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# The social museum in the Caribbean : grassroots heritage initiatives and community engagement

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# Theoretical Framework

> *Rather than only being an institution that provides comment at a safe distance, to be meaningful a museum must actively co-produce with its community, effect change, and forge dynamic connections. It is this active museum that is the antithesis of the disconnected museum of old.*
> Elizabeth Crooke (2015: 482)

Crooke echoes the main sentiment of the New Museology which developed roughly around the 1970s in direct opposition to what was seen as 'traditional' museology. This older museology had been focused on methodology and practical issues, whereas the New Museology argued that museums needed to revisit their purpose before critically examining their practice (Vergo 1991). As the New Museology has developed, the discussion has shifted strongly to communities and their role within the museum – and, vice versa, the museum's role for communities.

This chapter sketches the theoretical frameworks which form the basis of this research project and dissertation. Both are rooted firmly within the sphere of the New Museology and its current forms. It is this particular theoretical conceptualization of the role of the museum, and the associated ideas of what contemporary museum practices and processes could look like, that lies at the core of the formulated research questions, informed the research approach, as well as influenced the analysis of the results. The main focus of the chapter thus consists of a discussion of the New Museology, its development over the last few decades, and a number of critical reflections. In order to fully understand the theory, its origin is placed within the framework of both historical developments and the emergence of two interrelated concepts: post-colonial theories and the current heritage discourse. Situating ourselves in this contemporary museological mindset requires a (re)definition of the term 'museum,' and a reflection on its meaning as it is currently epitomized by the International Council of Museum's (ICOM) definition. Such a redefinition was also necessary for this research project in order to understand the institution in a broader sense and to develop a definition that was appropriate for fieldwork in the Caribbean. Finally, the concepts of *community* and *community engagement* are presented within the current academic and museological debates. A consideration of these terms is placed within a Caribbean context in order to consider their relevance in the region and their applicability. It is argued that although 'community' remains difficult to define, community engagement is of particular importance for Caribbean museums due to the region's marked diversity.

The chapter thus provides the foundational understanding of community engagement in museums – its participatory practices and its processes – the central topic which this research explored within the context of the Caribbean region (see *Research Questions and Objectives,* page 18). While Crooke refers to this type of institution as the 'active museum,' it is argued here that community engagement in the Caribbean is characterized by the *social* museum.

## New Museology

Emerging in the early 1970s, the New Museology began as a movement against the 'old museology' – which had mainly been concerned with museum *methods* and practices – to shift the focus of museology to the *purpose* of museums in the bigger picture (Davis 2008: 397; Scott 2006: 48; Vergo 1991: 1). This shift in focus can be explained by historical developments and pressures from three different arenas. First of all, the geopolitical dismantling of much of the colonial system following the Second World War. Many museums that had been created as a part of colonial/imperialist structures – such as traditional museums of ethnography or museums set up in colonies by colonizers – now had to find a new purpose outside the colonial frame (Sauvage 2010: 100). Secondly, in a number of countries, most notably Australia, Canada, and the USA, Indigenous communities issued challenges to museums to include their heritages within the main narratives (Nicks 2003: 20; Sauvage 2010: 108). It began with Indigenous communities expressing their dismay with and disapproval of the way human remains of their ancestors were treated in museum displays and storages. These criticisms led to repatriation claims or discussions with museums on how such sensitive materials should be treated in the collections. As collaboration continued, Indigenous communities challenged the authority of the curatorial voice in other matters and insisted that their expertise and knowledge be included within other areas of the museum (Davis 2008: 398). Thirdly, the wide spread social movements of the 1960s for civil rights, world peace, and ethnic harmony called for a reevaluation of societal goals overall, which resonated through in museums as well (Davis 2008: 397). It was within the framework of these historical developments that the position of the museum in society came under scrutiny.

To be sure, discussions about the role or purpose of the museum are not exclusively the domain of the New Museology. For instance, when museums became more widely accessible to the public in the beginning of the 19th century – the so-called 'birth' of the modern museum – they were also intended to be in the service of society (Bennett 1995: 92). However, this role was played out by 'civilizing' the middle and lower classes through education, self-surveillance, and by the 'beneficial influences' of the upper classes (Bennett 1988: 86). It was suggested then that museums could provide a more wholesome alternative for those who otherwise squandered their time and wages in pubs. Under the New Museology, the societal role of museums is seen in a different light, but still "echoes nineteenth century notions of museums as instruments for positive social change" (Perkin 2010: 110). As the New Museology theory gathered support and its advocates demanded change, ICOM altered its definition of the museum in 1974 to include the phrase: "*in the service of society*" (Fuller 1992: 329).

The shift towards the New Museology resulted in a different approach to museum practices which continues today (*e.g.* Fleming 2012). Whereas previously the focus had lain heavily on collections and objects, now many museums place people and stories at the heart of their exhibitions. This requires a more emotive style of communication with visitors and a different approach to museum pedagogy. As cultural diversity and human rights have been given higher priority, museum practice has been characterized more by collaborations with minority or excluded communities and less by dominant monocultural narratives. Thus, while the core idea of the New Museology to focus on the societal role of museums is no longer *new*, it has continued to develop in recent years into more activist, participatory, and grassroots practices.

As it is seen now, the museum's purpose should be to work actively towards a variety of societal improvements (Silverman 2010), three of which are noted here in particular. Most commonly, authors point out that museums today should battle social inequality and work towards **social inclusion**.[2] This point is particularly emphasized, as museums are still frequently critiqued for their legacy of exclusion and social elitism (Sandell 2012). Thus, museums today should make an effort to target previously marginalized groups or communities and support the elevation of their position within society (Cummins 1992: 49; Kelly 2006: 8; Sandell 2003: 45). This can be done on three levels: individual (*e.g.* by promoting self-esteem and confidence), community (for instance by social regeneration), or societal (by promoting tolerance and respect, or by challenging stereotypes). Access to the museum should be enhanced for those at risk of being socially excluded (Sandell 2003: 48). However, policies of inclusion are not necessarily unproblematic and a critical caveat is necessary: generally, inclusion can either be achieved on the basis of universalism or by politics of difference (Lagerkvist 2006: 55). Emphasizing universalism and the commonality of all of humanity runs the risk of forcing homogeneity. On the other hand, while politics of difference account for diversity, promoting diversity can be critiqued as being discriminatory. Thus, museums pursuing social inclusion policies must carefully consider the manner in which they do so and try to avoid (accidental) societal exclusion, discrimination, or unwarranted homogenization in the process. Engaging in policies of inclusion requires careful deliberation beforehand and the possibility of conflicts arising must always be taken into account. Furthermore, Anwar Tlili (2008) cautions against measuring social inclusion through visitor numbers alone, as there may be many other barriers to inclusion besides physical access.

The push to work towards greater social inclusion is often mandated through public policies which have direct implications for (governmental) museums (Sandell 1998; Tlili 2008). However, more than merely politically, the desire for inclusivity is also echoed ideologically in the museum discourse and practically as guidance for museum staff. As an example of the former, the foundation of *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* in 2008 provided a scholarly platform to discuss how the museum can become more inclusive. At the same time, on the ground, museum staff members are concerned with matters of inclusivity (*e.g.* Cole 2014), although there is still much

2 This is distinctly different from the civilizing aim of museums in the nineteenth century. Although the goal was for lower classes to become more civilized and behave 'properly,' there was certainly no desire to remove class differences and to create a more egalitarian society.

work to be done in terms of the representativity of staff. The concepts of the inclusive museum and the social museum are connected and share a number of characteristics but do not overlap wholly. The social museum relates to the societal roles museums are taking on in relation to various communities. However, as will be discussed in greater detail later, this societal realignment is not always or not necessarily inclusionary, but can be focused on other societal aims or even be considered exclusionary towards some.

Secondly, beyond social inclusion, museums should actively engage in **community development**. There are many examples of ways in which museums have attempted to alleviate community problems or provide practical support: promoting education, improving literacy, supporting local economies, encouraging urban regeneration, or assisting local development (*e.g.* Davis 2008: 398; Fuller 1992: 332; Kelly 2006: 4-5). As stated in the opening quote of this chapter, if museums wish to solve community problems, it is crucial that they become agents of change rather than merely passive presenters of the past. For this purpose, heritage can be an exceptionally powerful tool for reshaping the present. One can think of the multiple cases in which, for instance, Indigenous peoples have legally retained rights based on a proof of heritage (through NAGPRA[3] or other legal frameworks). Museums may also support communities by providing a physical and emotional space away from existing problems or challenges. For instance, in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, *Museo de Arte de Ponce* in Puerto Rico reopened with temporary free entry to offer their local community a "tiny piece of normality" and a space for leisure in a time of great challenges (Monahan 2017). Beyond providing a respite from the crisis, several museums on the island engaged in collecting and distributing food and water or functioned as communication hubs and power stations (Stapley-Brown 2017).

A third, oft repeated, societal improvement that museums may work towards is that of **sustainability**. This should be seen on several levels, starting with the sustainability of the museum itself and the local environment (Davis 2008: 398), but furthermore encompassing the sustainability of the communities connected to the museum or even globally. The sustainability of communities is often encouraged through social cohesion which aims to enhance a sense of collective responsibility in order to achieve collective survival (Crooke 2008: 417-418; Perkin 2010: 108). It works by strengthening community members' sense of belonging and, therefore, draws them more tightly to one another. Building social cohesion is often proposed as a way to counter the destructive effects that globalization can have on communities (Nederveen Pieterse 2005). On the other hand, museums can also work towards sustainability of the global environment or humanity by targeting the global community and its collective responsibilities. Sustainability as a focal point or museum mission can also be directed at the preservation of cultures, languages, materials, or skills – indeed any type of tangible or intangible heritage preservation.

Considering the above three purposes, what should a contemporary museum be like according to the New Museology? Again, we can identify three main characteristics: museums should be **arenas for debate**, **self-reflexive,** and **relevant**. The first of these rests on the principle that museums are profoundly political spaces (Onciul 2013: 81). As such, museums cannot shy away from being controversial or discussing difficult

3 The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. Enacted in the USA in 1990.

topics within their exhibitions (Davis 2008: 400; Sauvage 2010: 109). As places of debate, museums do not merely lecture their visitors, but rather engage in dialogue with them. In order to stimulate dialogue, ideas become more important than objects – or, the role of the meaning of objects changes (Gurian 1999) – and, in doing so, museums become places of meaning-making. Another necessity for stimulating dialogue is a shift in authority: museums are no longer the owners of knowledge, transferring this upon the visitors, but rather, visitors and curators each contribute their own expertise to the conversation (Smith & Waterton 2009: 110). This requires frequent negotiation with communities in order to empower them and rework the pre-existing power balance (Sandell 2003: 55). In practice, this has resulted in museum exhibitions that focus more on stories and people rather than on objects, and in presenting these stories as multi-faceted and open for debate and interpretation. Besides giving visitors space to add their voices to the exhibition, the museum becomes an arena for debate also through activities, events, or via online platforms and social media.

The second characteristic, self-reflexivity, requires museums to be critical of their own (*e.g.* racist, imperialist, colonialist) pasts and the origins of their collections, and for museum staff to acknowledge that they are subjective individuals influenced by their own identities, heritages, knowledges, and experiences (Butler 2015; Lidchi 2010: 201; Sauvage 2010: 109). In consequence, it entails a critical stance toward museum practices, especially concerning the representation of non-Western cultures (Varutti 2013: 59). Self-reflexivity requires a constant evaluation of museum practices, processes, and products (McLean 2008: 289). Towards the public, museums should strive to reveal the power present within their exhibitions. Instead of presenting the exhibition as a neutral or objective space, power and authority must be accounted for and put on display (Nederveen Pieterse 2005: 176). A self-reflexive museum is therefore characterized by both self-awareness and self-critique, striving to reveal subjectivity and compensate for inequality.

Finally, a New Museology-inspired museum is characterized by its aim to be highly relevant to its society and communities. As Nina Simon puts it, "relevance is a key that unlocks meaning. It opens doors to experiences that matter to us, surprise us, and bring value into our lives" (Simon 2016: 25). Thus, such a museum works actively for presently living persons, as well as for future generations. For instance, they may make themselves relevant to their communities by acting as a surrogate home and accepting donated objects into their care (Candlin 2016: 115). While this helps to build collections for the future, it also supports contemporary communities by valuing their meaningful objects and promising to care for them. Museums may also work towards being a more relevant institution by lowering their focus from an international or national level to individual or community levels. Alternatively, first voice, pluralist, or multi-vocal approaches can be applied to attract new audiences or to increase relevance by the self-representation of targeted communities (Galla 2008: 10-11; McLean 2008: 289; Sauvage 2010: 109). Naturally, the content matter of the museum is vital in providing relevance.

To recapitulate, the New Museology developed in opposition to the older museological discourse under the influence of political decolonization, challenges from Indigenous communities, and strong social movements. It essentially shifted the focus of museology from museum practices to the purpose of museums. Putting societal

needs first, social inclusion, community development, and sustainability have been varyingly put forth as the main objective. In order to achieve this, museums strive to be arenas for debate, self-reflexive, and highly relevant. Over the last few decades, the discourse of the New Museology has become increasingly more activist and participatory as it has firmly placed communities at the heart of all museum work.

As a final point, it is frequently lamented that it is difficult (or even, 'impossible') to measure the values that these new museological approaches aim to increase. For instance, how does one measure an increase in social cohesion or sustainability? The research by Carol Scott (2006; 2009; 2015) has been instrumental in providing ways in which such museum values can be measured and 'success' may be proven to funding bodies or policymakers. However, in practice still too often measurement of the success of a museum relies on statistics related to admission numbers which do not fully reflect the extent to which a social mission is fulfilled. Therefore, a gap often remains between the museum's mission and practical proof of its achievements towards this mission unless new approaches for assessing the societal value of museums are employed. The case studies in Chapters 5 & 6 present some approaches as to how the values of museums and community engagement projects may be assessed from the point of view of participants.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the development of the New Museology discourse was influenced by a number of other theories emerging from related or relevant scientific fields. A prominent example of this can be seen in the impact which post-colonial theories had on the origin of the New Museology, as well as the influence they continue to have on its current form. Following the geopolitical decolonization which was gradually set into motion after the Second World War, post-colonial theories developed as a way in which the experiences and effects of colonialism could be critically examined. Initially, the discourse formed within the field of literature studies in the 1960s. It was inspired, among others, by Jacques Derrida, who developed a philosophical exercise, which could be used for literary analysis, known as deconstruction, by which writing may be deconstructed for hidden discourses, such as for (unintentional) colonial stereotypes or imperialist expressions (Derrida [1967] 1976; Gosden 1999: 199). In his seminal book, Edward Said argued that orientalism – that is, a specific and stereotypical dichotomy of East/West – can be perceived within academia as much as in the work of literary writers (Said [1978] 2003: 2). As a result, post-colonial theories were lifted beyond literature and permeated other academic fields, such as anthropology, archaeology, and political science. No longer necessarily focusing on literary deconstruction, but more broadly on all possible effects of colonialism, the theoretical field has been applied to many different topics: *e.g.* slavery, migration, representation, gender, race, resistance, or place (Kreps 2011a: 71).

This effort to critically examine the widespread effects of colonialism has taken some time to develop and its current relevance should not be underemphasized. As Chris Gosden has pointed out: "the independence of colonies did not immediately end the influences of colonialism and make us truly post-colonial in thought and by instinct" (Gosden 1999: 203). In the Caribbean, colonial legacies continue to be palpable. Colonialism has impacted the history of each island and country, resulting in today's geopolitical sub-regions, often identified through the four linguistic areas (Dutch, English, French, and Spanish). Beyond political organization and language,

colonialism has deeply and profoundly impacted many aspects of life – in the case of museums, it has impacted the origins of their collections, the scope of their narratives, but possibly also their current curatorial cultures and societal roles. Although the full scope of continued colonial legacies in the Caribbean is far too broad to discuss here, some of its possible effects on museums, as exemplified by differences in museums from the four linguistic – and thus geopolitical – areas, are considered towards the end of this dissertation.

A point of criticism should be recognized here. Post-colonial theories have been extensively explored by prominent scholars from beyond what has been called the Western sphere – *e.g.* Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In the post-independence Caribbean, a cohort of historians took on these theories to develop a new historiography and an interpretation of the history of the region from a post-colonial perspective (Farmer 2013: 172). Nonetheless, despite the concern of post-colonial theories with former colonies and revealing Eurocentric biases, some critics have said that the field is "characterized, if not defined, as a specifically Western analytical perspective" (van Dommelen 2010: 105). This critique is important to keep in mind, especially concerning the current state of the field and the continuing globalization of the region. Namely, Kevin Farmer noted that Caribbean museums are at risk due to a "nascent neo-colonial mentality" (Farmer 2013: 176), while others have flagged the exploitation of the region and its cultural heritage for the purposes of tourism as a neo-colonial phenomenon (*e.g.* Williams 2012) – that is, placing power in foreign hands. If political decolonization has not led to a post-colonial but rather a neo-colonial reality, attention is needed to avoid carelessly applying post-colonial theories from a purely Western analytical perspective if one wishes to appropriately unpack colonial biases.

Bearing this in mind, as well as the application of the discourse to a wide array of disciplines, post-colonial studies can be characterized as follows. There is often a strong focus on writing alternative histories, based on the perspectives and perceptions of Indigenous, non-Western, or otherwise marginalized communities (Karp & Lavine 1991). In doing so, people who were previously invisible or only present in the margins of mainstream history are granted a voice, a presence, and an identity. In the post-independence Caribbean, identity construction and nationalism required a shift in focus to the previously suppressed, but often majority, populations. These new histories "sought to combat the issue of the colonial self as inferior, replacing it with a notion of self as superior" (Farmer 2013: 174). Secondly, post-colonial studies are characterized by strong critical (self-)reflection. For anyone working in this manner, this can mean reflecting upon their own identity, culture, or nation, as well as a critical assessment of the discipline within which they are working. Understanding the discourses that shape our work and our way of thinking are advocated as a way to more deeply understand the power relations embedded in the work we create (Kreps 2011a: 72). Certainly, the need to adjust power relations that have been skewed by colonialism is a commonly emphasized aim. It should be clear at this point that the discourses of the New Museology and post-colonial theories share a number of common ideals and approaches.

Post-colonial theories, when applied specifically within the museum, can take on various forms. One example of this is by a critical reflection on the definition of the

museum and its biases. Christina Kreps has strongly critiqued the notion "that the museum is a uniquely modern, Western cultural invention […] to the point of neglecting other cultures' models of museums and curatorial practices" (Kreps 2011b: 457). Her research presents examples of museum models and curatorial practices, primarily from Indigenous communities in Asia and Oceania, and aims to place the concept of museology within a broader, global frame. Within the context of this dissertation, the definition of the museum will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

In agreement with her insight, even if the 'museum' is not a colonial concept per se, it does exist within a colonial frame (Sauvage 2010) and specific museums do have profoundly colonial roots. Nonetheless, it would be too simple to just call for the dismissal or destruction of these museums, as Kristine Ronan has effectively shown how Indigenous communities have taken colonial tools, such as museums, and used them to shape their own lives (Ronan 2014: 141). Similarly, Alissandra Cummins has shown how museums in the English-speaking Caribbean have confronted their colonial pasts and realigned their missions to serve new communities (Cummins 1998; 2004). Yet, as Kevin Farmer has pointed out, "in the experiment of nationalism in the Caribbean, the creation of this image of the region as comprising primarily descendants of Africa has seen the marginalization of certain other ethnic groups" (Farmer 2013: 173). Thus, there is certainly a continued need in the region in terms of post-colonial approaches and presenting alternative histories in museums.

Within the post-colonial discourse on museums, the concept of the 'contact zone' has been particularly widely discussed. Originally introduced by linguist Mary Louise Pratt, the contact zone refers to "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt 1991: 34). James Clifford linked the concept to museums, presenting a series of case studies of cultural consultation or collaboration processes which he described as contact work (Clifford 1997). Although Clifford stressed the power imbalances inherent in the contact zone, the concept has also been used by museologists in a more optimistic sense, as a dialogical space of equal reciprocity. Robin Boast has argued strongly that Clifford presented a more complicated view, even going so far as to say that the contact zone – in encouraging participation on certain terms, but silencing opposition – can be considered neo-colonialism (Boast 2011: 64). He states: "thus, always, is the contact zone an asymmetric space where the periphery comes to win some small, momentary, and strategic advantage, but where the center ultimately gains" (Boast 2011: 66). In the Caribbean, there are certainly cases in which the (national) museum operates as a contact zone in an asymmetric space. Yet, as Clifford already pointed out, grassroots museums effectively show how communities can use the museum-structure towards their own means, outside of these asymmetric spaces (Clifford 1997: 216-218).

How can museums continue working through post-colonial theories towards the aims of the New Museology? For this, it is helpful to consider Christina Kreps' concept of the *post-colonial museum* which is "fundamentally about inverting power relations and the voice of authority" (Kreps 2011a: 75). This is achieved by combining the methods mentioned above – by writing alternative histories, including multiple perspectives and diverse voices, applying different notions of identity, revealing Eurocentric biases

and assumptions in the Western museum concept, and by extending critical reflection to look inwards upon the museum itself and its practices (Kreps 2011a: 72). With varying intensity and results, the process of decolonizing the museum has been occurring around the world. One of the more common practices is a critical examination of the origins of the collections and the acknowledgement of the historical contingencies under which they were acquired. The oft resulting step away from a dependency on objects and collections mirrors developments in the field of heritage studies.

To discuss the characteristics of the current discourse on heritage, it is helpful to begin by contrasting it with the previous discourse, known as the authorized heritage discourse (AHD). Under the AHD, heritage was used as a noun, most commonly to refer to monuments or sites: objects from the past that were physically present in the landscape (Smith & Waterton 2009: 29-30). The values of this heritage were seen as intrinsic (that is, inherently known and unchanging) and experts were in charge of defining what was or was not deemed to be heritage. Special attention was paid to heritage that was considered to be significant for all of humanity (so-called 'universal heritage'). The AHD called for specific ways in which to manage this heritage, such as the perpetual conservation of the qualities or characteristics which contained this intrinsic value.

Under the influences of postmodernism, as well as new notions of identity formation and cultural pluralism, the meaning of heritage has been significantly altered. As K. Anne Pyburn so pointedly put it: "there is no such thing as 'tangible heritage;' a building is not heritage" (Pyburn n.d.: 1). Heritage is now more seen as a verb (a thing one does), rather than something that is (Smith & Waterton 2009: 43 & 49). According to this understanding, heritage is fluid and intangible to a high degree. It is no longer determined or controlled by experts but experienced and created by everyone (Russell 2010). As such, there is space for a plurality of meanings and values rather than one intrinsic value. The terminology used when discussing the new heritage discourse reflects this deep change in meaning. Heritage is *constructed*, it is *invented*, it is *manipulated*, it *alters* with changing circumstances, it is *selective*, and it is *discarded* when no longer needed (Crooke 2008: 423). Most importantly, heritage is a politically charged tool that communities or individuals can put to use towards achieving their own agendas (Smith & Waterton 2009: 75). Perhaps Steven Hoelscher defined heritage most eloquently as "the present-day uses of the past for a wide array of strategic goals" (Hoelscher 2011: 202). As such, heritage is no longer a fixed, unchanging object from the past but rather a fluid and intangible resource or action in the present.

There are clear implications of this heritage discourse for museums, especially when looking at the terminology mentioned above. Laurajane Smith's research in the U.K. has shown that today's museum visitors are not mainly, or not merely, looking for an educational experience. Rather, "the museum visit may be understood analytically as a cultural performance in which people either consciously or unconsciously seek to have their views, sense of self, and social or cultural belonging reinforced" (Smith 2015: 459). In this sense, museums are a space in which heritage is performed, constructed, supported, and changed. Museums are tasked with this role in "the process of 'heritage-making'" (Smith 2015: 459) and visitors expect not only to learn but also to feel.

In this changed discourse, it is clear that an understanding of heritage now relies less on artefacts and more on meanings and the intangible (Waterton *et al.*

2006: 347). In addition, there is room for a plurality of meanings that can reflect alternative values, views, and histories – in line with one of the main trends within post-colonial theories. As such, it strongly advocates inclusivity, not only for deciding which heritage may be important for a specific community but also what to do with it or how to manage it. In championing inclusivity, there is also a strong link between the current heritage discourse and the aims of the New Museology. There is, however, a risk here due to the power inherent in heritage. Communities may seek help from museums in order to achieve certain goals. In these cases, a museum must be sure that they are willing to support this community in achieving those goals, while running the risk of potentially excluding or going against the wishes of other communities. Conflict may be difficult to avoid when a museum decides to support one community's agenda over that of another; decisions will require careful deliberation. In addition, the fluid nature of heritage implies the need to be flexible and changeable for museums or similar cultural institutions. Moreover, the emphasis on the intangible nature of heritage has moved museums towards rethinking their collections and object-centered approaches and to include other cultural elements into their narratives. Alissandra Cummins has argued that especially in the Caribbean, heritage is valued not for its tangible remains but for the "shared, lived, defining (intangible) experiences" (Cummins 2012: 26). Focusing on heritage and its intangible aspects has changed exhibition practices to include more sensory experiences. Certainly, along with knowledge of the developments in post-colonial theories, an understanding of the current discourse on heritage is crucial to grasp the ways in which museums are adjusting what they present to the public and how.

Such a discussion of the theoretical frameworks underlying this research project is crucial, not only because it provides the perspectives from which to understand how the research questions were answered, but indeed also as the reason why specifically *these* questions were asked to begin with. This is the essence of the Foucauldian[4] definition of discourse, namely, that there are specific ways in which we can talk about – or ask questions about – specific topics (Foucault [1969] 1972; Hall 2010: 6). According to Michel Foucault, discourses not only provide a perspective but also imply a certain kind of knowledge and behavior. He explains this through the constant link between power and knowledge in which knowledge and power both infer and create each other (Foucault [1975] 1977; Gosden 1999: 198; Hall 2010: 48-49). That is to say, having a certain kind of knowledge can create power, while on the other hand, having power allows for the creation of knowledge.

One of the key points here is that discourses are historically specific and that they provide a specific framework for a *limited amount of time* (Foucault [1969] 1972; Hall 2010: 46). A change in discourse is called a discursive shift and frequently results in theoretical shifts within academia as well as the development of new methods and practices. Within society these shifts can also be felt, for instance in new political movements. On the other hand, as follows from the power/knowledge concept, political movements or events may also be the *cause of* discursive shifts. The wider discursive shift from colonialism to postmodernism can be seen as underlying the emergence of

4 This is distinct from semantic discourse theories which focus on an analysis of conversation (Hall 2010: 44).

the three interrelated theoretical fields: New Museology, post-colonial theories, and the current discourse on heritage.

It is within the framing of those same three theoretical fields that this research was designed, developed, and conducted. To be more precise, given the topic 'museums in the Caribbean,' it was the New Museology discourse which led to the specification of this topic by directing it towards the *societal role* of museums in the Caribbean. Influenced by the way in which the New Museology discourse has developed in recent years to be strongly about communities, the research questions were phrased so as to focus on participatory practices and community engagement processes. Methodologically, it implied focusing the research on museums in the present and contemporary communities, rather than taking on a historical perspective or choosing a collections-based approach. Inspired also by post-colonial theories, the idea of conducting the research entirely through a few case studies was discarded, instead opting to include a region-wide survey in order to allow a greater diversity of museums and communities to be covered and thus to improve the inclusivity of the research project and present multiple narratives and histories. Fieldwork was conducted in line with these discourses by ensuring that the museum visit was seen as a cultural performance which included more than just the building and its objects, but also depended on the staff, other visitors, and the context of the museum. Self-reflexivity was an important method in all phases of research, which will be discussed in more detail towards the end of the next chapter. Both the regional survey and the individual case studies were conducted in a way to provide multi-vocality, and to let the value of community engagement practices and processes be assessed by the community members themselves. Analysis and interpretation of the results was also placed within these discourses, choosing to focus on the societal impact of community engagement, placing emphasis on grassroots museums, or developing hypotheses of differences due to colonial pasts. In summary, all aspects of this research were influenced predominantly by the New Museology and the interrelated developments in post-colonial theories and heritage discourse. This influence ties back to how the very essence of the research, namely the 'museum,' was perceived.

## Defining the Museum

The role and rationale of the museum has changed over the centuries and, along with it, so has its definition. In the words of John Whiting: "there are as many definitions of a museum as there are authors on the subject" (Whiting 1983: 1). The history of the origin of the museum was already briefly discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, which allows us at this point to focus on how alterations of the term 'museum' over the last century have led to the current definitions and models. On a global stage, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) has been an influential actor in terms of providing a standard definition that not only defines its 20,000 institutional members across the world, but for instance is also incorporated directly into the national heritage legislation of some countries (Murphy 2004). Thus, the undeniable international influence of the ICOM definition warrants a brief overview of its historical development, followed by some critiques and reflections.

ICOM's first museum definition was adopted in 1946 and encapsulated a view of the museum as being centered on a fairly broad range of collections:

> *The word "museums" includes all collections open to the public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms.*
> ICOM (1946: 2.2)

In 1951, ICOM added terminology expressing the need for a museum to be a "permanent establishment" (ICOM 1951: 2), thereby restricting the concept and excluding institutions of a more temporary nature. A decade later, the definition was reworked again, now stating that collections had to consist of "objects of cultural or scientific *significance*" (my emphasis; ICOM 1961: 2.3). Influenced by the development of the New Museology and the reconsideration of the purpose of museums, the definition was significantly altered in 1974[5] by stating that a museum was "in the service of the society and its development," further specifying the museum to be a "non-profit making institution," reintroducing the need for museums to be "open to the public" and dropping the need for significance by simply stating that they contained "material evidence of man and his environment" (ICOM 1974: 2.3). Over the following three decades, this definition of the museum remained unchanged, with the exception of the introduction of gender neutrality, altering "man and his environment" to "people and their environment" in 1989 (ICOM 1989: 2.1). During these decades, it was only the specification following this definition – which validates the inclusion of, among others, archaeological sites, zoos, science centers, nature reserves, and exhibition galleries – that was expanded a number of times. Finally, the most recent amendments to the definition in 2007 have entirely eliminated this list specifying what types of institutions qualify as museums. An even greater change at this time was the incorporation of intangible heritage into the museum definition, which now reads:

> *A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.*
> ICOM (2007: 3.1)

Despite the statement that museums should be 'in the service of society,' the current ICOM definition reflects mostly an old museological discourse on museums and heritage, emphasizing permanence and education, with a focus on collections and objects. As an organization, ICOM has also received criticism for becoming increasingly Eurocentric and for having limited the opportunities for participation for members from *e.g.* the Caribbean and Africa by changing the requirements for national

5 UNESCO's *Round Table on the Development of the Role of Museums in the Contemporary World* (Santiago de Chile, 1972) had included ICOM's director and is also seen as a formative moment in drafting the 1974 ICOM definition.

committees. Fiona Candlin has eloquently pointed out the irony that despite the drive for museums to become more inclusive to visitors, many museum associations or organizations adhere to strict rules which limit membership and exclude those museums which are seen as ineligible (Candlin 2016: 11). Indeed, there are a number of points where ICOM's view of the museum does not line up with the New Museology and contemporary museum practices and processes. The definition above is quite different from, for instance, the idea of the museum visit as a cultural performance where views, identities, and a sense of belonging are reinforced (Smith 2015: 459). In addition, much of the focus remains skewed towards national institutions and perspectives, leaving little room for local views or grassroots developments.

Although new revisions to the ICOM definition are being planned, it seems impossible for the reality of museums on the ground and this internationally referenced theoretical definition of the concept to neatly overlap. Museums and museum models have to a greater extent been practically affected by the ideals of the New Museology, while the root of the ICOM definition continues to keep it tethered to an older museology. For this research project, it was therefore necessary to develop a much broader definition of the 'museum,' which was appropriate for contemporary museums and museum models throughout the world, but specifically for those in the Caribbean. This was approached as a 'working definition,' enabling adjustments as needed while fieldwork was being conducted in the region. The approach took the actual visits to museums as a point of departure, resulting in a definition that is rooted predominantly in practice. This broad working definition was: *a museum is a space for tangible or intangible heritage, which provides opportunities for knowledge transfer, and is open to the public*. Taking on this working definition enabled the inclusion of museums which were, for instance, for-profit or non-permanent and did not restrict the definition to certain types of collections or activities. By applying this definition, it was possible to visit a wide range of museums throughout the Caribbean region and to identify a number of museum models from a New Museology perspective. This has enabled the research and its discussion to be drawn away from the 'usual suspects,' such as national museums, into lesser-known – but equally important – terrain. By including living museums, spaces where persons actively embed intangible heritage into tangible sites, it was possible to study World Heritage Sites such as historic city centers (Galla 2005: 105; Galla 2008). This academic and museological rebalancing is much needed: "like curators choosing a series of plastic artefacts from a mass of incongruous items and placing the remainder into storage, […] academics have conceptually de-accessioned or warehoused organizations that do not support 'the desired narrative'" (Candlin 2016: 139).

Revisiting the New Museology and its demand for museums to work towards societal goals, the purposeful design of two museum models can be readily discerned. Originally developed in France in the 1970s, the ecomuseum was a concept that placed community issues at the core of the museum's institutional mission (Davis 2008: 398-400). The concept of the community museum that was developed in the same decade in Mexico, consists of a network of smaller museums that focus on local community outreach, while being supported by a larger national institution (Barnes 2008: 214-215). Both of these museum models can also be found to a greater or lesser degree in the Caribbean. In addition, a number of other museum models

were identified which are aligned to the New Museology discourse and community engagement. While none of these museum models fits wholly within the ICOM definition of the museum, they can easily find a place within the abovementioned working definition. The following presents a brief overview of five of these museum models to showcase how the New Museology and this working definition of the museum informed this research project and the selection of museums to include in the study. These five models are: grassroots museums, private museums, micromuseums, ecomuseums, and hybrid museums.

In the course of this research project and particularly the regional museum survey, museums were described based on a number of characteristics. One of these characteristics was the ownership of the museum and contained 5 categories: governmental, grassroots, private, mixed, or unknown (see *Regional Museum Survey*, page 49). **Grassroots museums** are considered to be those which are owned by an individual, community, or non-governmental organization and are not directly incorporated into, or financed by, private enterprise. If not owned by an individual, the grassroots museum of an organization or community is often based on a shared ethnicity, religion, language, cultural heritage, or location. A grassroots museum can be a collection that is publicly on display in a person's home, an institution run through a historic society, or a cultural display in a community gathering place. Most grassroots museums contain collections which are a mix of both tangible and intangible heritages. When objects are present, they are not always 'musealized' in the sense of Marzia Varutti's use of the term (Varutti 2013: 67) – they may still be handled, used, or not be conserved. This certainly does not imply that they do not receive museological care, as items in collections may be catalogued, protected in cases or boxes, and contain labels. Rather, objects may be given more active roles during museum visitation than what has been seen as the norm. Grassroots museums exist throughout the entire Caribbean region, but they are particularly abundant in those places where governmental support to culture and museums may be limited or non-existent. In some places, the grassroots museum may be the only museum, such as the *Heritage Collection Museum* on Anguilla, and its importance and value for both local communities and visitors is unparalleled. A network of community museums, similar to that set up in Mexico, exists in Cuba and in a comparable fashion in Martinique, but is not common throughout the region as a whole. However, in some places national museums have set up outreach museums in communities that are distant from the capital. In Jamaica, for instance, both the *National Museum Jamaica* and the *National Gallery of Jamaica*, located in Kingston, have set up outreach museums in Montego Bay.

Within this study, another category of museum ownership was **private museums**. In contrast to grassroots museums, private museums are directly incorporated into or financed by private enterprise. Although they share many similarities with grassroots museums, this close tie to a corporation tends to influence the mission and scope of the museum. Private museums can be found throughout the region: rum distilleries or cigar factories with exhibitions and tours are quite common, as are money museums in banks. In the Dominican Republic one can find multiple amber museums due to unique occurrence of this natural material on the island. In many of these examples, the mission of the private museum is centered on the associated enterprise and one of the goals is to encourage visitors to develop product awareness and spend money in the


*Figure 2: The artworks of Museo Bellapart, Dominican Republic, are accessed through a Honda dealership.*

(gift) shop. Certainly these museums also have other goals than only advertisement, but their subjectivity and dependency on the enterprise are evident. At the same time, there are other examples of private museums where the dependency between the enterprise and the museum appears to be purely financial in the other direction. This is the case when individuals have amassed significant wealth through their business and have chosen to invest this into the creation of a collection and a museum. Thus it is possible in the Caribbean to find a contemporary art museum in a Honda dealership (see figure 2) or an Amerindian archaeological museum in a former Coca-Cola factory.

By using the abovementioned wider working definition of 'museum,' this research project was able to place emphasis both on grassroots and private museums alongside governmental museums. This was seen as a necessary research approach, as "museum development cannot afford to turn its back on private initiative, especially when the contribution of the state may be supplemented" (Arjona *et al.* 1982: 80). Following Cummins' observation that Caribbean communities can feel a disinheritance or disassociation from mainstream national narratives (Cummins 2004: 238), these diverse museum models may be more widely appropriate.

Present within both of these two categories of grassroots and private museum ownership, two characteristic museum types warrant attention. The term '**micromuseum**' was coined by Fiona Candin to refer to "small independent single-subject museums" (Candlin 2016: 1). Her study focused on micromuseums in the U.K. and was very strongly centered on museums with a single subject matter, such as the *Bakelite Museum* or the *Vintage Wireless Museum*. Such museums also exist in the Caribbean, for instance the *West Indies Cricket Heritage Centre* in Grenada. Regarding these micromuseums, an interesting characteristic is how they can be at once more

public and more private than traditional governmental museums: "whereas it is less public in the sense of being open to audiences than a major institution, the business of the museum – the authorship of the displays, the labour involved, the people who work there, and its financial standing – is much more public" (Candlin 2016: 43). Thus a micromuseum might be less public due to its location within a home, its limited opening hours, or the owner's right to bar a visitor from entering for personal reasons. A visitor's behavior in such a museum might be more like that of a guest. However, at the same time, much of the museum work that often remains hidden 'back stage' in bigger institutions can be openly visible to the visitor. It is not uncommon for the visitor to meet the owner of the museum or to see exhibition development in progress. In the Caribbean, some of these observations of the characteristics of micromuseums also hold true for grassroots or private museums with a broader mix of subject matters, such as the *San Nicolas Community Museum* in Aruba. Dedicated to collecting a mix of local natural history, rural history, or art, these small, independent, multiple-subject museum may also have this distinct quality of being both more public and more private at the same time.

The museum model of the **ecomuseum**, as hinted at above, focuses on a (frequently local) community and the social, cultural, and natural environment it shares (Davis 2008: 398). Although an ecomuseum can be governmentally or privately owned, they are often set up as grassroots initiatives by communities or a collaboration between communities. They usually consist of more than a solitary museum building, for instance by encompassing a landscape or multiple sites and buildings within the community, or by incorporating parks, replica structures, or gardens. Collections may contain largely intangible heritages, such as data from oral history projects, language skills, or traditional crafts. Nancy Fuller has defined ecomuseums as "community learning centers that link the past with the present as a strategy to deal with the future needs of that particular society" (Fuller 1992: 328). These museums are characterized by the importance of their activities and other engagements that extend far beyond the physicality of the ecomuseum itself. Often, an ecomuseum has a double focus, first of all on the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage and secondly on environmental sustainability (de Varine 2006: 227). Both of these goals are linked tightly to the (local) community and its specific, contemporary needs. For instance, an ecomuseum may provide activities that help their community members develop certain skills, which are deemed necessary to function better within their particular (social, cultural, or natural) environment. Therefore, the ecomuseum can be characterized as a community *process* rather than a *product* in itself (Davis 2008: 403; Fuller 1992: 331). This implies that the ecomuseum, once opened, is not 'finished,' but rather ever changing according to the needs of the community. At the same time, once the community feels they have no need for the ecomuseum, it can simply be closed. Collomb & Renard (1982) published a review of the *Ecomusée de Marie-Galante: Habitation Murat* on Marie-Galante, but many other examples of ecomuseums exist throughout the Caribbean (for a more detailed discussion and additional examples, see *Ecomuseums*, page 73).

Finally, a broad definition of the term 'museum' enabled this research to include **hybrid museums**: museums which combine their mission with that of another type of institution or corporation. Hybrid museums can have governmental, grassroots,

or private ownership. In the former we may find university museums or military museums. Grassroots hybrid museums may consist of a combination of exhibitions with a religious building, such as a synagogue, temple, mosque, or church. Some examples of hybrid private museums, such as money museums, were already mentioned above, but this category might also include art galleries. In all of these examples, the meaning or mission of the museum is affected due to the additional functions it carries by means of the associated institution, enterprise, or organization. These additional functions might carry restrictions or obligations that are otherwise not common for museums. For instance, one has to be a trained and active member of the Jamaican military in order to work at the *Jamaican Military Museum and Library*. Religious museums may similarly limit their staff to members of their religious community. The focus of the activities of hybrid museums may entail different museum practices as well. For instance, university museums focus strongly on their research activities, being relevant to the student curriculum, and they tend to have larger research or reference collections, while they may not necessarily invest as much effort into their exhibition activities.

In summary, although the international influence of the ICOM definition of the 'museum' cannot be ignored, it poses certain difficulties as it is rooted in an old museology view of the museum and does not practically work well for museums that exist within the framework of the New Museology discourse. Furthermore, the ICOM definition tends to be exclusive, while the New Museology is aimed strongly towards inclusivity. In order to approach this research, a working definition of the term 'museum' was developed, based in practice on museum visitation in the Caribbean. According to this definition, a museum is a space for tangible or intangible heritage, which provides opportunities for knowledge transfer, and is open to the public. This wider definition enabled the identification of various museum models which might otherwise not have fallen within the scope of the research, namely: grassroots museums, private museums, micromuseums, ecomuseums and hybrid museums.

## Community Engagement

> *If the idea of 'community' most frequently embraced is something that is 'good', 'safe' and 'comfortable', it is with an acute sense of paradox that we note its emergence out of a distinctly* un*comfortable and challenging context.*
> Laurajane Smith & Emma Waterton (2009: 13-14; original emphasis).

How can museums respond to the changes they are expected to make, based on the New Museology and related to post-colonial theories and the current heritage discourse? How can museums sufficiently expand their social role, so that they are not only working *for* society, but *within* society (Crooke 2008: 418)? In answer to these questions, community engagement is most often proposed as the ideal method for museums to achieve this deeply social role anchored within contemporary discourses (van Broekhoven *et al.* 2010; Simon 2010). Community engagement, including participation, collaboration, consultation, and negotiation, has been extensively discussed

within museum studies over the last few decades.[6] However, before we discuss the meanings of these terms, it is necessary to take a step back and begin with a critical evaluation of the concept of 'community.'

A discussion of the use of the term community starts with a contradiction: on the one hand, it is frequently accepted or used without definition and, on the other hand, it is a term that is difficult to define. When left undefined, it tends to act as a buzz word that carries positive – almost utopian – connotations (Smith & Waterton 2009: 13). However, this does not account for the fact that community is *not* inherently good. In fact, communities are as much about inclusion as they are, de facto, about exclusion, meaning that their desires and actions can be conflicted or contested (Smith & Waterton 2009: 93). This is due to the fact that the meaning of the term has changed and no longer refers to 'the public' or 'everyone' (in the sense that 'communal' still refers to common use). How, then, can we attempt to define the concept? At a very basic level, a community is an abstract grouping of people who share a sense of belonging based on a shared characteristic. Such a sense of belonging may be constructed on the basis of locality, common experiences, characteristics such as language, religion, ethnicity, or other cultural markers (Crooke 2008: 416). It should be clear, then, that communities are not fixed entities: instead, they are fluid and can be created or discarded as desired. Like identity, communities are activated depending on the social setting or occasion (Karp 1992: 3-4).

There are a number of myths or stereotypical associations that tend to adhere to the term community. Besides the notion that community is inherently a good thing, these include the assumptions that communities are homogeneous units, that they are necessarily geographically based ('local'), that they have long established roots, or that their characteristics are easily recognizable (Crooke 2011a: 172; Gable 2013: 38; Smith & Waterton 2009: 18). Community is also on occasion mistakenly used synonymously with the term *minority* and placed in opposition to *society* as the mainstream majority. Eric Gable has warned that these misconceptions have influenced "the romance of community among those who work in museums" (Gable 2013: 39). Some of these perceptions may have lingered from previous definitions of community. However, communities are currently understood as heterogeneous, fluid, and they can take on any size. They are *imagined* in the same way that Benedict Anderson describes the nation (Anderson 2006: 6): in most cases, not everyone within a community knows each other personally, so instead their common sense of belonging is imagined. If we now understand identity as consisting of many different facets, some of which are more important at certain moments than others, it is understandable how people can all belong to more than one community at a time and how such membership may be "fleeting, partial, or innate, lifelong, and unshakeable" (Onciul 2013: 81). Considering communities such as the LGBTQ or the online community, it is clear that many of these myths do not reflect the actual nature of communities. As a final point, it must be emphasized again that communities have the "potential to be both beneficial and detrimental" (Onciul 2013: 79). Because communities tend to define themselves in opposition to what they are not, they are exclusive in

6 Community involvement approaches have become popular in other areas as well, for instance public archaeology, civic engagement in policy making, community feedback in game development, or urban development planning.

essence. In doing so, depending on their power and ambitions, they can be marginalizing to a greater or lesser extent (Golding 2013: 20).

How has this current understanding of community affected museums in their work? Both in museological theories and practices, *community* has come to either replace or exist in contrast to *the public*, *audience,* or *visitors* (Crooke 2011a: 170). These latter three terms reflect a perception of people in museums as a largely homogeneous and passive group, consuming museum products, such as exhibitions and events. Visitor demographics usually allow for only a few outwardly visible characteristics to be noted, for instance, age, gender, or a distinction between local and tourist. Of course, these do not begin to account for the multitude of characteristics that may determine an individual's sense of identity or community. In contrast, applying the notion of community allows the museum to look at people as heterogeneous groups of actors within the museum process, *e.g.* youth communities (Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke 2018). This can have two concrete effects on the museum. First of all, it allows for a broader investigation of audiences, so that museums can provide services that are better suited to the specific communities they wish to target. Considering how people "belong to many communities, often simultaneously" (Karp 1992: 12) this is not an easy task. However, it is certainly a worthwhile adjustment museums are making in the face of greater cultural diversity and contemporary notions of complex identities. Secondly, it allows for the involvement of community members throughout the entire museum process – rather than only as recipients of a completed product. Thus, in the broadest sense, *community engagement* is the multitude of ways in which museum staff involve communities in the museum process. Reflecting on the last few decades, Elizabeth Crooke noted that "the sustained interest in the concept of community has had a major impact on museum practice" (Crooke 2015: 481) and that "it is not just a case of museums representing or symbolizing community; now it is museums forging community identity, altering community experiences, and improving community life" (Crooke 2015: 486).

Setting community engagement as an overarching method of involvement, there are many different manners in which this involvement can take place. There are two principal ways to approach community engagement models. First of all, methods can be identified based on the degree to which power is shared between the museum institution/staff and community members. Such a scale was devised for social work by Sherry Arnstein (1969), whose eight step ladder of citizen participation ranged from manipulation (non-participation) to citizen control. Within the sphere of museums, Nina Simon's work has been greatly influential. She proposed four models, ranging from contributory (by which a community contributes to the work of the museum) to hosted (meaning that the museum acts as a host for the work of a community) (Simon 2010: 190-191). For heritage conservation, Amareswar Galla similarly proposed three models, ranging from consultation to community cultural action (Galla 2008: 22). The necessity to look at community engagement from the perspective of power sharing is echoed in critical museological research which supports the need for *negotiation* over *consultation* (*e.g.* Fouseki 2010). Nonetheless, it is important to remember that during any community engagement process the power balance may shift and be different during the various stages of the process, making such typologies and models difficult to apply in practice (Onciul 2013: 82).

Secondly, community engagement can be defined by specific activities – so-called participatory practices – no matter whether the initiative for these activities lies with the museum or the community. The repatriation of objects, which can be seen as one of the reasons for the emergence of the New Museology, is one of these participatory practices (Nederveen Pieterse 2005: 175; Peers & Brown 2003a: 6). Crowdsourcing, defined as "the practice of obtaining information or services by soliciting input from a large number of people, typically via the Internet and often without offering compensation" (Ridge 2013: 436) is another which has gained popularity in recent years. Exhibition co-curation, participatory action research, community consultation groups, participation in interactive displays, community collections management, hosting community activities – there are countless examples of participatory practices.

Considering the wide variety of community engagement methods and participatory practices, it is not surprising that the goals or reasons for applying these methods are also abundant. Community engagement methods and participatory practices are mostly designed to benefit both community members and the museum and its staff, although the type of benefit and its extent might be different for these groups. For museum institutions and staff, reasoning frequently revolves around relevance and purpose: "if the public is not interested in what we are doing, then what are we doing?" (Pyburn 2008: 202). Certainly, being institutions that are open to the public, museums depend greatly on public support (Crooke 2008: 415). This is especially true for museums working deeply from a New Museology perspective, who wish to become stronger social actors and attract different (perhaps previously excluded or neglected) communities (Simon 2016: 51-56). Motivations may be political or democratic, hinging on notions of social inclusion and the decolonization of the museum. However, the need to target new audiences may not only stem from ideals of inclusivity, but it may simply be a demand from governments or funding bodies (Fouseki 2010: 181). Set within a larger academic trend to be pluralistic, interdisciplinary, and reflexive, other forms of knowledge and expertise are welcomed to balance out the museum narrative (Campbell 2008: 310). From the point of view of communities or community members, engagement with the museum is beneficial on various grounds. For the individual, engagement may result in a stronger sense of identity, self-efficacy, confidence, empowerment, or new skills and knowledge (Ohmer 2010: 6). For communities, the goals are usually more long-term, such as solving community problems, adjusting power relationships, increasing communal efficacy, or fostering cross-cultural understanding (Onciul 2013: 94). Most of these goals generally concern community engagement and its inherent benefits, while individual projects would of course also lead to specific benefits, such as the repatriation of a certain collection or the inclusion of a community's voice in a museum exhibition.

Keeping in mind that community is as much about exclusion as it is about inclusion, community engagement can not only be beneficial but may also lead to conflict and contention. First of all, community members and museum staff not only have different reasons for getting involved in community engagement processes, they also desire other outcomes, which may take place on different time scales. For instance, museum staff may be working towards a short term exhibition production deadline, while community members could be seeking long term political influence. If, perhaps due to a lack of transparency, these different desires are not made clear from the outset, disappointment can arise along the way. Conflict can also occur if one of the parties

holds more power throughout the process and only their goals are reached (Clifford 1997). In reviewing community engagement projects, frustration is often apparent with community members who feel that they are not being listened to or that their needs are not being met (*e.g.* Fouseki & Smith 2013: 236-238). In these cases, museums may be accused of tokenistic community engagement (Lagerkvist 2006: 59). Although the fact that both parties have different aims can be a source of friction in itself, many of these problems stem from a lack of transparency and unequal power balances. Especially for community members who already consider themselves to be in a disadvantaged position in society, issues of power can be more sensitive and problems may arise more easily (Lagerkvist 2006: 63). Power inequalities may be perceived from the very beginning, for instance if the museum is the one taking the initiative in the engagement process. By inviting a community in to collaborate, this may already reinstate (perceived) superiority (Varutti 2013: 62). In the worst case, community members may see unequal community engagement as a form of exploitation by the majority and accuse the museum of cultural appropriation or neo-colonialism (Kreps 2011a: 81). For instance, in a critical review of the *National Museum of the American Indian*, USA, two Indigenous scholars characterized the employment of Indigenous staff not as an effort to be inclusive but rather as the creation of "living exhibitions in the persons of the tour guides" (Hilden & Huhndorf; quoted in Ronan 2014: 136).

Another difficulty is the matter of representation. In almost all cases, it is not practically possible to work together with an entire community and all of the museum staff. Thus, community engagement is ultimately based on individual representatives from all participating groups (Onciul 2013: 81). However, museums frequently assume that individual community members can and do represent their whole community. At the same time, community members express the pressure, both from the museum and their own communities, to be proper representatives (Fouseki 2010: 181). The heterogeneity within communities can also make controversy difficult to avoid (Lagerkvist 2006: 54). Still, controversy, if negotiated carefully and handled correctly, may be turned into fruitful opportunities for community engagement (Lagerkvist 2006: 65).

To attempt to avoid some of these problems, a number of conditions or values have been proposed to improve the success of community engagement. The investment of plenty of time is one of these conditions. The real importance of community engagement, it is argued, are the results that can be achieved throughout the whole process, not simply the end product or exhibition (Smith & Waterton 2009: 116). Trust and respect between parties is something that needs time to develop. Time is especially important for the community members, who are generally more interested in long term results and communal benefits, rather than reaching a deadline for the exhibition opening. It is stressed, therefore, to see an exhibition (for instance) as only an intermediate part of the engagement process: a process that begins long before and continues long after the opening event. Parity and equal access are also important conditions. In practice, this might mean that not all of the meetings take place at the museum, but that a location is found where all those involved may feel like equals. Time and sensitivity are also needed to investigate first of all which communities or museums to engage with, how to contact the members of these communities, and how to reach significantly representative participants.

In summary, the concepts of community and community engagement have been defined above. Various community engagement methods were described, based either on their degree of power sharing or on the types of participatory practices involved. Although benefits were noted for all parties involved in community engagement processes, some criticisms, common pitfalls, and risks of conflict were also indicated. The remainder of this chapter will consider community and community engagement in a Caribbean context in order to assess the relevance and applicability of the terms in this particular region.

What better way to place the concept of community in a Caribbean context, than with the words of Jamaican historian Rex Nettleford?

> *The encounter of Africa and Europe on foreign soil and these in turn with the indigenous Native Americans on their long-tenanted estates and all in turn with latter-day arrivants from Asia and the Middle East, has resulted in a culture of texture and diversity held together by a dynamic creativity severally described as creative chaos, stable disequilibrium or cultural pluralism.*
> Rex Nettleford (2003)

Whereas identity construction is complex everywhere, Nettleford argues that identities are even more diverse and fragmented in the Caribbean (Nettleford 2004). When the process of political decolonization was set into motion throughout the Caribbean, national and ethnic identities were the first to enter the debate. Newly independent states struggled to define themselves, often in opposition to their former colonizer, in a condition of great diversity. Jamaica's national motto from 1962 ("out of many, one people") reflects the need to construct unity out of diversity. Within the larger Caribbean region, for instance through organizations such as CARICOM, the construction of a regional Caribbean identity is still on the agenda as one of the main priorities. During its 30th anniversary, Maxine Henry-Wilson urged delegates that "the creation of a Caribbean person or identity cannot be accidental or incidental to our actions and activities" (Henry-Wilson 2003). Considering the diverse ethnicities, languages, religions, and cultures of the people in the region, it has been suggested that such a regional identity could be constructed on the basis of pluralism, rooted in a culture shared by all (Nettleford 2004). This could largely be based on the shared experience of recent or distant migration. As Alissandra Cummins pointed out, "in essence, it is a region where (virtually) everyone came from (virtually) everywhere else, whether voluntarily or by force" (Cummins 2012: 26).

Within Caribbean museums, identity construction has been similarly complex (Farmer 2013). In some places, communities of African descendants have received the strongest representation in recent years, while other communities are underrepresented. Besides ethnicity, Caribbean communities and identities are also diverse in many other facets, such as religion, language, culture, or local history, and this provides enormously varied opportunities for potential engagement with museums. Elsewhere in the world, community engagement practices have been criticized for focusing too much on ethnic communities, which has created an imbalance in the voices that are heard (Mullen Kreamer 1992: 377). The pluralism of the Caribbean, combined with the continuous presence of temporary visitors provides a unique situation for Caribbean museums

that wish to apply community engagement methods. Although 'community' remains difficult to define in general, the pluralism and diversity of the Caribbean makes community engagement particularly important for museums in the region. Pushing the concept of community in a wider framework beyond the local/tourist dichotomy, Caribbean museums can work with dynamic, fluid, heterogeneous communities in all aspects of their work.

There are some challenges facing Caribbean museums that wish to pursue community engagement as part of their work. Although not unique to the Caribbean, museums need to struggle to prove their relevance and impact in order to have access to resources and not be the lowest priority in terms of political or financial consideration. Representativity can be a challenge if museum staff insufficiently reflects the local diversity of communities, creating a discrepancy between the museum and its surroundings (Brookes 2008: 2). Perhaps the most severely challenging condition is the legacy of cultural disinheritance – the fact that museums in the colonial era were used as tools of suppression by denying certain communities their heritage (Cummins 1992: 38). Finally, some local and visiting scholars have noted that museum visitation is not a part of Caribbean culture and that local adults rarely enter museums (Brookes 2008: 3; Gilette 2000: 47; Whiting 1983: 73). However, this research has not found this to generally be the case. Although certain museums in the region do attract more visitors and fewer locals, this seems to be the result of museum-specific policies rather than a cultural trend.

Despite the challenges facing Caribbean museums, some of these have created positive opportunities for community engagement. For instance, a lack of governmental support for museums has in many places inspired the creation of grassroots museums (see *Grassroots and Governmental Museums*, page 67). Similarly, limited or colonially biased collections and a lack of staffing can be remedied by the donation of objects or by individuals volunteering as guides or working as staff at the museum. This crowdsourcing of objects and knowledge, along with the donation of time and expertise, and the high occurrence of grassroots museums, reflects some of the participatory practices that are commonly employed in the Caribbean (see *Caribbean Participatory Practices*, page 67). As such, community engagement can take place throughout the entire museum process (from inception to development to execution), rather than only temporarily during the museum visit or for the duration of a specific project. Community engagement in the Caribbean has also resulted in a large amount of multilingual museum products, which literally reflect the voices of multiple communities (Maréchal 1998: 47).

The intended goals of Caribbean community engagement practices are not essentially different from those anywhere else in the world. The main point is that they need to be relevant and inclusive to Caribbean communities. For instance, there has been a lack of local popular support for Eurocentric heritage projects, such as those focusing on European-influenced great houses (Cummins 1992: 42). On the other hand, support has been greater, especially among local adult communities, for museums and collections focused on the recent history of local (rural and urban) traditions (Brookes 2008: 5). For some specific communities, feeling pressured by the homogenizing effect of globalization and a separation from younger generations, the transmission of cultural heritage, skills, and knowledge are the most important intended outcomes. As with community engagement in any museum, relevance remains key.

Facing the particular context of the Caribbean, its colonial histories, and its pluralism of communities, museums in the region have embraced the New Museology and post-colonial theories to adjust their roles in society. By adopting and adapting participatory practices and by investing in community engagement processes, they have become increasingly social museums.