects of the land enclosure act in Europe and the industrial revolution leaving many rural workers unemployed, this opportunity for a new life became increasingly attractive (Comaroff *et al* 1999).

 Another appeal was that one could "leave [one's] bourgeois morality back in Europe" (Hochschild 2002: 138), and many did, becoming capable of administering unspeakable punishments to those Africans who did not obey colonial powers. Hochschild describes the mindset that makes it possible for people to behave in this manner as consisting of two main factors.

First, the administrator of the act must believe the subject receiving the punishment to be less than human. This typecast was already neatly provided by the Victorian notions of race which have been discussed previously. Museologically, imperial societies would have been exposed to representations of African people as 'Other' and 'less than human', leading to the generation of the social meaning of everything African as 'Other'.

The second requirement is that this behaviour must become normalized. With the beating of African offenders openly demonstrated in public spheres, it was not long before the treatment of black Africans in this manner became an acceptable public practice. These factors are also operational in the case of displaying African artefacts in museums.

If these artefacts are displayed within a colonial perspective, the display perpetuates the idea of African people as 'less than human', and therefore undeserving of recognition as people in their own right, making African heritage and history static. Misrepresentation of African cultures has already become normalized in a museum context, as museums have been characterizing Africans in this way for centuries. A well-known example of western representation of non-Western culture is that of Saartje Baartman, a young woman of San culture who was exhibited throughout Europe in the early nineteenth century. Saartje was made to stand on a pedestal like a sculpture, so that spectators could walk around her and view her as a perceived oddity of nature.

On Saartje's death, a cast was made of her body, and displayed along with her skeleton and sexual organs in the Museé de l'Homme in Paris (Martin in Skotnes 1996: 9). Martin states that 'Saartje Baartman has become a focus of the way in which human beings were used by eighteenth-and nineteenth-century theorists of race to prove the superiority of Europeans'. Saartje Baartman's situation is an example of the devaluation and commercial exploitation which can arise when a person becomes objectified to the point that his/her humanity is denied. The return of her remains to South Africa and her dignified burial by representatives of the San community also provide an example of the way in which culture and history are fluid and developing.

Joseph Conrad, in his novel *Heart of Darkness* set in colonial Congo, aptly summarizes the attitudes of the colonizers in the characterization of African people:

> "They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force –
> nothing to boast of when you have it, since your strength is just an
> accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they
> could for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with
> violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind
> – as is proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the
> earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a
> different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a
> pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the
> idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an
> idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up,
> and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to…" (Conrad 1960: 6)

By the late twentieth century African countries had gained their independence from colonial rule, the last country being Namibia in 1990. Although technically independent before, South Africa only gained true independence after the country's liberation from Apartheid in 1994. These independent countries now fall under the umbrella of *post*-colonial discourse, ironically still defined only in terms of how they relate to Western (European) history and imperial rule. For example, the exhibition **Congo. The Colonial Era** in the Royal Museum for Central Africa begins only at the point of European contact in 1400 and ends abruptly once Congo became independent of Belgian rule. **Zulu heritage: the history and culture of the Zulu people** at the Msunduzi Museum, however, has begun to move away from this static representation. The exhibition begins with the chronology of Zulu kings, before the arrival of European settlers and moves through their traditional lifestyle, ending with how these traditions continue to the present day in contemporary society.

A critical approach to studies around culture, history and heritage after a colonial era is referred to as post-colonial theory, although theorists disagree about the exact definition and grammatical construction of this term. For the purpose of this paper, post-colonial theory does not refer only to the period after colonial rule, but rather to a theory that "addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact" (Ashcroft *et al* 1995: 2). One cannot talk comprehensively about the period after colonial rule without talking about colonial rule itself and the resulting global consequences. Suppression and subjugation on a scale such as European reign over Africa cannot exist without a certain extent of resistance, as most people would not usually hand over vast quantities of land and labour unless forced to or presented with no other option. Post-colonial theory questions these matters of agency and investigates the ideologies and hegemonies that enabled the conquest of Africa.

Jean and John Comaroff (1991) argue that colonial ideologies began at the point of collision between the hegemonic belief systems of the colonizer and the hegemonic belief systems of the colonized. Although hegemony can be established by any person or group of people who consider themselves to be the dominant, such authority can only be instituted and maintained if the people over whom this dominance has been asserted, accept it. The Comaroffs,

however, believe that neither party, specifically in the case of colonization, is even aware that these hegemonies exist. They state that any assertion must be unconsciously made, as the moment either party is required to defend their hegemony, new ideologies are formed and the original hegemony falls away (1991: 24). For this reason, in examining colonial discourse, it is necessary to interrogate matters of agency, that is, to what extent indigenous African people had the ability to resist the enforcement of external hegemonies.

The Comaroffs argue for limited agency of the oppressed as well as the oppressor, claiming that both parties only half understand the implications of what they are agreeing to, or what they are trying to achieve. When applying the Comaroffs' theory to the display of African material culture, one could argue that neither the curators, nor the people belonging to the culture being displayed truly understand the implications of misrepresentation or how this misrepresentation may impact viewers outside the cultural group. However, current museological discourse, the questioning of 'Other' and the questioning of display, make it impossible to be ignorant of these concerns. Any museologist who chooses not to address, or attempt to address, these concerns is therefore making a conscious decision to do so.

Conversely, James Scott (1990) maximizes the agency of the oppressed, that is, he emphasizes that the subjugated population in colonial hierarchy had more agency than is acknowledged. Scott argues that although the oppressed may not fully understand the implications of accepting new hegemonies, an offstage conversation or "hidden transcript" (1990: 4), unheard by the oppressor, is continually underway, such that these hegemonies may be accepted in the public area, but not in the private arena. Scott suggests that it is this conversation that enables agency. The Msunduzi Museum, for example, is attempting to reveal or tap into this offstage conversation by including information pertaining to all the cultures and religions present in the Msunduzi area. Ironically, once this discourse has been 'tapped' and displayed in a museum, it becomes part of the onstage discourse of the powerful. This ironic incongruity is another circumstance where Brew's 'look again' valuation is particularly important and should be considered.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, colonization depends largely on the creation of difference (Said 1994), and what Said identifies as a binary concept of the 'Orient' and the 'Occident'. Said describes notions of "The Orient" (or 'Other') as a "European invention" (Said 1995: 87) that has defined the Western (or European) world by providing a "contrasting image" for comparison. By placing cultures that do not follow Western thought and power relations into categories and labelling them as 'Other', the threat of the unknown is removed.

Said describes classification as "a Western style for dominating, reconstructing, and having authority over the Orient [or 'Other']" (Said 1995: 88). It is important here to note that museums too employ methods of categorization and labelling, often physically placing items of material culture into boxes to protect them from environmental elements (such as dust, humidity and even the wandering hands of visitors). In some ways, it is this box that adds importance and economic value to the object. As soon as the item is removed from the box, the importance and the value decrease. For this reason, the criteria of curators and museologists directly effect what aspects of a culture are considered relevant and important. By choosing what artefacts to display, curators and museologists attach a kind of cultural capital to each artefact. Classification has a history of assisting to create difference, and was taken to extremes by the development of anthropometry.

Anthropometrists claimed to be able to indicate the cultural distinction between different race groups by measuring certain parts of the body and its functions. This method of classification gained academic credibility in the late nineteenth century and was thought to be more scientifically accurate as "unlike earlier emphasis upon skull shape and size, it embraced measurements of the entire skeleton and tests of the brain's sense and motor functions" (Rich 1990: 101).

Anthropometrists in Britain wanted to establish a British equivalent to The Bureau of American Ethnology (an endeavour concerned with the collection of data pertaining to the indigenous American people) which ironically was to be located on the premises of the British Museum. The movement, however, was not received well at a governmental level. The objection to forming this society was not that it was morally unethical, but rather that its

primary aim was futile as it involved "researching 'subject' races which would soon become too 'civilised' to have any great anthropological interest" (Rich 1990: 107). This research suggests that this reasoning was also applied to the collection of the material culture of colonized indigenous groups.

Colonial authorities, those involved in museology and those not, wanted to preserve examples of cultures considered to be 'Other'. This could possibly be attributed to a desire to show what wonders had been achieved in the civilizing of the 'primitive' or 'savage' peoples, to provide a contrast to emphasize the high level of evolution in Europe, or even simply to preserve the nostalgic, even affectionate notion of the 'noble savage' (Claydon 1969) as introduced by Rousseau.

Claydon explains Rousseau's theory as that if one 'strip[s] man's nature naked…one discovers an innocent, but the pretended perfection of man as he has made himself at the dictate of fashion and artifice has debased him, bringing him misery, suffering and conflict.' (Claydon 1969: 9). The classification of African people as 'noble savage' is not an acknowledgment of cultural currency, but rather a devaluation of African culture.

African culture, as Europe perceived it to be during the colonial era, was frozen in time and permanently available for public viewing all across the world. Many of these cultural artefacts are still housed in the museums where they were first taken and many are still used to educate Europeans about African culture (for example the eccentric survival of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford). By displaying a culture as 'primitive' and 'static', the museum and its structures are described as 'civilized' and 'evolutionary'.

Culture is never static, but rather continually evolving and changing depending on social situations and international influence. Museum exhibitions should therefore also be continually changing to maintain a current representation of African culture. Exhibitions that are allowed to stagnate may result in an essentialist image of this culture. If cultures are allowed to be viewed as 'pure', many problems arise with regards to the establishment of identity. Homi K. Bhabha believes that the creation of a valid identity lies in the "on-going

negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (1994: 2).

Colonialism and independence can most definitely be viewed as "moments of historical transformation", however, negotiating these paradigms and learning how to mediate an acceptable narration of either is not a simple formulaic distinction. Imperialism and colonialism only allowed and validated a "cultural discourse that was formulated within it" (Said 1994: 194) which resulted, of course, in an entirely biased and partial perspective. Contemporary cultural discourse, on the other hand, allows and validates a conversation of "suspicion on the part of formerly colonized people, and of theoretical avoidance at most on the part of metropolitan intellectuals" (*ibid.*). Said offers an alternative strategy to either of these single perspectives which he calls "contrapuntal" analysis.

Re-reading these histories contrapuntally means to re-read them with "a simultaneous awareness of both the metropolitan history that is narrated and those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (Said 1994: 51). The acknowledgement of these narratives interlinking and overlapping allows one now to view a new, more balanced history. Said likens this contrapuntalism to Western classical music, in which many instruments are playing simultaneously, with one specific instrument being awarded only temporary dominance, and each instrument receiving the same attention. This rise and fall of advantage in a structured and controlled manner from themes within the music is what, in the end, creates the full and complete orchestral sound.

Colonialism, resistance and independence too function, or should be seen to function, in this simultaneous manner, all ever present, and each having their turn at dominance in museum displays. The same can also be said for the display of African material culture in the museum context. One cannot simply ignore or discount any of the aspects or 'players', no matter how problematic they may appear at first. This idea links strongly with Brew's concept of "look again". By finding a way to view these elements contrapuntally, as juxtaposed, interlinked and circular, a complete and contextually sound representation becomes more achievable.

3.1 Contextualization of 'Other' Within Museological Paradigms

Karp and Lavene state that there has recently been a "heightened worldwide interest in multicultural and intercultural issues" (1991: 1) and a questioning of these structures. This can be attributed to the international re-contextualization of social and political ideals. For example in South Africa, the ideologies of the oppressive Apartheid regime have been replaced with those of social and governmental democratization. Museums now bear the responsibility of reflecting this political shift through the reworking of exhibitions. Karp *et al* argue that any museums "attempting to act responsibly in complex, multicultural environments are bound to find themselves enmeshed in controversy" (Karp *et al* 1991: 5).

Museums that display non-Western cultures, such as the Royal Museum for Central Africa and the Msunduzi Museum, face many criticisms, mostly surrounding their right to display these objects or cultures, the way they choose to display them, and how these displays might affect the cultural identity of the group concerned. A display which is put together in an uninformed manner will affect the identity of people belonging to the culture negatively. Such exhibitions also create misconceptions among viewers outside the cultural group and enable the continuation of past prejudices and stereotypes.

According to Karp (*et al*), museums must "[devise] strategies that do not merely rehearse traditional Western ways of organizing experience and that respond imaginatively to the presuppositions of visitors not acquainted with the areas involved" (1991: 7). This follows closely to concerns raised by Hooper-Greenhill and Kaplan as well.

Like both Hooper-Greenhill and Kaplan, Karp *et al* introduce the concept of the museum as a forum where a space is created to enable "confrontation, experimentation and debate" using the writing of Duncan Cameron to reinforce this position. Karp *et al*, however, highlight the fact that not enough attention is being awarded to exactly who is doing the debating and the experimenting.

Francoise Lionnet speaks of the dangers of displays in museums that follow Western paradigms of museology, which do not recognize the evolutionary nature of culture and

heritage. The display of artefacts as historically frozen in time perpetuates the sense that the object is "contained within a sphere of cultural and religious beliefs that does not intersect with [the viewer's] own" (2004: 99). In this way, feelings of inadequacy and difference imposed onto non-Western cultures are reflected, captured and made static. Museums are therefore constantly at risk of maintaining colonial hierarchy and retaining the historical divide between 'self' and 'Other', Western and non-Western.

If a museum presents an artefact from a perspective that objectifies it, or the culture it represents, and allows the viewer to engage in a reading that is 'primitive' and static, the modern spectators can be "reconfirmed in their own sense of identity". Lionnet suggests that in the case of the Western viewer, this may be because they now feel that they have "safely evolved beyond the archaic stages of primitive behaviour" represented by the display of cultures in this manner. If objects and artefacts from non-Western culture are represented in this manner, issues surrounding intention arise. Is the intention of the exhibition to teach the audience about the culture, or does it exist simply to reinforce Western ideologies of civilization and culture? These questions of intention are apparent in the Royal Museum for Central Africa.

In the Royal Museum for Central Africa, the historical account of Congolese culture is fixed in a specific period, and offered from the single point of view of colonizer/ colonized. The framing of these cultures in this manner brings museological intention into question. Is the display about preservation, or is the intention to freeze Congolese culture in the past tense? As this paper has already defined culture as evolving, this does not give a balanced view, or provide an authentic representation. What redeems the exhibition **Zulu heritage: the history and culture of the Zulu people** from the pitfalls of the Royal Museum for Central Africa is the inclusion of interesting and succinct historical information that does not end at one particular point. Although more information about the intended purposes of the objects themselves would be ideal, the inclusion of details about how these historical traditions are alive today once again emphasises the continuation, and therefore the evolution of Zulu culture. This evolution is often described as Social Darwinism, or 'an attempt to apply the

central principles of Darwin's theory of evolution to human societies' (Malešević 2004: 78). This concept was particularly prevalent in nineteenth century colonial culture.

Lionett concludes with a call for all museums to enable the visitor to "enter into a productive dialogue with the subjects of these exhibitions" which would facilitate greater identification and understanding through "autoethnography" (the creation of exhibitions by people within the cultural group being displayed).

Karp also aptly states that "[c]ross-cultural exhibitions present such stark contrasts between what we know and what we need to know that the challenge of reorganizing our knowledge becomes an aspect of exhibition experience" (Karp in Karp and Lavene 1991: 22). The spectator should be allowed to participate within a discourse that will enable them either to reorganize their own perceptions and knowledge systems to include the information presented to them, or conversely to reorganize the information to fit with their perceptions. If the exhibition is arranged in such a way that the spectator chooses the former option, a successful situation of education and learning occurs. If not, the visitor walks away unchanged.

Baxandall (like Hooper-Greenhill, Karp and Kaplan) explains the viewer as actively forming conclusions between the object and the label (where the label is all the information made available in the catalogue as well as the plaque pinned below or next to the object). The viewer will make a mental connection between the given information and the object that suites their perception of it. Baxandall suggests that this space between object and label should be enlarged. One way this end could be achieved is if the curator "[offered] a pregnant cultural fact" (Baxandall in Karp and Lavene 1991: 41) that would stimulate the viewer, rather than an "explicit interpretation" (Baxandall in Karp and Lavene: 41). This would require the viewers to actively involve themselves in the interpretation process. In order to better understand this interpretation process, it is useful to refer to different theories surrounding hermeneutics, or the study of the production of meaning.

Critics who align themselves to the philosophies of New Criticism (Culler 2001: 3) believe that interpretation occurs when the "innocent reader" and the "autonomous text" collide

(Culler 2001). This field of thought assumes that the person reading the text has no past history or pre-existing paradigms of their own, and that the text they are reading too is without history or subjectivity derived from the writer's circumstance. Through the course of this research it has become clear that no one person is without their own morals and opinions, and therefore "to read is always to read in relation to other texts" (Culler 2001: 12). This model of interpretation reflects Hooper-Greenhill's belief that viewers should not be seen as empty vessels, but rather as people with an historical background and a social context.

Reader-Response Criticism was formulated in reaction to New Criticism, and can be classified as any criticism that focuses on the reader and their response to the text, as can be taken from the title. What lies at the core of this movement in literary critique is the belief that the reader activates the text by the action of reading. In a sense, the reader unlocks what is contained within the text and what is contained within the self so that the reader and text are mutually activated (Tompkins 1986). This approach acknowledges the active role of the viewer together with his/her lived experience, as well as the meaning that an artefact may already possess before it is placed on display in a museological context.

Tompkins talks further of Culler's theory that individuals interpret text according to a specific set of signs and symbols which they automatically assimilate from their social climate. This means that similar groups will have similar interpretations of one specific topic. It is not to say, however, that all individuals belonging to the same group will have exactly the same opinions. It is possible to belong to more than one set group, thus most individuals will have a multifaceted view constructed from a variety of fragments. In the case of museum display, this means that rather than dictating a meaning and imposing it on viewer, museologists must allow the viewer to read his/her own meaning from the visual triggers provided.

Conclusion

In this chapter, colonial and post-colonial theory were explained and then applied to a museum context. Matters of agency, both within a colonial environment and within the framework of display, have been considered. While both the Comaroffs and Scott raise

concerns which differ in important ways, when applying agency and colonial ideologies in a museum context, an informed argument will consider both positions.

Furthermore, this chapter entered into a discourse concerned with the construction of other, both in a colonial context as well as within museological paradigms. The evolutionary nature of culture and heritage was emphasized, with particular prominence given to the dangers of exhibiting cultures in such a way that they become static and objectified.

From the investigation conducted thus far, this chapter concludes that by combining a contrapuntal view of the histories surrounding an artefact, with the acknowledgment of the viewer's lived experience in accordance with Reader-Response criticism, the viewer's active interpretation of museum exhibitions will be expanded.

The following chapter will explore some of the histories surrounding the exhibitions **Congo. The Colonial Era** and **Zulu Heritage: the history and cultures of the Zulu people**, before analysing these exhibitions in terms of the theory discussed in previous chapters.

Chapter 4: Contextualization of Research

4.1 Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren

The Royal Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren Museum) in Belgium was built in 1897-1898 at the command of King Leopold II (*Figure 1*). The aim of this building was to 'arouse interest' (Cappellemans 2003: 79) in the Congo, over which Leopold had recently declared himself to be Sovereign King. The museum's collection was mainly acquired between 1885 and 1960 by '[m]ilitary men, missionaries and merchants, colonial administrators, collectors and scientists' (Cappellemans 2003: 81). This collection was then largely taken over by scientists. In order to understand the context of this museum space, it is important to have a basic understanding of the history surrounding it.

The first sustained contact between Europeans and black African people occurred in 1491 in Mbanza Kongo (Hoschschild 2002), and the scramble for African began. King Leopold II of Belgium became obsessed with owning his own colony, however this endeavour was suppressed by the Belgian Parliament. After much deliberation and research, Leopold II devised alternative, and often underhanded, strategies to enable his pursuit. In 1876 he founded the International African Association (IAA), whose supposed aim was to abolish the slave trade and human trafficking of African people. The IAA became the perfect front for the appointment of one of Leopold's allies, Henry Morton Stanley (née John Rowlands) under the pretence that he had been instructed to investigate the situation. Stanley had, in fact, been privately ordered by Leopold to buy as much territory as possible. This would prove to be an expensive enterprise, forcing Leopold to ask the Belgian Government for a loan in 1882, linking the unsuspecting government to his exploits in the Congo (Hochschild 2002).

Through the bribing of the necessary officials, who used their influence to sway public opinion, the United States of America recognised the Congo as Leopold's colony in 1884, to be shortly followed by France under the promise of a free trade agreement. In 1885, the Berlin Conference had divided Africa between opposing European forces, granting Leopold the Congo, and on 29 May, Leopold finally realised his dream and declared himself Sovereign King of his own private empire, État Indépendant du Congo (Congo Free State).

It is interesting at this point to note that King Leopold II never once himself set foot in the Congo Free State, or anywhere else in Africa. Never seeing the damaging effects of his reign first hand allowed him a distance which made it possible for him to fool even himself into believing that he was a philanthropist, not a murderer. Hochschild explains that "[t]he Congo of Leopold's mind was not the one of starving porters, raped hostages, emaciated rubber slaves, and severed hands" (2002: 175). For Leopold, the Congo was "the empire of his dreams, with gigantic trees, exotic animals, and inhabitants grateful for his wise rule" (2002: 175). It was this imaginary Congo that Leopold brought to Belgium and publicised to Belgian society. He ordered the construction of extensive greenhouses filled with lush, tropical vegetation and brought Congolese animals to the Belgian zoos. This reflects the representation of Congolese people as 'Other', linking strongly to those colonial notions of adaption, adoption and appropriation as I have discussed in previous chapters.

The climax of this illusion surfaced in 1897 when Leopold shipped 267 men women and children from Congo Free State to Brussels for the world fair. Huge spectacle was made of these indigenous people, who were installed in three villages ranging from 'uncivilised' to 'civilised'. They were displayed in several 'genuine' situations, such as going about domestic chores with pots and wooden spoons, even being made to canoe around a pond, arousing delight in European spectators. What is specifically important to my discussion is that this African fair took place on the grounds of what is now the Royal Museum for Central Africa.

Hochschild describes the colonization of the Congo as "the first major international atrocity scandal in the age of the telegraph and the camera" (2002: 4). These photographs provided accurate evidence that could not be brought into question. Many of them have been enlarged and used in **Congo. The Colonial Era**, and the originals are stored in the museum. Leopold attempted to destroy all evidence of his genocide so as to evade legal prosecution by burning the archives in which all his records were housed.

Still no one has admitted responsibility for the horror that washed throughout the Congo. No one has been held accountable for the genocide, torture and rape of both the land and its

people. Congo attained independence on 30 June 1960, fifty-one years after the death of King Leopold II. Independence, however, did not succeed in stabilising the turbulent territory. Only five years later, in 1965, Joseph Mobutu seized control and continued Leopold's legacy of dictatorship and violence. Even after Mobutu's fall from power in 1997 (Gondola 2002: 5) the Democratic Republic of Congo, as it is now called, remains a war zone and many people have died as a result of famine and warfare (Gondola 2002).

The Royal Museum for Central Africa assigned a group of historians in 2002 to further examine the genocide under the rule of King Leopold. Still no admission of guilt is offered and still no one is held accountable. The emphasis is placed rather on the positive aspects, if one could call them that, such as the introduction of schools, roads and railways. I believe that much of this denial has filtered through and still has a strong presence within the Royal Museum for Central Africa.

In order to reach the exhibit **Congo. The Colonial Era**, visitors are required to walk through the entrance hall, the 'Anthropology' section, then either through the 'History' section or the 'Art' section (see *Figure 2*). Thus, by the time visitors reach **Congo. The Colonial Era**, they will already have made certain presumptions based on what they have been exposed to en route to the exhibition.

The entrance hall to the museum, for example, is littered with sculptures, some depicting various interpretations of African people, while others are more symbolic. One such sculpture is entitled 'Belgium Brings Civilization to Congo', by Arsene Matton (see *Figure 3*) and commissioned by the Ministry of Colonies between 1910 and 1922 for one of the niches in the rotunda of the RMCA (http://www.africamuseum.be/museum/permanent/museum/permanent/permrotunda). Matton's sculpture illustrates a maternal figure with her arms around two naked, childlike figures. This sculpture is an apt depiction of one of the Victorian (Eurocentric) notions of Africa, as discussed in chapter three, that African people are "passive and helpless beings in need of missionary care and protection" (Rich 1990: 12).

Westernized people who have no first hand contact with Africa will have no grounds on which to question the representation of African people presented to them by the museum. This, once again, is an example of the power of knowledge and classification, and why it is important to question these structures. Any stereotypes that the viewer may have had have now been reinforced: African people are noble savages in need of Western aid. The interpretation of Congolese culture in this manner creates, as Lionett describes, the opportunity for the Western viewer to retreat into the safety of the knowledge that they have sufficiently evolved from these barbarous figures as to be considered 'civilized'.

Once visiting the desk, paying and receiving a floor plan of the museum, the visitor moves into hallway 2 or the 'Anthropology' section, lined with spot lit glass cases of 'curiosities' from the Congo. Another example of the reinforcement of Western stereotypes encountered en route to **Congo. The Colonial Era** is a plaster sculpture titled 'The Leopardman' by Paul Wissaert (*Figures 4* and *5*). In this sculpture, a murderer disguised as a leopard is poised to kill a sleeping comrade. The visitor has now been presented with the second Eurocentric stereotype, discussed in chapter three, of black African people as "savage and bestial figures who needed to be controlled at all costs" (Rich 1990: 12).

By constructing difference between the Congolese 'savages' and the 'civilized' Western viewer, the museum reinforces Said's theories of the binary opposites of the 'Orient' and the 'Occident'. This difference dampens the impact that **Congo. The Colonial Era** may have had by reflecting Hochschild's description of the mind set of the colonizer – if the subject is less than human, a savage 'creature', then restraining them with violence is justifiable.

The cultural artefacts themselves are grouped according to 'strict rules of classification' (Verswijver *et al* 1995: 15) which are 'one style- one ethnic group' (*ibid.*). Very little information is presented about the objects on display, except to indicate their use in their original setting. This arrangement constitutes the display of objects in the category of what Catalini refers to as "artistic display", that is "exhibits that have prioritized the artistic nature of the items, while subordinating their religious nature" (Catalini: 71).

At the end of this first hallway is a series of video clips dating back from 1952-1956 that depict various cultural practices of a selection of Congolese ethnic groups. To the side of this is the entrance to a second hallway dedicated to King Leopold II and his militia. One of the walls bears a marble engraving of the names of the Belgian officers who lost their lives while 'crusading' against the Congolese. This plaque is mounted above naïve depictions of 'the natives'. A doorway halfway into this hall leads the viewer into a room that houses the newest section depicting the Congo. This exhibition is called **Congo. The Colonial Era**.

The curators of **Congo. The Colonial Era** aimed 'to continue reflection and debate on the colonization of the Congo by Belgium, a highly controversial period in history' (http://www.africamuseum.be/museum/permanent/museum/permanent/permhisto). This permanent exhibition elaborates on a previous temporary exhibition titled **Memory of Congo: the Colonial Era** (4 February – 9 October 2005). **Congo. Colonial Era** follows from 1885 onwards, from Leopold's reign through to the institution of independence in 1960.

Much of the emphasis in the exhibition **Congo. The Colonial Era** is placed on what Congo gained from its contact with Belgium (i.e. hospitals, roads, railways, schools). Very little space is dedicated to the economic gains that Belgium obtained from its colonization of the Congo. The exhibition seems to be trying to reinforce the apparent 'upside' of this contact, almost as if the museum is saying that 'colonization has its advantages'. The Royal Museum for Central Africa preserves the belief that it was not the colonization that made Congo into the war zone that it is today, but rather 'untimely independence'. It is apt here to refer once again to Said (1994).

Said identifies total independence as a "nationalist fiction" (1994: 19). Colonialism has ended for the most part, but imperialism "lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices" (1994: 9). In short, previously colonized nations will never be completely free of the effects of colonization. This often leads to a continuation of the violence, even after independence, as subsequent leaders mimic the aggressive regime that preceded their rule. This continuation of brutality likely leads to the belief that imperialist countries should have retained their colonies

and "kept the subject or inferior races in check, remained true to [their] civilizational responsibilities" (1994: 25).

This view is reinforced by a narrative that visitors are encouraged to watch on entering the new exhibition area (see *Figure 6*). In this narrative, a Congolese social worker expresses her belief that the trouble started after independence was gained. Another source in the narrative attributes this self-denial to the fact that times of crisis lead one to doubt even oneself, and the past becomes idealized. The narrative continues to speak of the propaganda King Leopold employed to encourage Belgians to believe that his appropriation of Congolese resources was in fact a charity mission, calling it 'a struggle against barbarism', 'evangelisation', 'social promotion' and even 'sustainable development'. These slogans seem to have been so effective that they are still altering thought patterns of contemporary Belgian society.

Although there are many questionable aspects to this newly constructed exhibition that do not seem to correspond with the museum's vision of becoming 'a stimulator of intercultural dialogue and interest in contemporary Africa' (RMCA Museum Key: 83), the curators have included some subtle commentary. The exhibition is constructed by room dividers that have been printed with images and explanatory passages presenting the viewer with a basic history of Belgium's contact with the Congo.

On one of these dividers, the curators have juxtaposed the 'List of deaths of White Personnel' (Compagnie du Chemin de fer du Congo, RMCA display label), complete with dates and other detailed information, and a copy of the 'General situation of black Personnel as of as of 25 September 1892' (Compagnie du Chemin de fer du Congo, RMCA display label). Although this comment on the disregard towards the value of Congolese lives may not be immediately apparent to all visitors, the clever combination will almost certainly not sit comfortably with any visitors, regardless of their knowledge systems.

The exhibition is constructed in the centre of the museum and surrounded by scientific recordings of the Central African fauna and flora. This placement promotes the unsettling feeling that the cultural practice of the Congolese people is somehow grouped in with fauna

studies. Furthermore, after visiting the new exhibition, the only way to exit is either back through the first entrance hall where one passes the 'cultural curiosities', or through halls filled with animals specimens, some of which have remained 'virtually unchanged since the Museum opened in 1910' (http://www.congo2005.be/geheugen/frameset.php?page=praktisch. php& lang =en&menu=2). This means of exit does not seem to allow the viewer to recognize the misrepresentation for him/herself, armed with new knowledge, but rather perpetuates these misconceptions and enables the visitor to retreat back into the comfort zone that Lionett describes of having safely evolved.

This contemporary, multimedia exhibition attempts to presents the viewer with a range of attitudes towards the past, and the main aim seems to be to encourage visitors to think for themselves and form their own conclusions by juxtaposing contrasting points of view. However one is left with the impression that important facts have been sidelined, possibly because they were too emotive, such as photographs of severed hands which, though present, are small and far too subtle for the subject matter.

By presenting visitors with facts as well as contrasting view points, the museum encourages independent thought and acknowledges the complexities of the situation. The exhibition is designed to open the lines of communication and present a platform for debate. However, by not finding an appropriate solution to resolve propaganda techniques previously employed during Leopold's reign, the impact of the new exhibition is lessened considerably by the time the visitor has left the building. Pre-existing misconceptions overpower new ways of thinking, and the exhibition falls short of challenging these misconceptions sufficiently.

The exhibition also excludes any depiction of contemporary life in the Congo. The Congo remains frozen in its past, which ends at the point of independence. Nothing is said of the fact that the new leader was executed shortly afterwards, nothing is said of the political turmoil that prevails. This exclusion brings about questions around the true intentions of the exhibition. Is it truly an attempt to progress beyond the boundaries of colonial perceptions? Or is it simply a politically correct concession to give the impression of liberalistic views? Is

this exhibition designed to shield visitors from an uncomfortable colonial past or is it truly attempting to provide an accurate account of Belgium's history with regards to the Congo?

The fact that the exhibition appears unfinished in areas, with some of the oversized photographs unceremoniously propped up in empty glass cases, which would previously have held other 'curiosities', also adds to the feeling that this exhibition, while attempting to bring the museum into the 21st century, is full of half measures.

The lasting impression of The Royal Museum for Central Africa is one of unequal power relations. This imbalance is also highlighted by other writing on the RMCA (see Morrison 2006 and Lionet 2004). Congolese history begins when Belgium invaded, and ends once the Congo gained its independence. The Congolese people are depicted as static and non-progressive barbarians whom Belgium rescued from their perceived suffering. There is a sense that the museum is attempting to apologize on Belgium's behalf without admitting to the true brutality of the past. By this admission, the museum would have the opportunity to change contemporary perceptions of the Congo, and provide a discursive platform.

It becomes extremely difficult, and even dangerous, to place absolute blame on any one party in situations of this nature. The curators can only hope to present all of the facts with equal emphasis in order to spark debate, creating, once again, a platform for discourse. **Congo. The Colonial Era** is a step in the right direction, and although many downfalls are apparent, renewal and reform of institutions like the Royal Museum for Central Africa have to begin somewhere. It is pertinent here to also acknowledge that there may not be an appropriate solution, and to remember that it is, in fact, the process of working towards the idea of one that is important. Curators of such institutions must 'look again' repeatedly at the impact of what has been attempted with 'unbending intent'. This paper suggests that this exhibition should be viewed as a first attempt, and thus a spring board from which further exhibitions may be able to take their cue.

4.2 Msunduzi Museum, Pietermaritzburg

Thus far, my thesis has had a broad, international focus. The research will now be localized by shifting to a South African context. The Msunduzi Museum (previously the Voortrekker Museum) is situated in Langalibalele Street (previously Longmarket Street) in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal (see *Figure 7*). The fact that the names of streets and public buildings are being changed is indicative of the fluid and changing situation of contemporary South Africa.

The museum complex is comprised of the Main Building, the Church of the Vow, E.G. Jansen Extension and Andries Pretorius House. My research will be looking exclusively at the Main Building, more specifically the upstairs section which houses the exhibition titled **Zulu heritage: the history and culture of the Zulu people** (2006).

According to the museum brochure (Msunduzi Museum Brochure no date), the Main Building of the Msunduzi Museum was designed by A.D. Dainton and built between 1902 and 1910. It was originally the premises of Longmarket Girls School and became the site of the Traffic Department in 1972. It was declared a national monument in 1975, and thus became the property of the museum. The building has functioned as a museum space since October of 1995. Originally a single-themed museum dedicated to the Voortrekkers, the Msunduzi Museum extended to involve a more multi-cultural view in 1996, following the election of Nelson Mandela as president in 1994. Thus a museum once devoted to the historical rivals of the Zulu people now provides an inclusive, rather than an exclusive, cultural experience to visitors.

As in **Congo. The Colonial Era**, the visitor must make his/her way through various spaces before reaching **Zulu heritage: the history and heritage of the Zulu people**, and will therefore already have adopted a certain mind-frame before viewing this exhibition. The display area opens with a new exhibition called **A river runs through it… Msunduzi** (2006). This exhibition provides an historical setting for the city of Pietermaritzburg and the surrounding areas, from the first record of human inhabitants and the development of

architecture, to aspects of contemporary life, such as the predominant religions and annual sporting events.

The most recent exhibition, **The Birth of Democracy** (2006), gives a brief, even too brief, outline of the region's history with regards to the Apartheid regime and the ensuing struggle. What is clever about this exhibition is that instead of having historical write ups and inserts, the exhibition consists of a tin 'shack', a wooden bench with the words 'Whites Only' on the back rest, light-boxes with sections of the Apartheid legislation and pass cards printed on the front, and a chronological overview of the main events. This presentation of what Baxandall might call 'pregnant cultural facts' creates a sense of interest and interaction with the viewer, allowing him/her to make his/her own connections.

At this point the visitor may climb the stairs to the exhibitions of the French presence in South Africa, Zulu Culture and Indian Culture. The section dedicated to Zulu culture consists of several raised, glass-sided cabinets, each side containing a back board on which images have been printed, with cultural artefacts on the shelf in front of them. Some of these artefacts, however, seem to fulfil a decorative purpose rather than an actual function. In the first cabinet many of the artefacts are not identified or labelled, leaving the viewer without information that would enable the contextualization and understanding of the artefacts. This leads to the inaccurate conclusion that the artefacts are, in fact, insignificant outside of this decorative function. In another cabinet, pertaining to traditional healers and traditional medical practice (*Figure 8*), this lack of labelling and cultural context allows a disembodied and mysterious reading of Zulu culture. The misrepresentation of Zulu culture in this manner highlights the difference between Westernized or Eurocentric traditions and Zulu Traditions, reinforcing colonial notions of the primitive 'Other' that museologists are trying to move away from. One possible solution could be to once again provide the viewer with Baxandall's pregnant cultural facts, which would encourage deeper thought, contemplation and consideration.

By providing the viewer with an historical context and then incorporating tangible Zulu heritage or material culture, the viewer is more likely to internalize an authentic and contextually sound image of Zulu culture. For example, the exhibition begins with the

succession of Zulu Kings starting with the most famous and influential, Nkosi Shaka Zulu. The establishment of the Zulu Kingdom is then described and a chronology of significant battles is given. The exhibition then follows with an exploration of Zulu traditions of dress, religion and everyday life. This is done by providing physical examples, as in the case of dress, and then juxtaposing these artefacts with written explanations of how the artefacts would have originally been utilized.

Overall, this exhibition does seem to have a more emic perspective than **Congo. The Colonial Era**, although here too, there has been a certain degree of fact selection. For example, Umkhosi Womhlanga (the Reed Dance) involves virginity testing of young girls which caused a public debate in KwaZulu-Natal in 2003. One of the many criticisms of such testing is that it could be viewed as 'a violation of human rights and the right to bodily integrity' (http://www.news24.com/news24/South_Africa/news/0,,2-7-1442_1548793,00.html). Other concerns of virginity testing include hygiene risks, such as HIV/AIDS, and the stigmatization of girls who had already been subject to sexual abuse, yet nothing of this nature was mentioned in the explanation. This is yet another example of the tendency to sanitize heritage, presenting only the good histories, and excluding the bad.

The exclusion of negatively emotive facts may be attributed to a general social sensitivity in South Africa to anything that could be interpreted as a negative portrayal or discrimination towards any particular culture following the recent turbulent past. The definition of heritage established earlier in this paper becomes important once again, as heritage comprises of both the positive and the negative aspects of history, even those that would rather be forgotten. By altering this history, one alters heritage and ultimately negates the chance of providing an authentic presentation of the culture that the heritage concerns. This sensitivity, while necessary in some cases, has led here to an exhibition that is so excessively democratic in nature that many important aspects of Zulu culture have been glossed over. For example, not much emphasis is given to the Zulu belief system of *amadlozi* (ancestors) which is a crucial and central aspect of traditional Zulu culture, and indeed everyday life. This exclusion may be attributed to a possible reluctance on behalf of the museum to address any perceived cultural delicacy between traditional belief systems and Christianity.

Colonial perpetuation, in many cases, is unavoidable due to the fact that everything in the museum has been removed from its original context and relocated into a Western invented tradition. In the case of this particular exhibition, the most obvious example of colonial appropriation is evident in the display of a throne, believed to belong to Nkosi Dingane kaSenzangakhona's (see *Figure 9*), which was acquired in 1834 after the defeat of the Zulu Army and then donated to the museum in 1938. The throne is displayed in a glass sided cabinet with unlabelled ceramics decorating the base. Other than the fact that it was acquired after the Zulu Army's defeat and the year of donation, no information is given regarding either the throne or the ceramics. The fact that all the artefacts are displayed in a museum originally dedicated to the Voortrekkers (the historical rival of the Zulu Kingdom) is both ironic and fitting. One of the hardest processes in the regeneration of social unity after a separatist regime like Apartheid is for cultures with a history of conflict to negotiate a truce whereby a collective, national identity can be generated. Transforming a space originally instrumental in the segregation of cultures, into a space that illustrates the interlinking and co-dependent nature of different, yet geographically similar cultures, provides a safe environment for dialogue and discourse.

Although there are numerous areas of this exhibition which could be improved, there are also many positive aspects which must be considered. The exhibition concludes with a section called 'Zulu People Today' (see *Figure 10*) in which the effects of urbanization and the resulting dislocation of Zulu culture are explored. What is particularly interesting here is that the information explains that the current transitional state of Zulu culture comprises of two main value systems: those of traditional Zulu values, and the more recent influence of Western values.

The information states that the 'traditional' lifestyle still exists in more rural areas, but that it is gradually disappearing due to the growth of modern influence and technology. The effects of this influence on architecture, clothing, economy, politics and religion, are outlined, emphasising that many of the traditional values are still present. For example, traditional regalia are generally reserved for special occasions and official ceremonies, but aspects of this

traditional clothing have influenced contemporary fashion in South Africa. The explanations of important traditional practices are in the present tense, also indicating that these practices are still alive and taking place.

The emphasis on continuity and the contextualization of traditional values in contemporary society allows for a more rounded and complete view of Zulu culture as a whole, not as an historical occurrence. The museum thus avoids the pitfall of many exhibitions of African material culture that display Africa and its many cultures as historically frozen in time, as Lionett argues. This exhibition, **Zulu heritage: The history and culture of the Zulu people**, offers an interpretation of Zulu culture as a current social facet of South African society.

Conclusion

I have been assistant curator of the Jack Heath Gallery at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the duration of my postgraduate studies. The most recent exhibition that I and my colleague were required to install consisted of objects of Zulu material culture (such as headrests and carved wooden spoons) and some contemporary sculptures (*Figure 11*). The artists were all from rural KwaZulu-Natal and this was to be their first exposure to the formal exhibition process (their work is most often bought directly from their homesteads and then sold at hugely marked up prices in commercial galleries).

We began the process of installing the work as we begin every other exhibition: by placing the art around the gallery in the most aesthetically pleasing arrangement. All the objects were of a high quality of carving so this was not particularly challenging. Once all the artefacts had been positioned, it was simply a matter of clearing the gallery space and cleaning to exhibition standard. It was not until the following day, in a meeting with my supervisor, that this even seemed strange or incongruous.

For the last two and a half years of my studies, the core of my research has revolved around the complications of displaying artefacts belonging to African material culture. Through this research, I have involved myself in the debate surrounding this issue and have familiarised myself with much of the available theory, which I have already discussed. The obvious question to ask at this point is why none of these views, opinions or theories managed to permeate my involvement in this exhibition?

Nowhere in the exhibition was the context of the artists explained to the visitor. Nowhere in the exhibition was the context of the artefacts explained to the visitor. Nowhere in the exhibition were any of the pertinent concerns that I have discussed in this paper raised, addressed or even acknowledged. The only concern was that the objects were positioned in such a way that the over all effect was pleasing to those who came to purchase.

It must be said that this exhibition differed from both **Congo. The Colonial Era** and **Zulu heritage: the history and culture of the Zulu people** in that the intention of the exhibition was commercial and the items were up for sale. The purpose of this exhibition was not to create awareness of Zulu culture or to provide information to visitors about the items on display. This difference may seem to negate the relevance of the exhibition to this paper. I suggest that it does quite the opposite; it rather highlights the relevance of this exhibition to the concerns of this paper, specifically as the Jack Heath Gallery is associated with, and located at, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Pietermaritzburg Campus.

UKZN, and indeed all universities, have hierarchical power structures which could be said to mirror those of the museum. Furthermore, society has a tendency to trust what the university endorses as it is seen as a reputable academic institution. Here, once again, the question of whose knowledge and whose power is being displayed and why becomes important. A university, like a museum, can be used as an apt example of Foucoult's perception of the archive: "a machine generating social – as opposed to linguistic – meaning" (Merquior 1985: 81). This means that all aspects of the university must be conscious of the meaning they may be generating, intended or unintended.

By disregarding the context of the objects on display, one assumes that it is the objects only that are important. Looking back to authors such as Hooper-Greenhill, Baxandal, Karp and Lavene, Kaplan, Said and Lionett, the idea that the object is separate, at any time, from its cultural implications and associations is problematic. It is irresponsible to assume that because the artefacts are for sale one may disregard their cultural context.

If one acknowledged the audience as active, as Hooper-Greenhill does, then one must further acknowledge the fact that the audience is continually learning from exhibition experiences, as from all experiences. The exhibition at the Jack Heath Gallery had the possibility of involving an emic perspective as the artists were present during the construction of the exhibition, yet nothing was made of this possibility. By consulting and involving the artists, the exhibition would have retained an emic perspective which would have afforded it a depth that it sorely lacked.

If the intentions of the exhibition are taken into account, it was all in all extremely successful. Most of the artefacts were sold during the opening evening, the opening was very well attended and the overall visual impression was well received. However, it is my position that no exhibition, no matter what the intention or location, is exempt from issues of representation. Rather, exhibitions of this nature are more likely to reach a wider audience and therefore have arguably more responsibility, though I now know first hand that the practicalities are not as easy or straightforward as they may seem at times.

The hypothesis for this paper was that it is possible to develop exhibitions of African material culture that move away from objectification and encourage learning and discourse rather that appropriation and misrepresentation. Through the course of the research, it has become clear that this is a particularly difficult end to achieve in a museum context. Neither of the displays that have been examined completely fulfils these criteria. Both perpetuate colonial imposition at times and both have room for improvement. However, both exhibitions are also steps towards the generation of didactically responsible displays of African culture, though the phrase 'steps towards' is used with rather less emphasis in the case of **Congo. The Colonial Era.** It must once again be emphasised that although one cannot discount the importance of the end product, the process of aspiring towards an ideal solution is more important than achieving this solution.

This paper suggests that by applying Said's notions of contrapuntal analysis in the case of all museum displays, one would create a basis from which visitors could begin to question and engage with cultural representations. That is, by viewing all aspects of the history/histories surrounding cultural artefacts (colonial, post-colonial, resistance and native nationalist narratives (*sic* Said 1994: 51)) contrapuntally, as juxtaposed and simultaneous, the viewer would be allowed an inclusive, rather than an exclusive, understanding of the heritage of the culture concerned.

This idea of contrapuntal analysis is already apparent in the Msunduzi Museum where the curators have attempted to include as many of the cultures relevant to the area as possible.

The Royal Museum for Central Africa on the other hand, is not as successful in this regard. If the museum was to expand the historical account provided in **Congo. The Colonial Era** to include the history of the Congo before, during and after Belgian rule, emphasizing the dynamic and continually evolving nature of Congolese culture and society the exhibition would read more comprehensively. By contrasting this expanded history with an explanation of Belgian history, both separate from and together with the Congo and allowing this new definition to permeate the rest of the museum, The Royal Museum for Central Africa would be more likely to offer its visitors the discursive platform identified in my hypothesis.

The exhibition **Zulu heritage: the history and culture of the Zulu people** can be held as an example (with much room for improvement) of how museums are beginning to re-address these concerns and take active steps toward finding an inclusive interpretation of African material culture. If these examples are seen as building blocks to what one might expect in future attempts, then (even though the hypothesis of this paper may never be proved absolutely) through trial and error, museum displays of African artefacts will reach a standard far beyond that of current attempts.

Illustrations

Figure 1
Royal Museum of Central Africa (Tervuren Museum)
Personal Photograph 26/06/2007
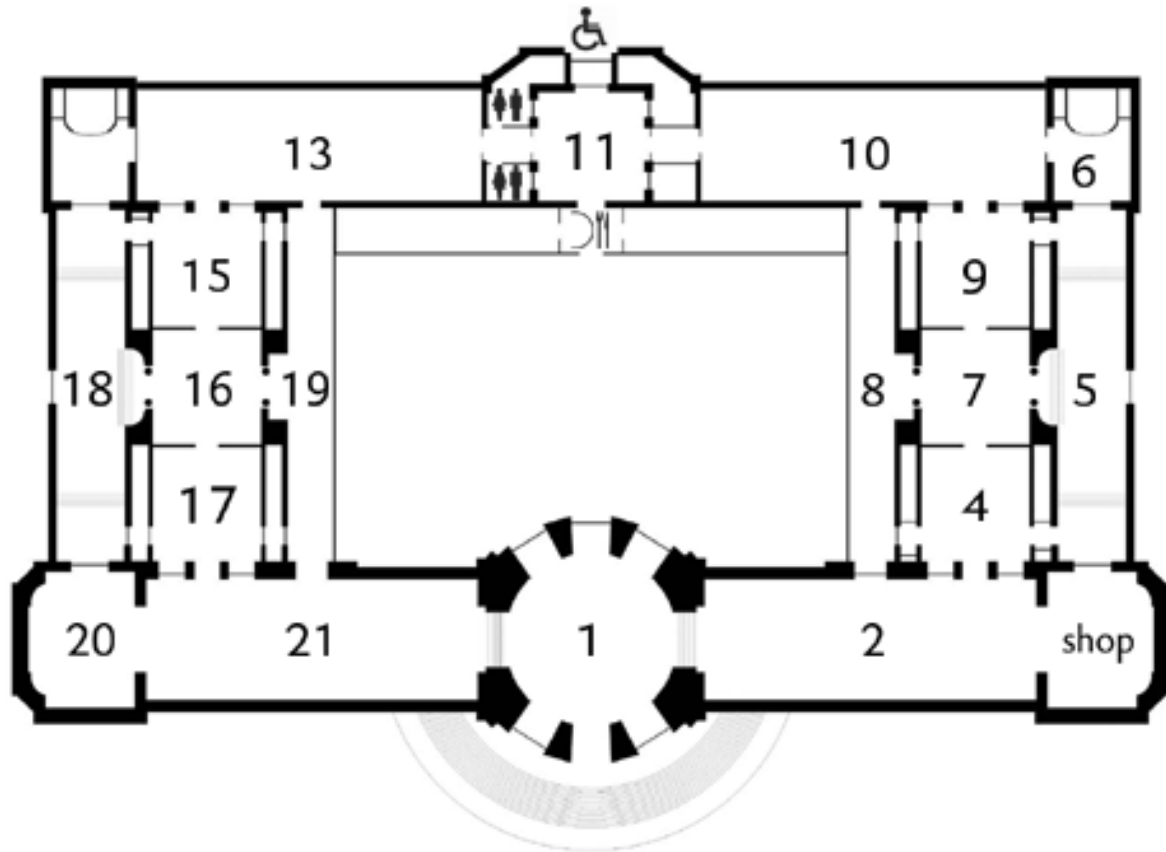
Figure 2
Floor plan of the RMCA
http://www.africamuseum.be/museum/permanent/museum/permanent/index_html

1. Rotunda
2. Central African Ethnography
3. Museum Shop
4. The Art Room
5. Temporary exhibition Knock on Wood!
6. Temporary exhibitions gallery
7. H.M. Stanley
8. Memorial Gallery
9. Congo. The Colonial Era
10. Agriculture & Forest Economy
11. Hall   / Cafeteria
13. Zoological Dioramas 1
15. Birds
16. Fish, Amphibians and Reptiles
17. Insects and Invertebrates
18. Temporary exhibit Headdresses
19. Prehistory and Archaeology
20. Zoological Dioramas 2
21. Comparative Ethnography

Figure 3
'Belgium Brings Civilization to Congo' by Arsene Matton
Personal Photograph
26/06/2007

Figure 4
'The Leopardman' by Paul Wissaert
Personal photograph 26/06/2007

Figure 5
'The Leopardman' by Paul Wissaert
Personal photograph 26/06/2007
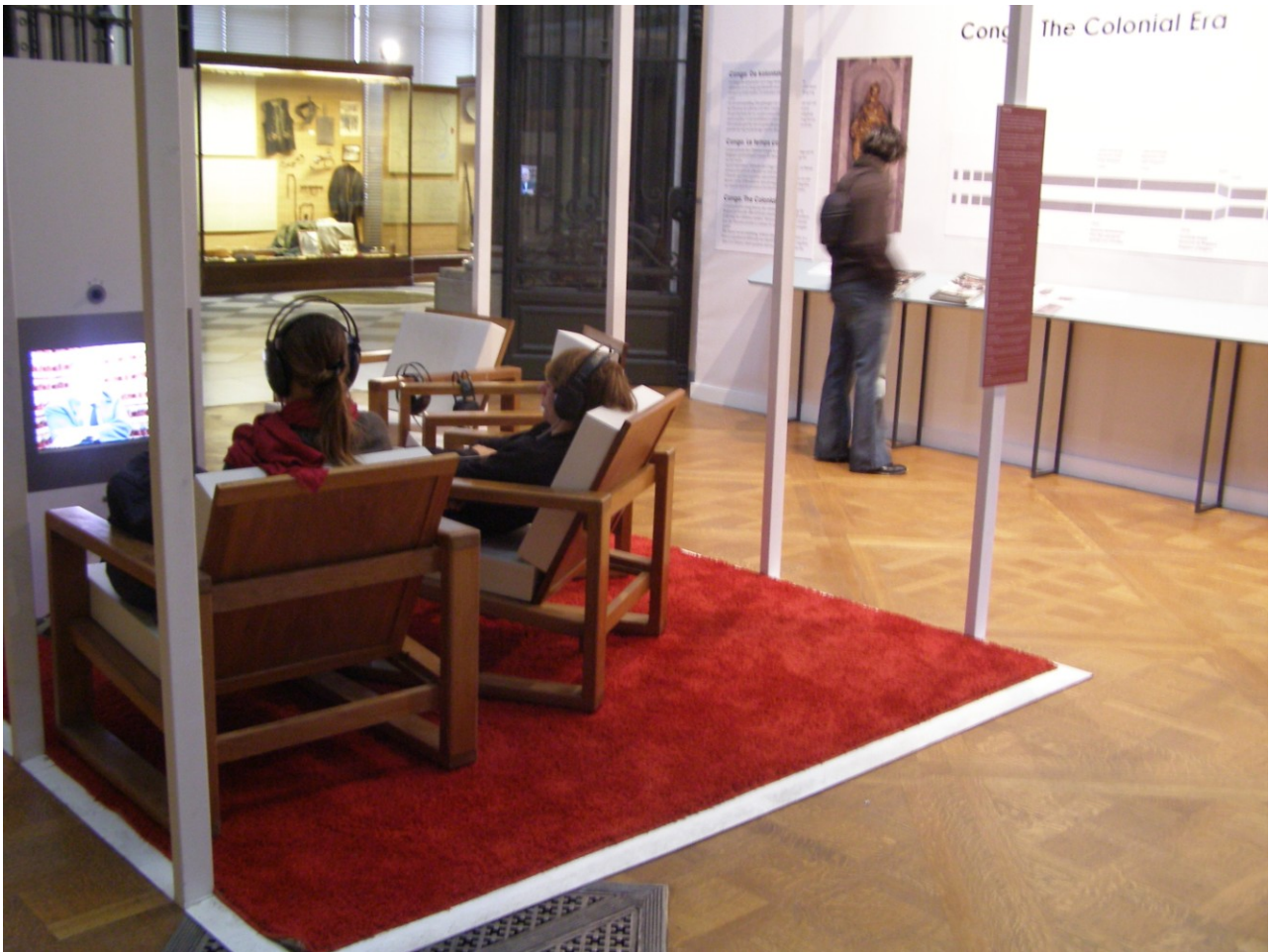
Figure 6
Interactive Area
Personal Photograph 26/06/2007

Figure 7
The Msunduzi Museum
Personal photograph 27/05/2008

Figure 8
Amasangoma
Personal photograph 31/06/2008

Figure 9
The Throne of Nkosi Dingane kaSenzangakhona
Personal photograph 31/06/2008

Figure 10
Zulu People Today
Personal Photograph 31/06/2008

Figure 11
The Jack Heath Gallery
Personal photograph 25/05/2007

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