

## Museology in Colonial Contexts: A call for Decolonisation of Museum Theory

*Museología en contextos coloniales: Una llamada a la descolonización de la teoría museal*

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# Museology in Colonial Contexts

## A Call for Decolonisation of Museum Theory

**Bruno Brulon Soares**

Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro  
(UNIRIO), Rio de Janeiro

**Anna Leshchenko**

Russian State University for the Humanities,  
Moscow

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### ABSTRACT

The theory of museology produced over the past half century to define its own moral interpretation of reality has shown to be marked by paradigms created within colonial structures of power. This paper aims to question whether museology has a political centre. Two methods of analysis – *author geopolitical backgrounds* and *bibliography and citations* – were chosen to identify the main patterns of geopolitical impact on international museological production through examining key international publications: *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie*, *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies* and *ICOFOM Study Series*. Our research shows that the theory of museology is still produced according to colonial structures of power.

Key words: Museology, postcolonial studies, knowledge production, ICOFOM.

## RESUMEN

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### **Museología en contextos coloniales: Una llamada a la descolonización de la teoría museal**

La teoría museológica producida durante el último medio siglo con el objetivo de definir su propia interpretación ética de la realidad ha demostrado estar signada por los paradigmas creados dentro de las estructuras coloniales del poder. Esta ponencia pretende poner en cuestión a la museología como opción política. Elegimos dos métodos – el de análisis de antecedentes geopolíticos de los autores y el análisis de bibliografía y citas – para identificar los patrones principales de impacto geopolítico en la producción museística internacional. Examinamos publicaciones clave y de alcance internacional: *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie*, *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies* and *ICOFOM Study Series*. Nuestra investigación demuestra que la teoría museológica aún se reproduce según las estructuras coloniales del poder.

Palabras clave: Museología, estudios poscoloniales, producción de conocimiento, ICOFOM.



The theory of museology and museum theory produced around the world over the past five decades has had, as a central purpose, the education and training of professionals to work in museums. The focus on this mainly Eurocentric institution has guided several academics and “theorists” of museology to envisage a discipline that is both culturally founded and politically charged. Furthermore, the instruments to disseminate this theory were singularly based in the West<sup>1</sup> and in countries that control the production of knowledge because they control the means for its “circulation” around the globe (either as capitalist potencies, or as former metropolises in the colonial system that still impact knowledge production and circulation today). For this reason, it is possible to map the centres of power in knowledge production that have defined museology and museum theory in both the past and the present, unveiling the “coloniality of knowledge” and some of its consequences in this academic discipline today.

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1. The term “West” in this article refers to the “First World” countries that control the capitalist production and knowledge production in a global perspective, being European countries or other capitalist powers such as the United States and Canada.

Our purpose in the present analysis is, thus, in direct reference to the concept of the “coloniality of power and knowledge” used to discuss the legacies of European colonialism in different social orders and systems of academic production. We take as a starting point the introduction of this notion into post-colonial studies and Latin-American subaltern studies in the late 20th century (e.g. Quijano, 2000), considering the persistence of colonial domination sustained by the global capitalist system and in the policies of states in former colonies.

Over four decades, the International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) has been the most active and regular forum for the publication and circulation of theoretical knowledge in museology and museum theory. Its international production and the central authors who have presented and published their papers are a testimony to the great geographic and cultural diversity among its members. The topics approached are a consequence of a wide range of issues and concerns that constitute this discipline’s theoretical base. However, its centres of power and the political agents who configured it and are still involved in its maintenance are yet to be questioned using a reflexive approach.

Since the 1970s, in the social sciences, the ideas that knowledge is colonised and that every theory stems from a political centre (Connell, 2012) were expressed in different disciplinary domains (Mignolo, 2007). As many authors have argued, knowledge is an important part of colonisation. Hence, knowledge in itself was colonised in the processes of “colonizing imaginaries”<sup>2</sup> (Gruzinski, 2007) or in the history of domination of what was once denoted the “Third World”. In the early 1970s, Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro stated that the imperial march toward the colonies goes with arms, books, concepts and preconceptions, while denouncing the geopolitics of knowledge that historically separated the cultures that investigate from those that were investigated (Ribeiro, 2011).

In this violent dispute over imaginaries and mindsets through knowledge production, museums played an essential role. As a consequence of direct involvement in the colonial system of power, and after several studies that express *mea culpa* towards the past (see Gonseth, Hainard & Kaehr, 2002), museums have faced a drastic revision of their predatory practices. On a different level, museology is on the verge of dealing with a revision of its own paradigms, as a field of studies whose base is strongly tied to European tradition.

Slowly, museum practice has been adjusted to start considering non-European authority in the process of shaping the representation of reality, for example, by including indigenous peoples in the institutional processes or recognizing their own perspectives in exhibitions. Even the museum, as an institution with a certain end, has been adapted to serve as a tool for different societies that

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2. Historian Serge Gruzinski, in the work, *The Colonization of the Imaginary*, refers to the process of *Westernization of imaginaries* as a continuation of the colonial process in its strict sense and the conversion of the natives by the missionaries. In this article, we use the concept of “colonizing imaginaries” in a broader sense referring to knowledge as an instrument to shape and colonise mindsets.

wish to present their own interpretations of reality through musealisation<sup>3</sup>. The movement of New Museology, associated with the invention of ecomuseums, has allowed a certain perspective on the democratization of the institution to be spread in the most diverse places in the world, disseminating the idea that the museum had been “decolonised” (e.g., Varine, 2005).

But how far has museology accompanied the decolonisation of the museum? And is the museum of the 21<sup>st</sup> century shared by every culture working as a real decolonised forum for inclusion? If we have indeed achieved the decolonisation of these historically colonial institutions, have we recognised the true political centres of museological knowledge?

Reflecting on the body of knowledge that museology encompasses today requires, in our view, a critical revision of its place in a postcolonial epistemology. According to postcolonial authors, knowledge produced these days cannot be separated from its grounding in powerful metropolitan universities and central institutions that sustain and control its circulation. In this global “knowledge economy” (Connell, 2015), the recognition that the so-called “Third World” countries could also produce knowledge and, even more, develop critical approaches to the “classics” as defined by the metropolis, came late to European theorists. Engaged in denunciation of the power relation between the (metropolitan) centres of knowledge production and the so-called “peripheries”, as they were defined in colonial times, a whole field of postcolonial studies and de-colonial theories has been created, constituted by intellectuals both from the “centres” as well as the “peripheries” (not necessarily in this order).

As Fernando Coronil puts it, these studies have raised a central intellectual challenge related to the problem of producing knowledge of history and society in the context of imperial relations:

“to develop a bifocal perspective that allows one, on the one hand, to view colonialism as a fundamental process in the formation of the modern world without reducing history to colonialism as an all-encompassing process and, on the other hand, to contest modernity and its Eurocentric forms of knowledge without presuming to view history from a privileged epistemological standpoint.” (Coronil, 2008, p. 401).

Considering museology as “postcolonial” or as a decolonised social science involves unveiling its power centres, identifying its own forms of coloniality. Used both as a set of prescriptions for museum practice and as a reflexive discipline, museology in the present day is in conflict with its own founding purpose and needs to be critically reconsidered to be up-to-date.

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3. Although “musealisation” is a term widely used by many ICOFOM members and is part of the professional language of museologists in Eastern, Central and Northern Europe, as well as Latin America, it should be noted that it means the transformation process of some entity into a museum entity. For a more detailed definition, see *Key Concepts of Museology* (Musealisation, 2010).

## Methodology

With a reflexive perspective on museology, this paper considers the multiple approaches to postcolonial studies in the social sciences and the coloniality of power and knowledge (see Quijano, 2000; Lander, 2005) to develop a conscious review of museology and museum theory in the present.

The methods chosen to identify the main patterns of geopolitical impact on international museological production were an *analysis of authors' geopolitical backgrounds* and *bibliography and citation analysis*. The choice of publications for analysis was driven by their self-declared international scope and intended readership. Analysis of authors' geopolitical backgrounds was applied to the following key museological publications:

- *Vagues, une anthologie de la nouvelle muséologie*, 2 volumes, 1992
- *Cent quarante termes muséologiques ou petit glossaire de l'exposition*, 1998
- *Reinventing the Museum*, 2004.
- *Musée et muséologie*, 2005
- *Vers une redéfinition du musée?*, 2007
- *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie*, 2011
- *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*, 4 volumes, 2015
- *ICOFOM Study Series* (2006-2016)

The three latter publications underwent a thorough bibliography and citation analysis. Since our hypothesis is that the power centres in museology are related to specific regions – notably Francophone and Anglophone<sup>4</sup> countries of the “First World” regions – the citation and bibliographic data were divided into data sets in the following way:

- References to Francophone authors
- References to Anglophone authors
- References to other European authors (outside Anglophone and Francophone regions)
- References to other regions

Francophone and Anglophone were not judged by the publication's language or city of publication, but by the residence and presumed nationality of the author<sup>5</sup>. International publications without names of authors (e.g. UNESCO

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4. Francophone regions include France, Belgium, Switzerland and Canada, whereas Anglophone include the UK, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The latter region is often referred to as “Anglo-Saxon” in other languages.

5. For “European authors”, division into Europe and Asia was geographical, so all publications of the European part of Russia were counted as “References to other European authors”, whereas the Siberian part of the country was seen as “References to other regions”. For Canadian authors, the division was between Francophone and Anglophone, based on the language of the article. If the author was born in one region and moved to another country where they received a degree and later delivered lectures in a non-native language, we counted them as belonging to that country where they were civilized by study. For example, English publications of Manuel DeLanda and Hans Ulrich

and ICOM documents) were discounted, as were references made to the whole volume of *ICOFOM Study Series*, unless it was a publication of the regional meetings of ICOFOM LAM or ICOFOM ASPAC that were attributed to “other regions”.

We only counted secondary sources, skipping press or museum catalogue images that were used as primary sources by authors. Self-citations as a reference to an author’s previous publications were not included in the analysis, because the aim was to determine influence.

The selection of the articles of *ICOFOM Study Series* was limited to peer-reviewed articles of the past decade (2006-2016, issues 35-44), thus skipping the non-reviewed special edition of 2014, a tribute to André Desvallées, and all case studies that were published between 2014 and 2016.

## Political roots of museology

If we consider that all knowledge is structured within a certain system of power and that its historical foundations sometimes lie in “colonial situations” (Balandier, 1951), it is mandatory to assume that there is no such thing as neutral or *apolitical* knowledge. In this sense, the deconstruction of the power centres in museology should begin with a reflexive exercise of disassembling the invisible traces of political intentions in the foundations of museum theory.

Firstly, we have to question the very background of knowledge production. As pointed out by different authors, the individualist model of the “genius” who bears knowledge, a notion invented in the Renaissance, can no longer be sustained in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the present, knowledge economy researchers work in networks and depend on an international industry of publishers, journals and conferences, software and websites, grants and fellowships to produce academic materials and to circulate this knowledge (Connell, 2015, p.92). However, this production is not without a centre. The idea that individual creativity operates through a social network of cooperation does not exempt knowledge from having a centre of power from which it is controlled and commercialised.

According to Connell (2012, pp.10-11), we can identify a global post-colonial periphery – such that most large data sets are collected around a metropolis, where those data will be processed, formalised, debated, organised and edited. In the peripheries (the plural is important), studies will be conducted by theorists from the metropolis, applying their methods to the most complex postcolonial subjects. In fact, there is only one viable subject of study suited to the concepts and methods forged in the centres. In Brazil, India or Australia, academics quote Foucault, Bourdieu, Giddens, Beck, Habermas, and so on, in order to understand their subjects and, ultimately, to shape their own

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Gumbrecht were counted as US authors and Zygmunt Bauman as a British author.

social realities. In most of our references, the founding fathers of our so-called mother-sciences came from very far away and were imported in the process of colonisation, and it is they who constitute knowledge and science the way we understand them today.

In this sense, in order to argue that museology has an imperial centre, we must carry out a real genealogy of this discipline. The term “museology”, investigated in its historicity by François Mairesse and André Desvallées (2011), has been perceived as indicating the existence of a specific field of study, formed by its organised actors and with particular geopolitical goals. Originating in Europe, notably Germany, the term – “*Museologie*” in German and “*muséologie*” in French<sup>6</sup> – evolved according to the transformations in the very notion of the “museum”, which were emphasised mainly from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and more intensely in the interwar period.

During this period, a colonialist Europe was still trying to impose ideas and a cultural viewpoint over the rest of the world. In 1926, the *Office International des Musées* - OIM<sup>7</sup>, bound to the League of Nations<sup>8</sup>, was created as the first attempt to implement an international entity centred in Europe, gathering museums of the world and their professionals<sup>9</sup>. In 1946, after the end of World War II, the creation of the *International Council of Museums* – ICOM, marked the constitution of a central platform for the museum field based in France, and which enhanced the broad circulation of general materials, textbooks and manuals produced in the imperial centre that would be, consequently, reproduced in the peripheries.

Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the notion of “museology” presents no common understanding. The absence of a consensus over the term, as argued by Aquilina (2011), is related to the fact that various languages use the word differently. Moreover, some languages have introduced into their vocabulary terms that, although not exact synonyms of museology – such as “museum studies”, “museum theory” and “*museumwissenschaft*” (museum science) – are nonetheless interpreted that way by some authors and translators (p. 2). In fact, based on critical analysis of some of the works that use such terms in recent textbooks, we may conclude that the variations in language are directly connected to different centres of power and knowledge in the roots of contemporary museology.

In textbooks, such as *Musée et muséologie* (2005) by Dominique Poulot, the whole history of museums and of museology is centred in Europe and in the

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6. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the word “*Museologie*” first appeared related to the administration of museums, notably in the contexts of Germany and France. For the history of the term see, for example, Aquilina (2011) and Brulon Soares, Carvalho, Cruz (2015).

7. International Office of Museums.

8. Created in 1919 by the Treaty of Versailles.

9. In this period, with its most disseminated publication, the review *Museumion*, the OIM tried to approach themes of central importance for museums at the time. The review *Museumion* was published from 1927 to 1946 (fifteen years, with a gap during the war period) by the OIM.



richest countries in the north. In Poulot's work, even though the author gives a general and international approach to "museology", his vast bibliography is acutely Eurocentric, showing 74 titles from Francophone authors and 64 from Anglophone authors, being 32 North Americans and 32 from the United Kingdom; the bibliography presents only three titles by Asian authors, and there are no authors listed from Africa, Oceania, or Latin America.

In another part of the world, in a textbook published at almost the same time, *Reinventing the Museum* (2004), American scholar and museum professional Gail Anderson reunited articles from 35 North American authors, almost all from the United States, and its bibliography consists of 85 titles, all by Anglophone authors, mostly from North America.

Museums and museology have at least two clear political roots. The different approaches that assume museums as universal institutions, and museology as a philosophy or a set of abstract theories related to the museum, corroborate with the invisibility of the power structures in which museology is imbedded. After decades of studies and academic discussions, museum theory and the theory of museology are produced by agents under the influence of at least one of the centres of knowledge production that we can identify in the foundation of this complex disciplinary field. These are *muséologie*, imagined by the French and Francophone theorists in general, and *museum studies* or *museum theory*, conceived and legitimized by Anglophone authors, in different instances primarily in Britain and North America. The political differences between these centres of power and epistemic frameworks, with clear geographical occurrences, can no longer be ignored in the perspective of a reflexive museology.

## **Decolonising Museology: Dichotomy of a discipline between two political centres**

If the museum and museology are culturally and politically determined, the aim of decolonisation of the theory sustaining these two concepts should be to map the centrally focused networks of knowledge production within which they are being reproduced and consumed. Far from being neutral concepts detached from political intentions, both the museum and museology have their genealogy marked by colonisation – of "nations", imaginaries and epistemologies. Our goal in the present section will be to identify the hegemonic traditions according to which museum theory and museology are produced, configuring an international field of knowledge that has inherited, even in the margins, the paradigms of its centres.

For this purpose, we may understand "museology", in its most general sense, as "the philosophy of museal field" (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010, pp. 53-56), aligned with Western thinking about the Museum. Or, in a slightly different approach by Karsten Schubert, as "the systematic enquiry into the nature and methods" of a museum (2002, p. 28). In both definitions, as with several others we could recall, museology is understood within the frames of a political

domain of knowledge that have shaped philosophical thinking in the West. Our purpose here is not to drastically abandon such frames, but to unveil them, putting them under the lens of critical epistemology to uncover the coloniality that lies at its core.

Through critical analysis of some of the discipline's most referenced textbooks, we will show the existence of two political and cultural centres of knowledge production in museology. These two centres are sometimes dichotomised in the discipline's foundations<sup>10</sup>, but lately, not without difficulty, have been establishing their first conceptual bridges.

## French museology and the *Nouvelle Muséologie*

Different generations of French museologists throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century have demonstrated a particular interest and rigor with the roots and multiple influences in the very discipline they intend to define and determine. A simple differentiation between theoretical and applied museology could begin to explain this specific trajectory in French publication. As Burcaw put it, the Anglophones would prove to be more inclined to study the practical aspects of this discipline, relegating theoretical concerns to the background (Mairesse, 2012, p.20). On the other hand, French museology, since the 1950s, has been clearly influenced by Eastern European thinkers, such as the Czech Jan Jelínek (the first president of ICOFOM), the Russian Awraam Razgon, the German Klaus Schreiner and, of course, the Czech Zbyněk Stránský who presented the first attempts to draw a system of concepts and theories for this specific discipline. His concepts, in particular, would not gain adherence over the years, but the purpose of formulating theoretical bases and defining a set of specific terms for museology, would be pursued by French authors such as Georges Henri Rivière, André Desvallées and, more recently, François Mairesse.

In 1958, during a training course in Rio de Janeiro organised by UNESCO, ICOM and several Brazilian authorities and specialists, Rivière, the then-ICOM director, introduced his definition for museology as “the science that studies the mission and organization of the museum” (1960). This UNESCO Regional Seminar, under Rivière's coordination, involved the participation of several Brazilians and, among them, a majority of museum professionals. In his report on the event; published in 1960, Rivière presented his fundamental definitions for the terms “museum”, “museology” and “museography” as discussed at the seminar. The first definition was taken from the ICOM statutes adopted at that time, while the other two were based on debates from the seminar sessions which involved local participants and also influenced their views.

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10. A similar dichotomy was identified on an institutional level by Javier Gómez Martínez (2006), which he called two *museological traditions*; Mediterranean, dominated by France, and “Anglo-Saxon”, dominated by Britain and North America.

The early 1970s brought some initial reflections on the social and political role of museums in a postcolonial Europe to the French context. A critical consciousness of the museum, its practice and theory, was raised by some voices from independent colonies. These views found resonance in events, such as the ICOM 9<sup>th</sup> General Conference in Dijon, in 1971. This was most notable in the speech of Stanislas Adotevi, a philosopher from Benin, Africa, who solemnly questioned the role of traditional museums in colonised countries (Adotevi, 1971), bringing attention to a critical imbalance in museum action in different world contexts. The following year, the UNESCO Round Table in Santiago, Chile, organised with the aim of debating the role of museums in Latin-American societies, heard further calls for the decolonisation of this Eurocentric institution. Several French museologists would integrate the criticism and produce a more sensible discourse about the “Third World” regions.

This so-called “decolonisation” of museology (Varine, 2005) was a direct response to a broader claim for the revision of paradigms, related to the social movements that marked the end of the 1960s, as well as the attainment of independence by some colonised nations. In this political and theoretical movement, some European museologists saw a chance to redeem the theory and concepts disseminated in the colonial discourse that had framed traditional museology, creating a so-called *new* museology or *nouvelle muséologie*. The first reflections on this theory appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s, at a time when the supposed crisis of museums was being intensely discussed worldwide.

The *Nouvelle Muséologie* in France, and a few years later in the rest of the world, was a movement with a political centre, even though it advocated the deconstruction of power structures in museum practice and a renewed approach to audiences. The ideas of some non-European thinkers are in its foundations, such as the above-mentioned Adotevi, but also the Brazilian Paulo Freire, the Mexican Mario Vásquez, as well as the North Americans Duncan Cameron and John F. Kinard. Their ideas were translated and appropriated by French museology in the publication *Vagues: une anthologie de la nouvelle muséologie* (1992), two volumes of which were edited by Rivière’s disciple André Desvallées, quickly becoming a central reference for this international movement. Although introducing some non-French authors to Francophone readers, this work also presented texts from well-known French museologists and theorists such as Georges Henri Rivière, Hugues de Varine, Jean Clair, Élie Faure and others.

Since Rivière’s compendium *La muséologie*, was published in 1989, an emphasis on society and on contextualizing museum practice has marked French studies. The emphasis encompassed applied museology, as well as reflection on this discipline’s socially founded key concepts. In the 1990s, André Desvallées was internationally appointed to lead an extensive project to determine museology’s terminology, not only for the French but for the whole museological field. Since then, several texts on the definition of the terms “museology”, “museum”, “museography” and others were published as part of this ambitious project. In his chapter *Cent quarante termes muséologiques ou petit glossaire de*

*l'exposition*, in the *Manuel de muséographie* (1998) compiled by Marie-Odile de Bary and Jean-Michel Tobelem, Desvallées presented his definition of selected museological terms according to the French museum field and to the theory of museology as perceived in France. His references consisted of 16 French titles, no more than five North American titles, and two works from Britain. Among the selected French authors, the ones occurring most were Desvallées himself, Rivière, Jean Davallon; other authors included the British museum studies professor Susan Pearce and the Czech museologist Zbyněk Stránský, with two works each in the bibliography.

In 2007, a collective publication entitled *Vers une redéfinition du musée?* was produced with the support of ICOFOM, with François Mairesse as co-editor, presenting papers debating the definition of the museum by authors with various cultural and geographical backgrounds. Among the invited authors, other than Mairesse and Desvallées themselves, most were ICOFOM members; overall, there were five Francophone authors (10 Europeans in total), and five non-European authors. In this work, we further observe increased participation by female authors, notably from colonised countries, in contrast to a clear male predominance among Europeans<sup>11</sup>. The partial diversification of authors exposes the diversity of approaches to one single concept at the core of this disputed discipline.

Following this publication, Desvallées and Mairesse pulled together a team of Francophone editors to work on a full dictionary of specific terms. The selection of terms and authors was centred clearly on French museology, and the result was the *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de Muséologie* (2011); its vast bibliography reveals an undeniable Western view. In its general bibliography, the *Dictionnaire* lists 29 French titles, 19 North American titles including authors from the United States and Canada, 12 from Britain, 22 from other European countries, one from Africa (in a French publication) and none from Latin America, Asia, or Oceania. This extensive work, fully written by Francophone authors, is a testimony of coloniality in museology, as we have counted in the referenced authors across all its articles:

- References to Francophone authors - 510
- References to Anglophone authors - 352
- References to European authors (outside Anglophone and Francophone regions) - 174
- References to other regions - 17

As we have demonstrated, French museology over the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries opened itself up for different international influences without, nevertheless, losing its central position. After the 1970s and 1980s, under the influence of

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11. While the book's five authors from Australia, Canada, India, Argentina and Brazil were women, all 10 authors from Europe were men, showing that coloniality can be also connected to gender relations.

ICOFOM, and directly concerned with international standards in the production of specific terms and concepts for museology, French authors implemented an “imperial” museology that cannot be disconnected from the coloniality of power and knowledge.

## Anglophone Museum theory

The trajectory of the development of museology in Anglophone countries has been described in the “Museum Theory” volume of the *International Handbooks of Museum Studies*. According to the editors, museology, seemingly around the world, has passed through three phases:

1. “Museum studies, affiliated with history, art history, sociology, cultural studies, and Foucauldian cultural theory, addressed the process of nation building that had motivated the development of mid-nineteenth-century public museums” (Witcomb & Message, 2015, p. xxxvii)
2. The new, or critical, museology “informed by postcolonial studies and development anthropology, and motivated by themes of equity and human rights” (p. xxxvii)
3. Current museum studies approaches are “influenced by concerns about social justice and community building, as well as by public policy-oriented approaches” (p. xxxviii).

*The International Handbooks of Museum Studies* is becoming a main reference for museum training in some parts of the world beyond Western Europe and North America. However, in other regions, such as Latin America where French museology has a great influence, it is rarely quoted and not used as a central reference.

Of the authors invited to contribute to the handbooks, 85% are from Anglophone countries (half are UK authors, Fig. 1). Only two authors wrote articles in their native language to be translated (Bettina Habsburg-Lothringen from Austria and Beat Hachler from Switzerland). Out of 102 articles throughout four volumes, only 13 are from a non-English-speaking country, but are still from Europe. In a publication positioned as “international”, there are authors from only 16 countries, without a single one from Latin America, two articles by authors from Africa (Kenya and South Africa), and one from Asia (India). However, it should be noted that those nations are part of the so-called Anglophone and the texts were written in the official language of their country. A voice from the former colonies is given, but the predominant Anglophone nature of the handbooks is evident.

All publications referenced in the “Museum Theory” volume of *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies* were published in English, 98% of which were from Anglophone countries. Out of them we have counted the authors by geopolitical regions:

- References to Francophone authors – 78
- References to Anglophone authors – 967
- References to European authors (outside Anglophone and Francophone regions) – 92
- References to other regions – 6

The totals from all four volumes show that, geopolitically, the authors tend to refer to Anglophone authors, making up 83% of all references:

- References to Francophone authors – 175
- References to Anglophone authors – 3387
- References to European authors (outside Anglophone and Francophone regions) – 436
- References to other regions – 62

Most references to other regions come from authors also outside the Anglophone regions.

In the Anglophone tradition, the international movement of New Museology is dated to the 1990s and Peter Vergo (1989; see also Gómez Martínez, 2006, p. 274), ignoring its existence and history in France, which denotes how the different centres of knowledge production were historically in competition over the colonisation of international museology. So far, they have not succeeded in creating one hegemonic theory for museology or museum theory, producing several epistemic gaps and breaches between the most influential schools of academic thinking across the world.

## **The ICOFOM Study Series: an international journal in museology**

The authors of the *ICOFOM Study Series (ISS)*, the most regularly published journal in world museology, come from various regions; this is, in part, a consequence of the International Committee's concept of holding each annual conference on a different continent. This approach has led to 26 Argentinian articles out of 63 during the 2006 ICOFOM symposium in Alta Gracia, Argentina, and 12 Chinese papers out of 28 during the 2010 ICOFOM symposium in Shanghai.

Despite the continuous participation of authors from outside the European and North American centres of power, the analysis of bibliography and references in the *ISS* published in the past 10 years shows a predominance of Anglophone references, followed by Francophone ones:

- References to Francophone authors - 768
- References to Anglophone authors - 1050
- References to European authors (outside Anglophone and Francophone regions) - 573
- References to other regions – 559

Similar analysis of bibliography and references in the *ISS* published between 2006 and 2014 shows a balance among Francophone, other European regions, and outside these regions, with around 450 references attributed to them, while there is a considerable majority of Anglophone authors - 703.

While there was considerable growth in publications referring to Francophone authors appearing between 2015 and 2016, it still leaves Anglophone references to dominate and shows fewer authors from other regions:

- References to Francophone authors - 317
- References to Anglophone authors - 347
- References to European authors (outside Anglophone and Francophone regions) - 127
- References to other regions - 96

One possible reason for this effect may be the introduction of a double system of peer-review in 2014 - at first on the level of acceptance of abstracts and then for articles. However, the imbalance is not as noticeable amongst the authors accepted for the publication in 2015 and 2016 (Fig. 2).

Some aspects of publications from this period can be noted. There were no Asian or African authors in the volume following the Japanese symposium. The only two countries represented from Latin America are Brazil, with 7 publications, and Mexico, with 3 publications. While authors' nationalities have been linked generally to the region in which the symposium took place, after 2014 the Tsukuba and Milan symposia did not result in more local representation. On the one hand, the quality of the journal has been increasing by rejecting texts that did not address the selected topic; but on the other, some texts might have been rejected because they do not meet the high academic standards formed in English- and French-speaking countries.

The participation of Latin-American authors in recent issues is a relevant trace of this committee's international adherence. Latin American participation in ICOFOM has occurred since its initial years, mostly through individual members who could travel and speak the languages from the epistemic centres. However, with the creation of ICOFOM LAM - the subcommittee of ICOFOM for Latin America and the Caribbean - in 1990, regional events and publications have expressed a great integration of theory and local practice, as well as an appropriation of the ideas proposed by European authors into the discourse of Latin-American museologists who were not necessarily in direct contact with them.

In the analysis of some of the Latin-American articles in *ISS*, where we mostly see not only traces of Eastern Europe and French museology, but also theoretical approaches based on local experiences, we could envisage how knowledge can sometimes go through a process of *transculturation*. In this sense, the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz' concept of "transculturation" (1983) could be applied to knowledge or theory when produced in an encounter between



more than one culture, because it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena.

### **Some conclusions: museologies in plural?**

The genealogy of museology cannot be detached from a reflection on the political centres of knowledge, across the distinct parts of the world where it has been adopted as a “science” or university discipline and in different languages into which the term has been translated. The theory of museology produced over the past half century to define its own moral interpretation of reality has been shown to be marked by paradigms created within colonial structures of power, excluding approaches and experiences that cannot be translated – culturally or linguistically – into the discourse of the epistemic centres. For this reason, a postcolonial theory should be one of the central goals of this discipline, not only in the “peripheries” but also in the “metropolis” of knowledge where coloniality still influences museological thinking.

As we have demonstrated in this article, there is an almost invisible political force that guides museology as a discipline, centered in the regions of the world that control the means for knowledge production. This can be verified in the bibliographical material produced over the years and still referenced today. Since these works have marginalised other views on museology – such as those from Eastern Europe where theoretical museology was born, or the more recent production from Latin America, where museology was considered a “science” by some authors – a critical consciousness for this discipline will take time to develop.

In Latin America, for instance, a great corpus of museum theory or written reflections on museology existed even before the 1980s. This was, however, a decade when the first Latin-American authors published internationally, with encouragement from Czech museologists Vinos Sofka and Jan Jelínek, in the first publications of ICOFOM. This was the route for theoretical concepts from authors such as Waldisa Rússio, Tereza Scheiner, Nelly Decarolis and Norma Rusconi to be noticed by authors from Europe and North America. In Brazil, the 1980s marked the time when the first theoretical texts on museology were translated and published, some of them under the direct influence of ICOFOM publications that circulated in this country<sup>12</sup>.

In 1990, in South America, ICOFOM LAM was created, motivated by a will to regionalize the debates on museology. Indeed, the subcommittee amplified the circulation of theoretical texts written in Portuguese and Spanish across

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12. In Rio de Janeiro, the publication *Cadernos Museológicos* was coordinated by museologist Maria de Lourdes Parreiras Horta (*Cadernos Museológicos*, Rio de Janeiro, n. 1, 2 e 3, 1989-1990) presenting, for the first time in the Brazilian context, translations of papers from ICOFOM authors like Desvallées, Sofka, van Mensch, Sola and the only Brazilian who published in the first ICOFOM publications, Waldisa Rússio.



the region. This new regional forum allowed the experiences and their professionals – mostly not scholars, but museum professionals at different levels – to give their own interpretation to theoretical proposals from European authors. Unfortunately, to date, no text or collection of works from the ICOFOM LAM production of the past 25 years has been translated into either French or English.

Our research was based on analysis of bibliographical material constituting this academic discipline; in different parts of the world, but mostly from international publications. The research considered several museology textbooks in English, French and Spanish published from the 1990s to 2010s, and the *ICOFOM Study Series* publications from 2006 to 2016. The results show that museology, as it has been produced and taught worldwide in the past decades, was created and reproduced according to colonial structures of power. A long road is still ahead of us in the investigation of museological influences and currents both inside and outside these colonial centres.

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## Figure Captions

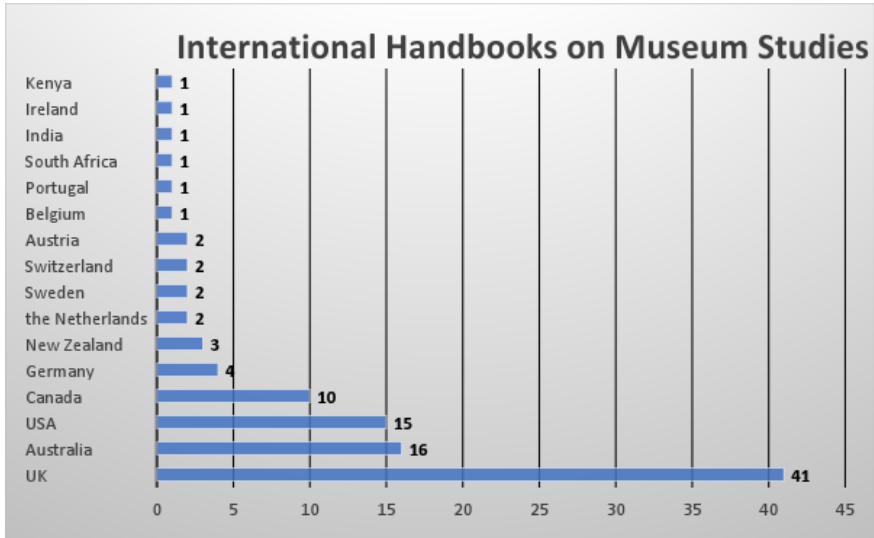


Figure 1. Geopolitical background of the authors invited to contribute to 4-volume “International Handbooks on Museum Studies”

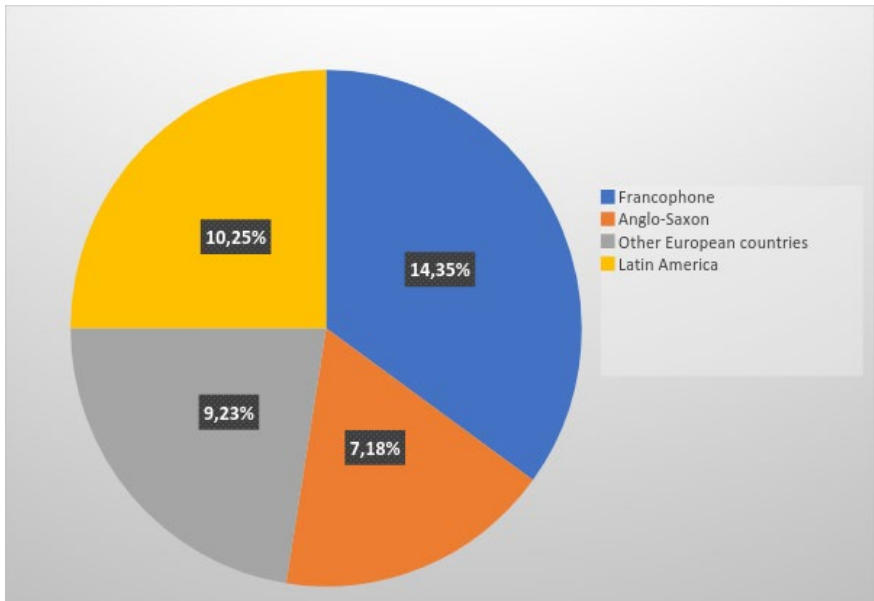


Figure 2. Geopolitical background of the authors accepted for the publication in *ICOFOM Study Series 2015 and 2016*