

EUROPEAN COLONIAL HERITAGE MODALITIES IN ENTANGLED CITIES

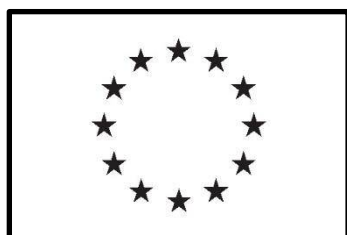
Engaging and Disengaging with Colonial Pasts in City Museums

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Researched within Work Package 3 '*City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts*'
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Engaging and Disengaging with Colonial Pasts in City Museums

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Introduction

This paper aims to discuss the preliminary results of the research conducted within the Horizon2020 ECHOES Project by the members of work package 3 on the topic of 'City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts.' Beyond presenting preliminary results, the paper also describes the approaches of each of the researchers and analyzes some of the challenges encountered collectively while working on the three case studies at the basis of this work package.

Work package 3 (WP3) focuses on how city museums around the globe represent and engage with the colonial pasts of cities which experienced colonialism or even 'multiple colonialisms,' one of the key concepts of the ECHOES project. Do these museum institutions act as cultural brokers able to tackle the problem of representing entangled global histories, identities, and emotions, or conversely do they support more traditional national perspectives? How do city museums in different countries collect, exhibit, study, and engage with urban colonial heritage? Our aim is to answer these questions through qualitative comparative analyses of three city museums, focusing on all aspects such as their histories, development, collections, leading narratives, political-cultural contexts, organizational policies, outreach activities, and the reception of museum products and activities by the public. The three city museums each represent distinct colonial destinies and positions within colonial history.

The research of WP3 centers on three recently reopened or refurbished city museums situated in markedly different geopolitical and epistemic zones: Western Europe (Amsterdam Museum), Central and Eastern Europe (Museum of Warsaw) and East Asia (Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum: *Shanghai lishi bowuguan/ Shanghai geming lishi bowuguan*, 上海历史博物馆/上海革命历史博物馆). These institutions were selected for the fact that, while they share several features, they present different alternatives to the representation of colonial pasts. Although to some extent the function and practices of these museums are comparable, each case study presents specific challenges which the individual researchers must tackle.

As mentioned, the institutions at the center of our research are situated in different geopolitical and epistemic zones. Firstly, the Amsterdam Museum represents the Western European imperial perspective. While the museum acknowledges - perhaps even glorifies - the global role of the city in its newest permanent exhibition *World – City* (2018), its

representations of Amsterdam's colonial past are complex and ambiguous. Secondly, the case of Warsaw was selected as an example of Europe's 'internal colonization' and a site to apply post-colonial discourse developing within and in relation to Central and Eastern Europe. The permanent exhibition of the Museum of Warsaw is polemical towards standard national narratives, and it employs unorthodox approaches to shed new light on the history of the dependency of the city on the Russian/Soviet and German/Nazi empires. Finally, Shanghai was selected as it reveals attitudes to European settlements in the distinctively different cultural context of modern China. The permanent exhibition of the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum (SHM/SRM) is the most traditional of the three case studies analyzed by WP3, as its narrative follows a Marxist-Leninist approach to colonial history.

The paper is divided in three sections, each of them subdivided into three parts in which the authors articulate their respective and collective experiences, results, and challenges. The first section of the paper - written in the voice of each researcher - showcases the particularities of our research settings, our backgrounds, and our different relationships to our case study subjects and associate partners. These differences have impacted the data collected within our respective research projects. The second section is the core of the paper and presents our preliminary results in which we critically reflect on our data and identify various heritage modalities through which the museums are (dis)engaging with colonial pasts. This section makes use of the framework developed within ECHOES with four modalities for practicing colonial heritage (Kølvraa 2018). Finally, we openly discuss some of the challenges that we have encountered in the early stages of our research, along with a reflection on some possible solutions or approaches to alleviating these challenges. In closing, the reader should know that the researchers published a first series of reports in early 2019 focusing on the histories and contexts of each museum (Ariese 2019; Bukowiecki 2019; Pozzi 2019). A second series of reports, presenting a more in-depth analysis of (de-)colonial practices will also be published in autumn 2019 (Ariese *forthcoming*; Pozzi *forthcoming*; Wawrzyniak & Bukowiecki *forthcoming*).

ECHOES: Researching City Museums and Colonialism

Amsterdam

The Amsterdam Museum (AM), founded as the Amsterdam Historical Museum (*Amsterdams Historisch Museum*), was officially opened to the public on 2 November 1926 (Kistemaker 2001). The museum was first located in the historical building De Waag, built as a gate house in 1488. Yet, the earliest collections of the Amsterdam Historical Museum were formed long before the creation of the museum institution (Kistemaker 2001), as the museum became the custodian of a diversity of collections of objects owned by the municipality of Amsterdam. This included objects held within municipal buildings, such as the city hall, and collections (on occasion including entire houses) gifted to the city by private collectors. The museum was moved to the building complex of the former civil orphanage (which had been in use 1580-

1960), reopening there after extensive renovations in 1975. In the lead up to the reopening, negotiations were held with other museums, in particular with the Rijksmuseum, concerning the long-term loan of objects (Middelkoop 2001). The collections were also expanded by the creation of the municipal archaeological service in 1973, as the museum was made responsible for all archaeological finds (Kistemaker 2001). Once reopened, the museum's permanent galleries largely chronologically detailed the history of Amsterdam, focusing strongly on the so-called 'Golden Age' (17th century).

The museum finished its last major renovations in 2011 and was rebranded as Amsterdam Museum (AM 2012). A new permanent exhibition was developed, *Amsterdam DNA*, chronologically presenting the highlights of Amsterdam's history in c. 45 minutes. Now, the AM has just completed a major internal reorganization (2016-2018). Alongside this internal reorganization, a second permanent exhibition was opened in 2018, *World – City*, which thematically explores the relationship between Amsterdam and the world from different angles. The Amsterdam Museum staff is directly responsible for four exhibition sites, namely: the Amsterdam Museum, the Museum Willet-Holthuysen, the Cromhouthuis, and the *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age* exhibition at the Hermitage Amsterdam. Part of the collections of the AM, consisting of over 100 000 objects, are displayed across these four sites, with the rest stored in the separate Collection Centre. In addition, the Amsterdam Museum is in a partnership with the Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder and the Bijbels Museum, formalized as the Amsterdam Heritage Museums, which together attracted 627 000 visitors in 2015 (AHM 2016: 5). Although the Amsterdam Museum has changed a lot since its foundation in 1926, its focus has always been on the city of Amsterdam and its history. The two permanent exhibitions, but especially the temporary exhibitions, strive to relate the history of the city to the contemporary city and to be relevant to the present day. The museum also runs different educational and public programs, organizes events, and manages not only public websites and social media pages but also an online information platform and an online collection catalogue.

The case study of the Amsterdam Museum within ECHOES' WP3 is conducted by one post-doctoral researcher, dr. Csilla Ariese, based at the University of Amsterdam. As a recently graduated museologist, I have an interest in the social aspects of the museum and particularly in community engagement. Thanks to my PhD research into 195 museums in the Caribbean (Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke 2018), I have experienced museums in diverse colonial settings. Furthermore, I have worked at the Amsterdam Museum as a work experience volunteer in 2013, providing some institutional knowledge at the outset of the research project.

The core approach with which I designed the case study of the Amsterdam Museum is that of participant observation. For this approach, I combine the theory and methodology of the field of museology together with anthropology. The guiding principle is to conduct research that is useful for both parties: the ECHOES project and the Amsterdam Museum. Starting my research in October 2018, I had four aims for this first stage of my research: to embed myself in the museum, to identify roughly some of the ways in which the museum is or is *not* dealing with colonialism (some of these examples are discussed in this paper), to identify areas that

would be of key interest for further research, and to begin to determine my contribution(s) to the museum.

Together with the key partner from the Amsterdam Museum, one of the curators, I designed the participant observation approach. I was included into the museum as a guest staff member, which gave me access to the museum, an office space, to the museum's intranet, as well as to all the resources of the museum (collections, archives, library, and the shared digital files of all staff members). This means that I have access to a vast amount of data, including on the institutional history of the museum. I was invited to join the New Narratives team which works on designing and running programs (such as tours, events, and workshops) that bring in new narratives and alternative, critical voices to the museum. Thus, I was able to embed myself into the museum, working there several days a week, with access not only to the public areas such as exhibition spaces, but also to the private areas of the institution. This was also crucial in terms of building trust with individual staff members to later conduct in depth interviews. By attending museum programs and events, critically visiting the four different museum exhibition sites, viewing the collection center, and participating in planning future museum activities, I was able to gain a preliminary insight into the ways in which the museum and its staff are (dis)engaging with colonial pasts. Along with my own notes and photos, I collected diverse types of data: scientific publications, museum catalogues, flyers, blogs posts, audio tours, internal policies, organizational diagrams, program and exhibition proposals, visitor statistics and surveys, visitor feedback, collection catalogue entries, meeting notes, and more. Finally, predominantly together with the New Narratives team, I have begun to outline the ways in which my research can contribute to the activities of the museum.

Shanghai

The Shanghai History Museum/ Shanghai Revolution Museum is a valuable case study to understand how non-European city museums engage with colonial heritage. The SHM/SRM opened in 2018 in the premises of the ex-Race Club, a neoclassical colonial building placed at the very centre of the city in 325 Nanjing West Road. The history of the development of this institution is quite complex. Plans to build the SHM and the SRM as two separate units started as early as in the 1950s, but it was only in the 1980s that these plans became more solid. The predecessor of the SHM, the Shanghai History Cultural Relics Exhibition Hall (*Shanghai lishi wenwu chenlie guan*, 上海历史文物陈列馆), was opened to the public in 1984; while the decision to establish a Shanghai Revolution Museum became official in 2010. The two now share the same premises and permanent exhibition. The collection contains one hundred thousand items, most of which pertain to the colonial history of the city. The permanent exhibition, which focuses on local history and is divided into 'Ancient Shanghai' (6000 BC–1839) and 'Modern Shanghai' (1839–1949), takes a chronological approach to describe the history of the city from prehistoric times until the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Besides, the SHM/SRM actively hosts exhibitions on different historical and artistic topics. The museum is also in charge of two archaeological units based in other

locations in the Shanghai area: the Songze Historical Relics Museum and the Yuan Dynasty Water Gate Museum (SHM/SRHM 2018). The fact that the SHM was finally realized in 2018 together with the SRM is paradigmatic of the CCP's interest in keeping control over the interpretation of the city's 'revolutionary' history (Pozzi 2019).

As an historian of modern China and of Shanghai's popular culture, dr. Laura Pozzi is familiar with both the history of the city and the CCP's techniques to reframe and repress past events and processes that do not fit the authorities' interpretation of history. As post-doctoral researcher, I am interested in analyzing the contemporary institutions' views on colonial heritage; furthermore, it is my intention to understand how the permanent exhibition was designed, and to run surveys to study visitors' reactions and thoughts on its contents.

Marxism-Leninist ideology guides the management of heritage and the narrative of museums in China (CNCHA 2010), nevertheless museums continuously adapt their exhibitions to the changing economic and political demands of the state (Denton 2014). This means that the SHM is a precious case-study to understand the most recent CCP's policies on the management of colonial heritage, and to study the reaction of visitors about the most current approach of Chinese museums to the history of European colonialism in China. While the SHM is the main subject of my investigation, I visited several other museums in the city (including the Shanghai Museum, the Site of the First National Congress of the CCP, and the old Shanghai History Museum still open in the Pearl Tower) to better understand the connections between these institutions at the urban and national level. Project ECHOES' partners at Fudan University helped me to organize interviews with the vice-director of the SHM and other members of the staff who designed and manage the permanent exhibition. Despite the help of the Fudan team, the SHM remains a quite secretive institution: documents about its history and its collection are available only to internal workers; I was able to access only partial information about its budget; and interviews are often the only source of information about the discussions which take place among the members of the staff. Despite these issues, the case of the SHM remains a fascinating case study which will allow us to better understand the changing interpretation of the role of European colonial heritage in China.

Warsaw

The Museum of Warsaw is a cultural institution of the capital city of Warsaw and its principal seat is located in the historical tenement houses on the northern side of the Old Town Market Square, which were reconstructed after the WW2 and interconnected. In the mid-2010s, the museum implemented the so-called 'turn to things' into its curatorial practices and since then it developed the concept of *The Things of Warsaw* as the main focus of the museum's new core exhibition and as a way of thinking about its huge collection of c. 300.000 objects. The opening of this new core exhibition in 2017-2018 replaced the previous old-fashioned single, linear, chronological museum narrative by a multi-layered and multi-threaded representation of the city's past through only original historical objects coming from the museum's own collections and divided into 21 thematic rooms. Each room showcases another collection of museum objects, such as – to give only few examples – architectural details, architectural

drawings, bronzes, silverware, clothing, maps of Warsaw, postcards, souvenirs, packaging of Warsaw companies, patriotic items, pictures of Warsaw, portraits of Varsovians, or representations of the mermaid (the symbol of the city from its coat of arms). The core exhibition is supplemented by two exhibits located in the basement of the museum and totally lacking any historical objects: *'The Warsaw Data'* (carefully selected data from the city's past, presented in the form of attractive infographics and 3D models) and *'History of the Tenement Houses'* (introducing the history of the present day principal seat of the museum).

At first glance, objects presented in the thematic rooms of *The Things of Warsaw* exhibition have nothing in common. The artistic and material values of particular displayed objects is highly unequal or even incomparable to each other and the criteria of separation into the thematic rooms are not homogenous. However, each room has – or they were read as such by the curatorial team – an important common feature which distinguishes them and gives them strength: their connections with the local history of Warsaw (c.f. Mycielska & Odnous 2017: 181; Trybuś 2017: 8). “The Things of Warsaw” are – as the museum says on its website – material “witnesses and participants of the city’s history and, therefore, a starting point for telling the stories of their owners and creators, as well as for presenting the events and processes that formed Warsaw as we know it today.”¹

Unlike in the cases of Amsterdam and Shanghai, there is no separate post-doctoral position in WP3 for a person who would be single-handedly, fully responsible for the research on the Museum of Warsaw. In this case, research is conducted collectively by the team which consists of four researchers representing different academic backgrounds and expertises: dr. Joanna Wawrzyniak (memory studies, social history, intellectual history), dr. Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper (social anthropology, memory studies, ethnographic research) and dr. Łukasz Bukowiecki (cultural studies, urban studies, memory studies) all from the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw, together with dr. Magdalena Wróblewska (art history, museology) from the Institute of Art History of the same university, who is also working at the Museum of Warsaw. Since the beginning of the ECHOES Project in February 2018, dr. Wawrzyniak and dr. Głowacka-Grajper have been part-time researchers, dr. Bukowiecki has been a part-time research assistant (increased to full-time as of January 2019), and dr. Wróblewska has been on maternity leave. Additionally, dr. Wawrzyniak and dr. Bukowiecki combine their research activities on the Warsaw case study with management and administrative duties for the whole WP3 as WP leader and WP assistant, respectively. All members of the Warsaw team work in Warsaw and have some experience in collaboration with Warsaw’s museums, including the Museum of Warsaw.

During the first year of the ECHOES project the primary objective of the Warsaw team was to recognize Warsaw’s past as a colonial one and to examine how this past is represented (or misrepresented) in the Museum of Warsaw (especially in the core exhibition and its relation to the museum collections) in the broader context of other heritage practices which are present in the city. Dr. Wawrzyniak and dr. Głowacka-Grajper focused mainly on the

¹ Cited from the Museum of Warsaw website: <https://muzeumwarszawy.pl/en/the-things-of-warsaw/>.

adaptation of the post-colonial approach to the specific case of Central and Eastern Europe, which included *i.a.* a critical revisiting of the scholarly publications released so far in this field, as well as the development of the ECHOES Methodological Toolkit in this area (see: the paper *The Diversity of Postcolonialisms in Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Review of Emerging Research Field* and the ECHOES Keywords' paper *Internal Colonization*). Dr. Bukowiecki and dr. Wróblewska have conducted empirical research on dissonant heritage in Warsaw and its connection to the main ideas of the core exhibition of the Museum of Warsaw (preliminary results of this study were presented at the ECHOES methodological workshops in Warsaw and Marseille in the papers *Post-Russian, post-German and post-Soviet Heritage in Contemporary Warsaw* and *The Negative 'Things of Warsaw': Between Erasure and Transformation*). Moreover, Warsaw researchers discussed ways to implement the ECHOES modalities of heritage practices for analyses of the Warsaw case study from the post-colonial perspective.

In autumn 2018, Łukasz Bukowiecki started detailed research of the Museum of Warsaw's priorities, policies, problems, and opportunities shaped by the museum's relationship to city authorities, to national and local politics, and to the particular features of the city. According to the ECHOES Grant Agreement, the results of this study aimed to help understand the museum's "evolution and priorities" and as such were included in the first sub-report on the Museum of Warsaw, finished in March 2019 (Bukowiecki 2019). This stage of the research relied mostly on existing written sources, such as archival documents and their scientific descriptions, official museum publications (annual reports, exhibition catalogues, brochures, flyers *etc.*), various manifestations of Warsaw's heritage practices in public discourse (*e.g.* press, social media, tourist guidebooks), as well as on a close reading of the museum's narrative at its exhibitions (supported by notes on the information provided by the audio guide and photos of exhibited museum objects, captions, and panel texts).

As a result of the application of the ECHOES modalities (repression, removal, reframing, re-emergence) the research on the Warsaw case study is leading to a deeper analysis of various dimensions of the museum's work (collections, permanent and temporary exhibitions, educational and cultural programs) in terms of their relations to colonial pasts. The WP3 Warsaw team is also collecting more data from separate in-depth interviews with museum staff and stakeholders (interviews with key museum staff members have already been conducted by dr. Wawrzyniak and dr. Bukowiecki) and conducting ethnographic studies of the exhibition. Moreover, dr. Głowacka-Grajper is responsible for planned audience research and focus group interviews.

(Dis-)engaging with Colonial Pasts in City Museums

Amsterdam

Amsterdam developed and continues to exist today within a colonial frame. As such, colonialism and related topics are inevitably entangled with the city, the municipal collections, and the cities' museums. The question is what shape these entanglements take in the particular case of the Amsterdam Museum.

Within the main exhibition site of the Amsterdam Museum, the colonial era and colonialism are present in both permanent exhibitions. In *Amsterdam DNA* (2011), colonization, slavery, the plantation system and the trans-Atlantic slave trade feature most visibly in the so-called 'Golden Age' room (covering the period 1600-1700). In the other galleries of the exhibition, colonialism is largely repressed by being unspoken or only visible in the sub-text or the margins. In the 'Golden Age' room, different modalities of engaging with colonialism clash with each other. For instance, the central video display coupled with the audio tour can be read as a mode of repression. The 'Golden Age' is represented in heroic terms, and the system of slavery is positioned within a positivistic spirit of entrepreneurship rather than characterized as dehumanizing exploitation. Yet, there is also reframing, particularly in some of the text panels in this room. The painting *The Herengracht Bend* (Gerrit Berckheyde, 1685) depicts one of the wealthiest parts of the Amsterdam Canal Ring, which had just been built. However, a new label text concludes by not only describing the wealth and development of the city, but also by underlining how this wealth had been accumulated: "Some of those who bought houses here in Amsterdam made their fortune by selling and exploiting people on the other side of the world" (AM Canon van Nederland label text).

Another part of the 'Golden Age' room has been alternatively perceived as reframing or as repression. Embedded within the timeline is a diorama depicting a 17th century plantation in Suriname, with a digital projection which shows the plantation owner, an enslaved woman serving him food, and their son, along with an audio conversation. In the background we see the interaction between an overseer and two enslaved persons working with sugar cane (see Figure 1). This diorama has seen some controversy as opinions of and emotional responses to the diorama by both visitors and museum staff have differed considerably from highly positive to extremely negative. Some people have had strong negative responses to the diorama and feel that it is repressive in dealing with the system of slavery by showing subservient relationships (pers. comm. 3 December 2019). They have wanted the diorama to be removed and have strongly rejected it, preferring something that shows resilience towards oppression. However, others have reacted very positively and instead see the diorama as successful reframing. They appreciate that the enslaved persons are given a voice and are individualized in the diorama. They also feel that the enslaved are being made visible in a way that is still relatively rare and find the representation empowering for that reason.



Figure 1: Plantation Suriname diorama in the *Amsterdam DNA* exhibition. Photo by: Caro Bonink, 16 May 2012. Image: Amsterdam Museum, repr.nr. BC_00888_026.

Indeed, the 'Golden Age' room has also seen removal. The wall surrounding the diorama is part of the chronological timeline, which runs throughout the exhibition as a stylized infographic. Here it depicts the process of sugar cane production on the plantations. Originally, there was an image of a person chained by the neck, being dragged by another person, and given to a third person in a top hat in exchange for a bag of sugar. The text under the image read "1 slave = 5000 pound sugar." Strong objections were raised towards this image which commodified human beings and equated enslaved persons with material goods. The depiction itself with the chained person was also found offensive and humiliating. It was opposed vocally within the museum in 2016 during a New Narratives Tour. The museum acknowledged the discomfort with the image, but initially left it in place. It was finally covered up with a sticker in July 2018 after renewed protests over Twitter. Thus, we can identify the modes of repression, removal, and reframing in the 'Golden Age' room of the permanent exhibition *Amsterdam DNA*.

The *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age* exhibition at the Hermitage Amsterdam has also seen debate in terms of its engagement or lack of engagement with colonialism and particularly slavery. This exhibition was designed with the intention to show the self-image of the Dutch urban upper classes during the 'Golden Age,' but to also add some contemporary perspectives and critical comments to this historical self-image (van der Molen 2016). Internally, some of the staff members – including persons who had worked on designing the exhibition in 2014 – feel that the exhibition is in need of some revisions. As one of the conservators told me, "I have to admit that despite our best intentions in 2014 to make a balanced exhibition, we did not entirely succeed. My own perspective has also changed since

then” (pers. comm. 20 November 2019; my translation). Thus, there is an internal proposal to adjust the exhibition: to change some of the panel texts and especially to change the conclusion of the exhibition by adding works of contemporary artists who critically engage with the ‘Golden Age,’ hopefully ultimately leading to re-emergence.

The two canal houses of the Amsterdam Museum – the Museum Willet-Holthuysen and the Cromhouthuis – provide interesting case studies for heritage practices in relation to colonialism. Both houses are located on Amsterdam’s World Heritage Listed Canal Ring, on the *Herengracht*, and date to the end of the 17th century. Entering these museums is a step into another time and an encounter with exorbitant wealth and decadence. Both houses still have a strict division between upstairs (the owners) and downstairs (the servants) (van de Kieft 2012), which manages to only hint at the lives and narratives of the servants who remain invisible in the stories of the museums, similarly as they would have moved through the house largely imperceptibly through hidden passages and small doors. The lives of the owners of the houses are interwoven into the museum narratives, present in every room, visible even in the museums’ names. Although visitors can explore the kitchens or other areas in which the servants would have worked and contributed to the life of the house, their existence remains marginalized in the narrative. Additionally, there is little to no mention of the source of the wealth that led to the building of these houses or to the creation of the collections of their owners. It is questionable whether everyone feels welcome to visit these museums, or whether visitors of all backgrounds could feel represented or included in these spaces and stories.

Heritage practices related to colonialism occur across all activities of the museum. Besides the permanent exhibitions discussed, modalities of (dis)engaging with colonialism are present within programs as well. The work of the New Narratives team can be seen as examples of various re-emergence practices. New Narratives began as an initiative in 2016 alongside the temporary exhibition *Black Amsterdam*. The original idea, developed by the guest curator of the exhibition, was to invite external experts to give tours of the exhibition during which they were encouraged to present new narratives and to voice their critique of the museum. A desire for improved multi-vocality and self-reflection guided these New Narrative Tours from the side of the museum. A major goal was to invite external experts from different backgrounds and with diverse knowledges and expertise, in order to work towards intersectionality. Throughout 2018, the New Narratives team set up a formalized plan that extended their program beyond New Narratives Tours. As part of the New Narratives Program Plan for 2018-2022, the collaboration with the ECHOES project was included, as well as the development of new (series of) events and online outreach through blogs and posts (AM 2018). At the end of 2018, the team organized the first New Collection Narratives event, a public evening in which one object from the collection is the focus for discussion and reflection from different angles.



Figure 2: Participants of the New Collection Narratives event within the exhibition *World - City*, looking at the painting *Plantation Waterlant*, AM. Photo by: Csilla Ariese, 22 November 2018.

For the first New Collection Narratives event, the painting *Plantation Waterlant*² (Dirk Valkenburg, 1706-1708) was selected, an image showing a plantation in Suriname as seen from the water. The aim of the event was to openly discuss which stories the museum tells about this painting. For this purpose, several (previous) label texts were reprinted and shared with the attendees, and the group also went to see the painting in its current context (see Figure 2). The event showed that there was a marked difference in tone and focus between different label and catalogue texts – depending not only on the time when they had been written but also their proposed audience or purpose. For instance, a newer catalogue text balances the visually idyllic setting of the painting by pointing out: “The human activity in the peaceful image only just about reminds the modern observer that the profits from the Surinamese plantations could only be gained over the backs of tens of thousands of enslaved persons and Indigenous peoples who had been driven from their lands” (AM catalogue text; my translation). The marked differences between the various texts, all of which had been written by the museum, were extensively discussed and participants were asked for their preferences and suggestions. Hopefully, in the future the input from the event will also lead to changes visible to visitors directly within the gallery, and these critical reflections on the museum collections can lead to re-emergences.

² This painting was also used to develop the décor of the diorama mentioned above in the ‘Golden Age’ room of *Amsterdam DNA*.

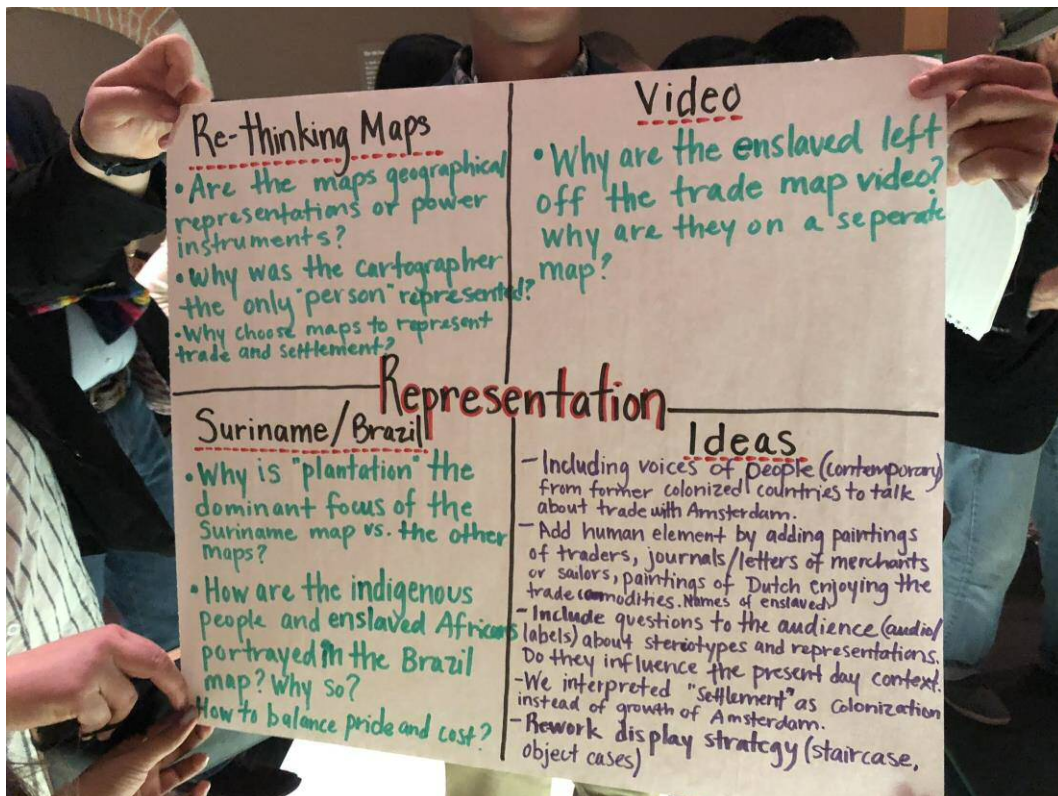


Figure 3: Participants of the training program *Sharing Stories on Contested Histories* within the exhibition *World - City*, presenting their results, AM. Photo by: Csilla Ariese, 14 December 2018.

The Amsterdam Museum continues to actively invite outside interventions into the museum. Besides the New Narrative Tours and New Collection Narrative events, the museum engages in other activities that vulnerably open up the museum to external feedback and critique. A recent example was the training program *Sharing Stories on Contested Histories* (2-14 December 2018). Organized by the Reinwardt Academy of the Amsterdam University of the Arts together with the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, this was a two-week training program for international museum professionals held in Amsterdam. The training program brought together early career professionals, predominantly from countries that have/had a colonial relationship with the Netherlands to “share reflections on and knowledge of contested histories in an inclusive and open-minded way, to lead to new transnational dialogues and new perspectives” (Kok & Smit 2018: 7). For this training program, the Amsterdam Museum functioned as the ‘client’ and the main subject of study. In the course of the program, the participants visited the museum several times and grappled with the displays, audio tours, designs, texts, media, and impressions. At the end of the program they presented their results in terms of questions they had tackled, insights and knowledge they wished to share from their own backgrounds and cultural perspectives, as well as some practical recommendations for changes (see Figure 3). Ideally, this kind of feedback will also lead to concrete changes within the museum and its activities, so that the input from external interventions again has the potential to result in re-emergence.

Many of the reflections or criticisms pointed out above are not unknown to the museum. Yet, the staff members of the Amsterdam Museum, including volunteers and interns, have

their differences in how they deal with the colonial pasts. Preliminarily, it seems that there are some staff members who are deeply engaged with de-colonization practices – often from the purpose of greater inclusivity, empathy, and justice – whereas for other staff members it is less of an issue. Additionally, the topic of colonialism is still often equated with slavery, and particularly slavery in the Americas and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Other aspects of colonialism, for instance slavery in South-East Asia, apartheid, or independence wars, are still rarely included.

As a city which has existed to a greater or lesser extent within a colonial frame for most of its existence and development, it becomes difficult to determine what is or is not ‘colonial.’ For instance, is it feasible, or even desirable, to categorize the Amsterdam Museum’s collections into ‘colonial’ and ‘non-colonial’ objects? More broadly speaking in the Netherlands, colonialism is most strongly associated with the colonial plantations and the system of slavery – particularly the trans-Atlantic slavery. This is true for the heritage discourse, as well as educational and political discourses. As a result, many other aspects of colonialism are marginalized and underrepresented. When these issues are repressed within the Amsterdam Museum, is this a deliberate heritage practice of the museum, or is it part of a wider discursive amnesia which the museum staff are – perhaps unconsciously – entangled in? These conceptual considerations will require more research and reflection in the remainder of the research project.

Shanghai

My research aims to answer two main questions. Firstly, Chinese museums are critical of foreign colonialism, but are they challenging what Walter Dignolo calls the “colonial matrix of power” (Dignolo 2011), or are they perpetuating Western views of modernity? Secondly, what does it mean to engage in decolonial practices in the Chinese context? In this section I will discuss these issues through the analysis of some examples from the permanent exhibition of the SHM/SRM.

The plan of the permanent exhibition is a relevant starting point to discuss the museum’s engagement, or disengagement, with decolonial theories. The organization and layout of the exhibition shows that the concept of modernity is still very much considered as a product of colonialism. I will first provide a general description of its layout, before then analyzing some of its features in detail.

The permanent exhibition is divided into two main sections, called ‘Ancient Shanghai’ (*gudai Shanghai*, 古代上海) and ‘Modern Shanghai’ (*jindai Shanghai*, 近代上海). The first section covers the history of Shanghai from its inception “6000 years ago” until the First Opium War. The ‘Modern Shanghai’ part opens with the First Opium War (1839-1842) and closes with the establishment of the PRC in 1949. In general, the SHM shares the same narrative as other history museums in China: the First Opium War and the resulting opening of treaty ports like Shanghai started the “one hundred years of humiliations” for China, which terminated in 1949 with the Communist takeover of the country (Denton 2014: 31). The division between ‘Ancient’ and ‘Modern’ history, with the modern era starting with the

foreign occupation of the city shows that Chinese museology is far from disputing the concept of Western modernity imported by colonial forces.

‘Modern Shanghai’ starts on the third floor. Its introductory panel states that “the destiny of Shanghai was the epitome of modern China,” going on to describe it as “the biggest city and the largest base of investment and plunder for the Powers in China.” Negatively charged terms such as ‘plunder’ are used throughout the exhibitions when describing the activities of foreign powers in the city. There is no ambivalence in the description of the exploitative aims of colonial forces. Nevertheless, there is a tension between the openly negative description of the actions of foreign powers and the fact that – according to the exhibition – the city achieved modernity during the colonial era. The picture wall which follows this gloomy introduction is another example of the fact that the pair of colonialism/modernity is not rejected in the exhibition. After reading the introduction, the visitor walks along a corridor towards the entrance of the exhibition hall. The wall on the right is covered with panels forming a black and white view of the Bund before the construction of the colonial landmark buildings which make it one of the most iconic cities in the world (see Figure 4), but if the visitor turns around, they will notice that from a different perspective the panels form a more recent and colorful view of the Bund presenting all the famous buildings which functioned as the headquarters of foreign companies, banks, and institutions during the colonial era (see Figure 5). The display, evidently chosen to demonstrate the transformation and beauty of the city, is unwittingly a celebratory monument to the achievements of colonial powers in Shanghai (Taylor 2002).



Figures 4-5: The two faces of the Bund at the entrance of the ‘Modern Shanghai’ section of the exhibition, SHM. Photos by: Laura Pozzi, 2018.

Institutions such as the SHM take for granted the necessity to protect the colonial heritage of the city, such as the buildings of the Bund but also object and documents. However, if colonialism is the cause of “one hundred years of humiliation,” why should Chinese institutions protect the physical memories of its dark history? How does the SHM explain the

decision to protect items which document the city's colonial past if it was so humiliating? I will provide two examples of how the SHM reframes colonial heritage to give new meaning to the past: the reframing of the Shanghai Race Club, the building that hosts the museum; and the history of the Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corporation's (HSBC) bronze lion statues.

Kirk Denton proved that "the symbolic power of a museum's exhibits derives as much from its building and its location in the urban landscape as from anything inherent in the exhibit's content or style" (Denton 2014: 15). This is particularly true for the SHM, whose building was once one of the most elitist and colonial institution in the city: the Shanghai Race Club. The racetracks, opened in 1862 in the former International Settlement, were the newest among the three race courses built in Shanghai at the end of the 19th century, while the neo-classical building of the Race Club house which now hosts the SHM was built in 1934 (see Figure 6). The race course was a place of leisure for foreigners, but from 1909 Chinese could also purchase admission tickets and watch horse races. In 1911 the Horse Racing Association allowed some Chinese to be honorary or invited members of the Race Club; access, however, was not equal (Xiong 2011: 481-482). In 1941, when Shanghai was under the control of the collaborationist government of Wang Jingwei (1883-1944), the Japanese transformed the premises of the club into a military garrison. At the end of the War of Resistance against Japan (1936-1945), the building was first used by American military forces and then given to British authorities (Chen 2011: 119). In 1946, the leader of the Nationalist Party and formal leader of the Republic of China, Chiang Kai-Shek (1887-1975) celebrated the return of the city to the Nationalists on the premises of the race course, an event that according to him testified to foreign powers' respect for and trust in his government (Xiong 2011: 485-486).

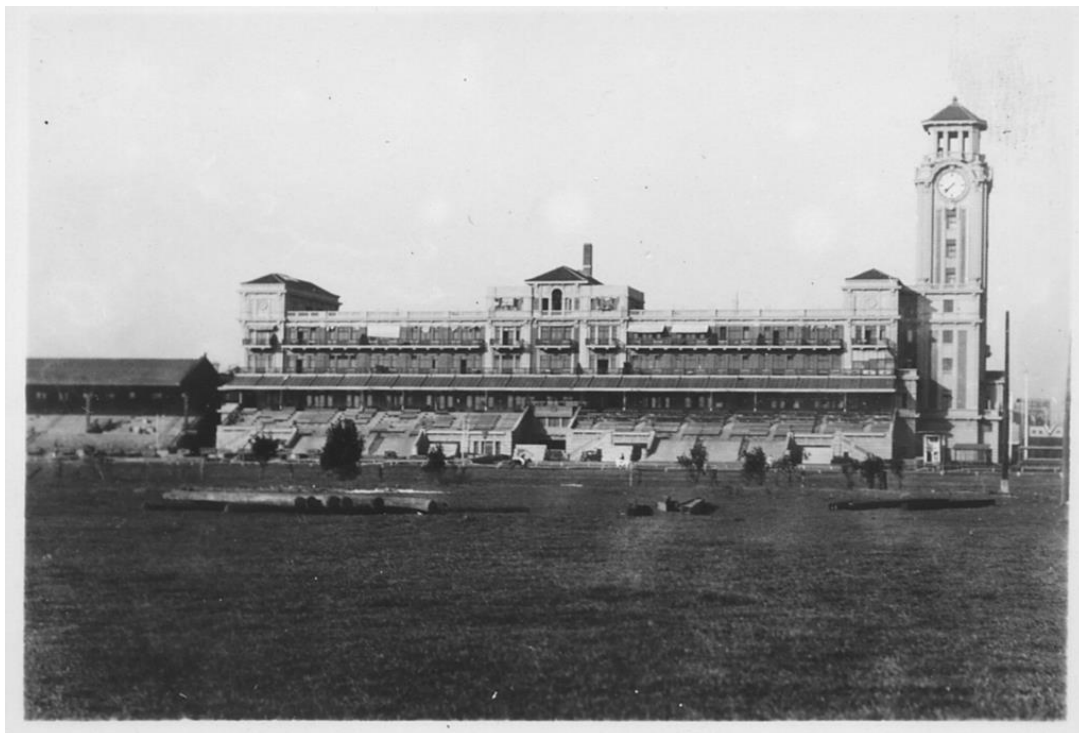


Figure 6: The Shanghai Race Club. Photographer unknown, c. 1945-1949. Image: Virtual Cities Project id: 33279.

Although the race course and the Race Club changed hands several times, and it stopped being a secluded foreigners-only space before the establishment of the People's Republic, after 1949 the propaganda machine of the CCP transformed the race course into a symbol of the Communists' victory over the evils of colonialism and of foreign imperialists' expansion (Braester 2005). Following the wishes of the new mayor of Shanghai, Marshal Chen Yi (1901-1972), the large race course was transformed into a park for the people of Shanghai – now known as People's Park – while in 1951 the building of the Race Club accommodated the Shanghai Museum and the Shanghai Library (Chen 2011: 119). In 1989, the building became a protected cultural monument. Between 2000 and 2012 the Shanghai Art Museum occupied the premises of the Race Club, and in 2015 the building was assigned to the SHM/SRM.

How is the history of the building of the Race Club presented to the public nowadays? The audio guide of the museum provides a political explanation to the decision of selecting this building as the site of the SHM: according to it, after the Liberation, the outstanding building of the Race Club “was transformed from an entertainment venue for few people to a cultural landmark,” and it stopped being a place for the entertainment of a few foreigners, becoming instead a public place for the education of the masses. Interestingly, the fact that the premises were used by the Nationalist government before 1949 is not acknowledged in the audio guide.

The representation of the audio guide fulfils two aims: firstly, it shows that the city of Shanghai cares about the preservation of its unique colonial heritage (the building is presented as one of the most iconic examples of the neo-classical architectural style), and secondly, it highlights the fact that the place is now open to the public. It is not easy to assess whether visitors receive this message and if they perceive their right to access this building as something which used to be denied to most of Shanghai's residents. Certainly, the history of the Race Club is reframed by the museum as symbol of the transformation of Shanghai from a colonial city into a Communist stronghold.

The use of the past to serve the present is a well-known propaganda technique which has been used in the PRC from its inception up to present days. But how do authorities decide which traces of the past are worth preserving and which are not? The architectural and artistic value of the Race Club might appear in our eyes as enough of a reason to explain its survival through history and its status as a protected monument; however, colonial heritage was not always considered worthwhile in China and it was attacked in the past as useless and harmful to the population. The SHM takes for granted that objects from the colonial past should be preserved and that they can be used as educational tools, but this was not always the case. The case of the two bronze lions once placed at entrance of the HSBC Building on the Bund exemplifies how the exhibition of the SHM represses some elements of the city's history to reframe the meaning of its colonial heritage.

The HSBC's lions Steven and Stitt now welcome visitors in the entrance hall of the SHM and they are among the most popular attractions in the museum (see Figures 7-8). According to the museum's audio guide, in 1923 the statues were placed in front of the Shanghai building of HSBC on the Bund. In 1941, when the Japanese army invaded the International Concession, the Japanese soldiers smelted several bronze statues in the city to produce weapons, but they

spared the lions, which survived the war intact. Again according to the audio guide, in 1966 the statues were stored in the warehouse of the Shanghai Museum where they remained until 1994, when they were exhibited for the first time in the “Exhibition of the Development of Shanghai Urban Modern History’ (Jindai Shanghai chengshi fazhan lishi chenlie, 近代上海城市发展历史陈列).

The audio guide does a good job at describing the artistic qualities and historical value of the HSBC bronze lions. At the same time, by emphasizing the importance of these and other bronze statues for the history of the city, the audio guide aims to accuse the Japanese army of heritage vandalism, even if these lions were not touched. While the Japanese troops’ attempt to destroy Shanghai’s colonial heritage is attentively described, the audio guide fails to mention that during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) the lions became targets of the iconoclastic violence of the Red Guards. Before the Cultural Revolution, a poem published in a *Wenhui Daily* praised the lions as they “witnessed imperialism, but now belong to the people,” but this explanation was not enough for the Red Guards, who wanted to destroy the statues as symbols of imperialist and capitalist forces (Ho 2018: 229). Workers of the Shanghai Museum managed to save them from the iconoclasm of Shanghai’s politicized youth by storing them in warehouses. These events explain why the lions disappeared from the public eye until 1994. Thus, the audio guide represses information about the events of the Cultural Revolution, framing instead the lions as survivors of the assaults of the Japanese troops, described in historiography and propaganda as China’s worst enemy (Gries 2004). In this way, the SHM engages in reframing to justify the protection of Shanghai colonial heritage without necessarily glorifying the action of the colonizers. At the same time, however, it engages in an act of repression to hide those historical events that do not fit the redemptive narrative from ‘victimization’ to ‘liberation’ proposed in the exhibition.



Figures 7-8: Steven and Stitt were once placed at entrance of the HSBC Building on the Bund, but now welcome visitors to the SHM/SRHM. Photos by: Laura Pozzi, 2018.

To conclude this overview of how the SHM engages and disengages with colonial heritage, I would like to discuss how the permanent exhibition conveys a nationalist message through the reframing of colonial heritage. Promoting nationalism is one of the main aims of Chinese museums, as inscribed in official regulations. While provincial, municipal, and even private museums are thriving in China and the contents of their exhibitions concentrate on more local issues and occasionally depart from the main national narrative, museums have limited maneuverability to disconnect local particularity from the national framework (Flath 2002).

Similarly, the SHM/SRM was born as a museum of local history, but the narrative of its permanent exhibition follows a national logic. Most of the events represented in the museum, such as the First Opium War, the October 11 Revolution, the May 4th Movement, the Japanese invasion, and the Liberation, had national repercussions. But the history of Shanghai is not always perfectly synchronized with the events taking place in the rest of the country. To make the story of the city more national, the exhibition represses several realities and hides histories that do not fit the revolutionary narrative broadcast by the CCP. The museum does not repress traumatic memories connected to the colonial past; in fact, injustice, inequalities, and coercion suffered by the local population under foreign powers are very much on display. On the contrary, the exhibition represses the grey areas that do not fit the Han-centered history of China, for instance, that Shanghai's population was composed of immigrants from other areas of the country (defined as 'sojourners') for whom provincial associations were much more significant than their 'Chinese' identity; that many locals worked side by side with the colonial powers; that many Chinese massively profited from the special status of the city; or that the borders between the lives of foreigners and locals became narrower over time (Goodman 1995). The fact that Shanghai was famous for being one of the most criminalized cities in the world is just mentioned without being discussed.

All the issues erased from the exhibition are those which confute the idea that the Chinese, or rather the 'Han Chinese,' were united to fight against imperialist forces, namely Europeans, Americans, and the Japanese. Sikhs, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Russians, or Muslim who lived in Shanghai are erased from the discussion. Another taboo subject is the biracial children for whom special schools were built (Hawks Pott 2009: 120). Some objects give us a glimpse into the variegated population of Shanghai: *e.g.* in a print titled 'The Booming Scene at Shanghai Fuzhou Road' (see Figure 9) or on a train ticket sold at Suzhou train station (see Figure 10) we can see Sikh soldiers, foreigners, and Chinese of different social classes. These displays are used to describe the growing web of infrastructure in the city, but do not discuss the cosmopolitanism of the city. Only the Jewish community is acknowledged in the SHM, as well as in a museum dedicated to them, located in the district of Hongkou.

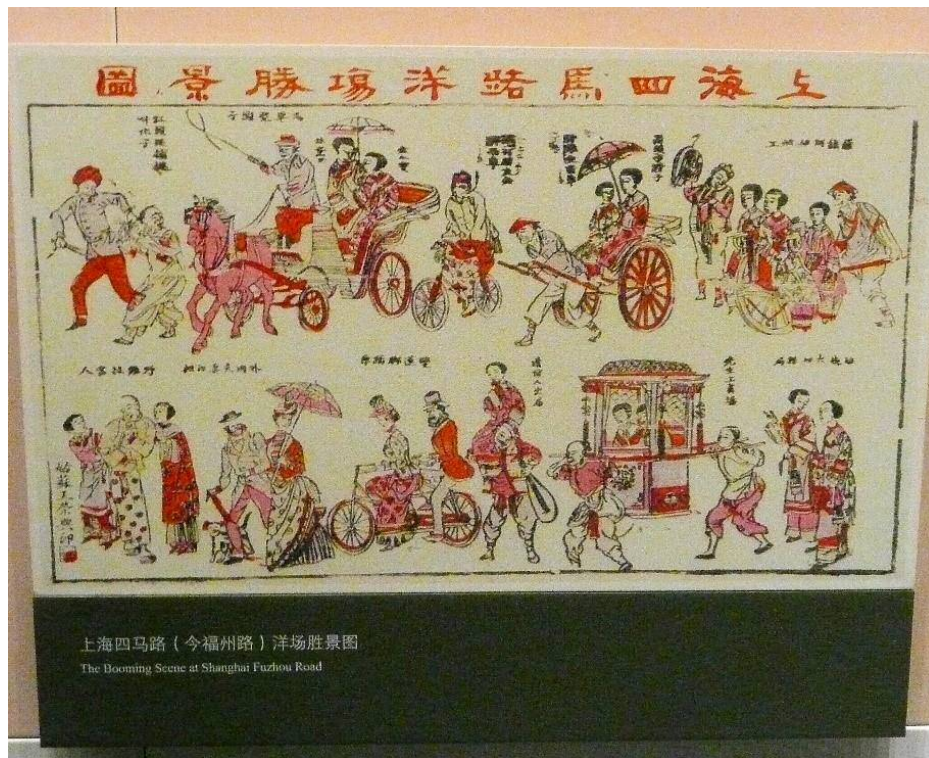


Figure 9: Print celebrating Chinese New Year, labeled 'The Booming Scene at Shanghai Fuzhou Road,' SHM/SRHM. Maker and date unknown. Photo by: Laura Pozzi, 2018.



Figure 10: Ticket to Wusong sold by Suzhou Railway Hot Wheel Vehicle Company, 1897, SHM/SRHM. Photo by: Laura Pozzi, 2018.

Not only the everyday life of foreigners is dismissed in the exhibition, but also the vibrant life of the Chinese community is partially lost. Certainly, the cultural differences between different groups of sojourners is greatly downplayed. People coming from different provinces of China had their own associations, buildings, temples, and even professional specializations which defined their identities and lives in the city. These people brought with them their dialects, foods, music, and religious practices. The exhibition downplays, or even removes,

the importance of provincial identity, while it highlights nationalistic feelings, a tendency very evident in the section dedicated to the Japanese invasion of the city.

There are several more examples of how the exhibition removes issues that do not fit the image of the glorious fight of all of the Han Chinese united against foreign invaders. What is central here is that the museum promotes 'Chineseness' above 'Shanghainess.' Furthermore, in the case of the SHM, repression is used to avoid discussing the 'contamination' of the Han ethnicity by foreign colonizers, the existence of provincial identities among the Chinese population, and the fact the Chinese Nation has been constructed also by castrating local, religious, and even ethnic specificity.

These are just a few examples of how the permanent exhibition deals with the city's colonial past. Reframing and repression are used to create a more uniform picture of a united Han-centered nation fighting against foreign invaders, whose knowledge, technologies, and ideologies were not fought against, but absorbed by the Chinese living in the city.

To conclude, to criticize European colonialism is not enough to decolonize a museum. In the case of the SHM/SRM decolonization will be achieved, at least partially, when the exhibition will discuss issues that do not fit the CCP's prescribed interpretation of the history of Liberation, when museums will promote a more inclusive description of Chinese society which will allow non-Han citizens to speak about their experience in the city/nation, and especially when the exhibition will be ready to discuss the problematic history of China after 1949. The SHM is a very 'safe' museum, in which problematic issues are skipped, and the blurred zones are never explored.

Warsaw

The particular challenge of the research conducted by the Warsaw team are the never-ending controversies on using the colonial and post-colonial approach in the Central and Eastern European case. Generally speaking, such terms as 'colonialism' or 'post-colonialism' are neither commonly used in Polish public discourse (e.g. in media or at schools) to describe the history of the state and/or the region, nor they are clearly accepted in academia by scholars who conduct research in this field. Some researchers highlight the advantages of adapting the colonial perspective to Central and Eastern Europe, some others point out several problems that may occur, and a silent majority just ignore post-colonial studies, treating it as nothing more than a fashionable concept from the West which colonizes intellectuals from 'the rest' itself. We need to consider such attitude, even if we do not share it.

The Museum of Warsaw has never directly applied post-colonial theory to its activities, which is highly important due to the fact that for decades the museum has also been one of the most important initiators, participants and publishers of studies on the Warsaw local history (*varsaviana*). As a result, there is almost no tradition in adapting the post-colonial perspective to practices of describing the city's past neither in the museum narrative, nor in scholarly communication. The ECHOES framework is, therefore, regarded as unusual or even confusing. For instance, every time I try to explain the premises of the ECHOES Project to the museum staff, heritage professionals or social activists, sooner or later I have to translate the

ECHOES vocabulary into such notions as ‘dissonant heritage’ (instead of colonial heritage) and ‘dependency,’ ‘domination,’ ‘incorporation,’ or ‘occupation’ (instead of colonization). What is more, translation in the opposite direction, namely from the ‘emic’ categories used by social actors to the ‘etic’ analytical framework, must be done respectively, while studying the museum narrative on the city’s past from the post-colonial perspective.

According to the ECHOES vocabulary, “researchers dealing with ‘internal European colonization’ point to analogies between the policy pursued by colonial empires and that pursued by subordinate European and non-European nations. In their opinions, the CEE societies underwent similar processes to those of Europe’s maritime colonies. In the case of CEE, the analogy argument can be traced down to at least three colonizing forces: the West (specifically German-speaking countries and, in general terms, European/global modernity), the East (Russia and Soviet Union) and the countries in this region with imperial ambitions (Poland and Hungary)” (Głowacka-Grajper 2019: 1).

The concept of *The Things of Warsaw* was not directly motivated by any decolonial intentions of the curatorial team, but the application of the post-colonial approach to the new core exhibition of the Museum of Warsaw by the ECHOES WP3 Warsaw team revealed a variety of ways of engaging and disengaging with ‘colonial’ pasts at many levels, beginning with particular museum objects, through the curatorial concept of the entire exhibition, to some global entanglements and universal condition of museums as colonial institutions.

The informational booklet about the exhibition of the Museum of Warsaw gives 4 reasons why a ‘traditional way’ of telling the history of the city was replaced by focus on things, particularly *The Things of Warsaw*. To quote:

1. The Things of Warsaw represent the tangible past of the city.
2. Direct contact with things is a unique way of learning about history, especially when there are no people remembering the past events anymore.
3. Since Warsaw was almost entirely destroyed during World War II, the things that survived became important memorabilia, even if they did not use to have any material value.
4. The histories of things reveal a multi-threaded history of the city, which is easier to realize when we ask the following questions: What historic events did they witness? Who did they assist and in what circumstances? What historic processes might they have influenced? Whose plans did they facilitate, or perhaps impede?

Many museum objects represent the history of subsequent waves of ‘internal colonization’ of Poland by its neighboring states in 19th and 20th century, but the museum generally avoids colonial vocabulary to describe experiences of former subordination-based relationships between states and groups of peoples in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Instead of this, the notions of dependency, domination, incorporation, or occupation are used in the

museum narrative, which is generally typical for historical descriptions in Polish public discourse, including school curriculums and museum narratives.

Two out of the 21 thematic rooms are devoted directly to such dissonant heritage in the traditional way of national struggles with foreign domination: in the Room of Patriotic Items “small-scale accessories of patriotic character [which] served to keep the memory of the Polish tradition alive” (Trybuś 2017: 126), belonging to the period of so-called partitions of Poland (1795-1918), are presented; the Room of Relics consists of “objects that bore witness to the most dramatic moments in the life of the city and its residents” (Trybuś 2017: 135), which are mainly from the WW2 period (1939-1945) and the Polish People’s Republic (1944-1989).

Some museum objects showcased in other thematic rooms may be regarded as an attempt at re-emergence, or at least reframing, of the heritage of internal colonization from the position of decolonized agency. For instance, the artistic representations of the Orthodox Cathedral from the Saxon Square in Warsaw which was subject of removal in 1920s are present in the Room of Postcards and in the Room of Souvenirs (*i.e.* a decorative plate from the period of German occupation during WW1, see Figure 11). Moreover, some remnants of the Cathedral resulting from its destruction are also displayed in the Room of Architectural Details (see Figure 12).



Figure 11: Plate with a view of Saint Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Cathedral in Warsaw, Meissen 1915-1916, Museum of Warsaw. Photo by: Łukasz Bukowiecki, 2019.

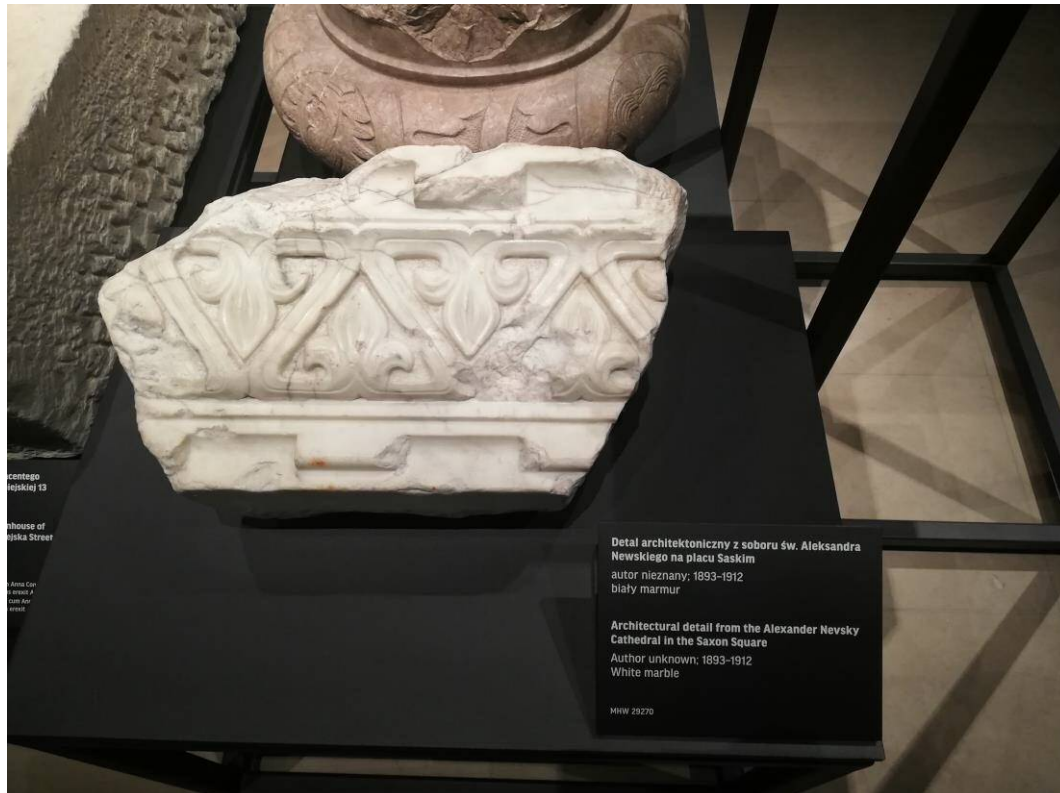


Figure 12: Architectural detail from the Saint Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Cathedral in Warsaw, 1893-1912, Museum of Warsaw. Photo by: Łukasz Bukowiecki, 2019.

The issue of the internal colonization of Polish territories in the 19th century by the Russian empire is complicated by Polish ‘reversed colonization’ in terms of economy and culture (c.f. Rolf 2016: 31). Namely, in the second half of the 19th century the industrial sector in Warsaw, as well as in the whole Kingdom of Poland, grew rapidly thanks to the removal of tariff barriers between the Kingdom and the Russian empire. It helped Warsaw companies to relatively easily gain large consumer markets in the East and resulted in the fact that Warsaw was often perceived by the empire’s inhabitants as a window to the West (or ‘Paris of the East’), providing goods of good (European) quality which were made according to good (European) taste. The topic of Polish ‘reversed colonization’ is represented in the museum narrative in the audio guide sections to be listened to in the Room of Silverware and Plated Silverware, when the story of the Warsaw plated silverware company of Norblin is told (the company sold its products to such cities of the Russian Empire as Petersburg, Moscow, Odessa, Kiev, Charkov, Riga, Vilnius, Minsk and Tiflis (Tbilisi)).

Regarding the German occupation of Poland and the Holocaust, some unorthodox methods of dealing with dissonant heritage are employed, when they are reframed in an unusual way by their attribution to thematic rooms. Some remnants of sculptures “which were found amongst the ruins of the capital city after World War II” (Trybuś 2017: 71) are presented in the Room of Architectural Details, and Jewish kitchen wares from WW2, excavated in 2013 within the area of the former Warsaw Ghetto, are showcased in the Room of Archaeology next to finds from much older times (see Figure 13).



Figure 13: Pots used by Jews, first half of the 20th century, excavated in 2013 within the area of the former Warsaw Ghetto, Museum of Warsaw. Photo by: Łukasz Bukowiecki, 2019.



Figure 14: Portrait of Bolesław Bierut by Mirosław Gawlak, ca. 1955, Museum of Warsaw. Photo by: Łukasz Bukowiecki, 2019.

The topic of internal colonization after the Second World War within the Soviet sphere of influence is treated ambiguously by the museum. On the one hand, an official portrait of Bolesław Bierut, a leader of the Polish People's Republic under the era of Stalinism, is highlighted as one of the key items in the Room of Portraits, which might be regarded as a way of re-emergence of communist heritage (Figure 14). On the other hand, at the viewpoint on the top of the museum complex, the audio guide provides a detailed description of the panorama of the city visible from each side of the viewpoint, but the markedly visible presence in the skyline of the Palace of Science and Culture, gifted to Poland by the Soviet Union in 1950s, is silenced (intentionally or unintentionally repressed), although a model of the same Palace (as the tallest Warsaw skyscraper) is presented within the *Warsaw Data* exhibit in the basement of the museum.

In addition, a strong, explicit reference to the destruction of the city during the Second World War in the museum narrative opens up another layer of the interpretation of the relationship between 'the things of Warsaw' as a curatorial concept and the colonial past of the city and the country. According to the curatorial argumentation, many people died, many things were destroyed or stolen, so the museum simply had no choice but to rely on the things which survived from the times before the war or testify to the post-war reconstruction of the city, both in terms of materiality (buildings, public spaces, infrastructure) and social life (demography, institutions). Therefore, if the occupation, destruction of the city, extermination, and expulsions of the majority of its inhabitants affect the museum and its collections so strongly, all the showcased Things of Warsaw are ontologically connected to the difficult, or in terms of the ECHOES approach 'colonial', past of the city.



Figure 15: Scale model of Warsaw in the 2nd half of the 20th century, 1954, Museum of Warsaw. Photo by: Łukasz Bukowiecki, 2019.

However, the museum's engagement with the colonial pasts of the city, country, and region is selective and covers only a few threads from the history of Polish-Prussian/German and Polish-Russian/Soviet Union relations which are reflected by museum objects from its own collection and the history of the principal seat of the museum. This happens not only because the limits of the collection are the limits of the museum narrative. Some dimensions of the internal colonization are omitted in the museum narrative, although they could be discussed even on the basis of examples of museum objects actually presented within the exhibition. For instance, any traces of Polish colonialism towards lands and peoples in Central and Eastern Europe are ignored and excluded from the museum narrative, even though a scale model of Warsaw in the 2nd half of the 18th century, presented in the exhibition as the single remnant from the previous permanent exhibition, could be very instructive here (see Figure 15). Namely, it presents the characteristic manner of designing the urban development of Warsaw in the early modern period. The most important part of the city, located alongside the so-called Royal Route, consisted at that time mostly of royal residences (like the Royal Castle, the Saxon Palace, the Ujazdowski Castle, the Royal Łazienki Palace, the Wilanów Palace) as well as palaces, manor houses and other private properties established by the nobility and rich gentry elites who wanted to stay in close political and economic relations to the parliament and the royal court. As such the spatial structure of the city and its demography reflected its role as a capital of Poland as a rural country with some imperial ambitions (especially on its Eastern borderlands) and the self-colonizing economy based on serfdom and exploitation of the peasants by the gentry (serfdom-latifundium system of *folwark* - *folwarki*), as well as on international grain trade (Poland sold grain via commercial port in Gdańsk on the Baltic seaside e.g. to the Netherlands).

Nevertheless, in order to discuss the colonial entanglements of Warsaw we should take into account not only more or less evident manifestations of internal colonization (between states in Central and Eastern Europe), but also some examples of the involvement of Warsaw's inhabitants, scientists, artists and companies in the discourses and practices of 'classical', 'Western' European overseas colonialism, accompanied by various forms of Orientalism. Such phenomena are also depicted in the core exhibition of the Museum of Warsaw. The figurine of an elephant in the Room of Bronzes is accompanied by an audio guide recording in which the curator of the room tells the story of Oriental imaginary in Warsaw, including the Stefan Szolc-Rogoziński's research trips to Cameroon in the 1880s and 1890s (his ship was decorated with the ship owner's flag depicting the Warsaw mermaid). In the Room of Portraits, a Picasso-like portrait of August Agbola O'Brown, the only Warsaw Uprising soldier coming from today's Nigeria, painted by Karol Radziszewski in 2015 is presented to deconstruct the mainstream narrative of the uprising and to break the canon of representations of heroes (see Figure 16).



Figure 16: Portrait of August Agbola O'Brown, soldier in the Warsaw Uprising 1944, from *Ali* series by Karol Radziszewski, 2015, Museum of Warsaw. Photo by: Łukasz Bukowiecki, 2019.

At the same time, some other global entanglements still seem to be unnoticed or unacknowledged. The name of the one of the tenement houses forming the principal seat of the museum – ‘Under the Negro’ – is neither problematized nor silenced by the museum at all, as if this name was transparently obvious. This is probably one of the strongest examples of repression in the museum’s activities (see Figures 17-18).

Finally, what usually connects museums with decolonial reflection is the question of who should be the owner of museum objects which were gained (bought, found, stolen) in colonies and are still exhibited and ‘told’ by institutions governed by former colonizers. The peculiar obsession with things, noticeable in the curatorial practices of the Museum of Warsaw, if read carefully, may reveal colonial assumptions to museum work (in Warsaw and in general), such as an exclusion of any voices of former users of ‘The Things of Warsaw’ (only the museum voice is present in the exhibition) and a conviction that museums are the best and ‘final’ places for cultural artifacts. Decolonial approach could be, therefore, applied not only to the representation of the city staged by the museum, but also to the museum practices behind the scenes.



Figure 17: 'Under the Negro' house, façade. Part of the principal seat of the Museum of Warsaw. Photo by: Łukasz Bukowiecki, 2019.



Figure 18: 'Under the Negro' house, façade, detail. Part of the principal seat of the Museum of Warsaw. Photo by: Łukasz Bukowiecki, 2019.

Comparatively

In the sections above, we have detailed the complex, diverse, fluctuating, and at times conflicting ways in which the three case study museums are (dis)engaging with colonial pasts. Our preliminary analysis shows that city museums are first and foremost important agents in reframing urban histories – including colonial histories. Yet, city museums are not primarily, or not the primary, actors which instigate a re-emergence of entirely new heritage practices and attitudes towards colonial pasts. While some of these practices can certainly be observed in the Amsterdam Museum, and to a lesser extent in the Museum of Warsaw, they are not (yet) central to the ways in which these museums work as institutions. Indeed, other cultural practitioners and heritage institutions are more commonly at the forefront of movements of re-emergence. City museums interested in engaging with decolonial practices may rely on the work of these practitioners (often by collaborating with contemporary artists), or be inspired by other movements, to change their own narratives and practices as a result. However, their central aim remains the reframing urban history and, for some of the museums, a desire for greater inclusivity and wider representativity.

Between the three case studies, the differences in dealing with colonial pasts are perhaps more immediately apparent as opposed to the similarities. Seen from within the museum institutions, the extent to which the city museums are applying post-colonial theories in their museum practices differs greatly. This can for instance be seen in the differing perspectives on museum objects and the (lack of) inclusion of multi-vocality or alternative narratives. Thus, there is a marked difference in the degree to which museum staff deal with or talk about decolonial museology, such as the repatriation of collections, the sharing of institutional power, or transparency towards the public.

Possibly as a result of the differing degrees to which post-colonial theories permeate the mindsets and practices of the museum staff, there are also vast differences in the resulting museum products (e.g. exhibitions) and activities. Thus, we can identify differences in exhibition structures: whether they are chronological/thematic, story-driven/object-focused, or descriptive/questioning. These distinctions are important as they frame the narrative of the exhibitions and guide where the story begins, what is included, and what is left out.

Finally, despite these differences, there are also similarities between the three city museums. There is a similarity in the spectrum from conservative/safe to experimental/critical along which the museums place their products and activities. Generally, we can observe that permanent exhibitions – and especially those displayed elsewhere than in the main museum building – are designed most conservatively. The rationale being that these take a long time to develop and then need to stand the test of time, thus they should avoid leading to controversy. Temporary exhibitions offer more opportunities for the museum to raise issues that may be controversial. However, it is particularly educational and public activities and events where museum staff have more freedom to take risks and experiment. It is here where staff can test new approaches, practices, and narratives with their visitors, with relative ‘safety.’ It is in these areas where we are most likely to find examples of re-emergence.

Challenging Colonial Pasts in City Museums through a Comparative Approach

The challenges which confront the WP3 researchers collaboratively in the ultimate aim of the project to produce results which can be comparatively explored, are discussed briefly under a number of key issues. Each issue is briefly mentioned and, where applicable, attempted or possible solutions are noted.

- Accessibility: The researchers have already encountered different levels of access to the museums and to their data, ranging from full access and working within the museum, to highly restricted access and working from another continent. We are concerned that these different levels of access will lead to differences not only in the quantity of data collected, but also in the quality of this data. Throughout the project, we will be transparent with each other and share our data, so that we can monitor the differences as the project develops.
- Disciplinarity: The researchers have distinct disciplinary backgrounds, leading to the use of different methodologies, terminologies, and theoretical perspectives. This is both a challenge and an advantage, as we are able to learn from each other and enrich our research. We are sharing bibliographies and literature, and writing collaboratively to benefit from our perspectives while learning to find a common terminology.
- Contexts: The different historical and geographical contexts of our case studies pose their own unique research challenges. However, we also see this as an advantage of our projects, being able to compare truly different case studies. As such, we are regularly sharing our research and results.
- ECHOES Keywords: Seeing how the basic premise of the ECHOES project and the foundational context of 'colonialism' is already so different for each case study, the ECHOES Keywords or its heritage modalities apply differently to each city museum. Thus, our first step has been to critically reflect on the term 'colonialism' and then to mold the ECHOES modalities individually for each case study.
- Politics: As with any research project, we as researchers have to deal with tensions. Here, we mean both struggles within the museum organizations in which we might become entangled, as well as external political pressures that might influence what we can or cannot say. For now, we are being mindful of the (potential) conflicts that exist and position ourselves observantly, making sure to be diplomatic as best we can.
- Dependency: We are aware of the essential relationship with our associate partners. Our research takes place within a relationship of dependency on the museums and their staff. On the one hand, it restricts our freedom or 'neutrality' as researchers, as we need to assure to a degree that our work and our results are in line with the desires of the museums. At some points, this may prove challenging if we cannot share certain information, or we might put ourselves at the risk of losing access to our subject material. On the other hand, although we want our research results to be beneficial to our partners, we do not want to place ourselves in a neo-colonial relationship and tell the museums what they should be doing. We are working as transparently and ethically as we can to balance this issue.

Conclusions

This paper presented the preliminary results of the ECHOES Project's Work Package 3, which focuses on city museums and colonial pasts, by looking at three case studies in Amsterdam, Shanghai, and Warsaw. The paper began by providing the contextual background of the case studies and described the three city museums as well as the approaches of the researchers towards studying their respective museums and the data they have collected. The core of the paper is formed by the preliminary results of the ways in which the three city museums are (dis)engaging with colonial pasts. The case of the Amsterdam Museum shows that all four heritage modalities of dealing with colonialism – repression, removal, reframing, re-emergence – can be identified across different aspects of the museum's activities and products, at times even occurring within the same display. Similar complexities were seen in the other case studies. The Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum works diligently to reframe certain aspects of its colonial past, while others are almost nonchalantly mentioned or simply erased. The Museum of Warsaw reveals that colonialism is not merely evident in the museum displays, but that colonial approaches can also be identified in the practices of the museum's staff. This section also reflected on some of the similarities and differences between the case studies. The final section considered research challenges and how the researchers as a team have been working towards alleviating some of these issues.

In the interim, the authors have each published a report detailing the preliminary results of their research, focusing particularly on the history of the three museums, their positions within the wider municipal and national museum landscapes, their organizations, as well as a discussion on the ways in which they are dealing with colonialism across their activities (Ariese 2019; Bukowiecki 2019; Pozzi 2019). In the following years of the project, the researchers will focus in more detail on the museums: their collections, exhibitions, programs, and events. This will result in a second set of reports, which will rely also on interviews with museum staff to more deeply explore the various (dis)engagements with colonialism (Ariese *forthcoming*; Pozzi *forthcoming*; Wawrzyniak & Bukowiecki *forthcoming*). Finally, a third set of reports will also engage with the receptions of the museum displays and activities, through various visitor studies. Besides these individual case study reports and potential additional activities to benefit the respective museums, the WP3 team will also be writing joint scientific articles, organizing academic meetings, and designing two university courses.

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