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ARTICLE

Amazonian Activism for European Museum Audiences: Critical Reflections on the Development of an “Amazonia” Exhibition at the National Museum of World Cultures, the Netherlands

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Abstract This paper describes and expands on the discussions held at a symposium at the Research Center for Material Culture in the Netherlands in February 2020, which was held as part of the planning of an upcoming “Amazonia” exhibition to be curated at that institution by some of the authors. The symposium invited curators and museum directors who had recently carried out projects with Amazonian communities to share their experiences with co-production and co-curation. The discussion and this paper aim to be a reflexive critical first step before reaching out to potential partners in South America. This paper supplements discussions on participative museology by examining the underlying frameworks of an exhibition project at its outset, in addition to contributing, as happens more commonly, post-rationalizations in a final written evaluation. The discussion furthermore contributes to exhibition co-curation by focusing on Amazonian-European collaborations, which are under-represented in Anglophone museological literature.

INTRODUCTION

A number of anthropology and history museums worldwide have sought to create exhibitions that co-produce and co-curate knowledge with local as well as geographically distant people. However, recent museological critiques have put stress on the need for these collaborative projects to

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acknowledge the institutional and community partner politics, systemic power imbalances, ideological frameworks and economic interests that underlie them. Furthermore, recent disciplinary attention has pointed to the disarticulated relationships between culture and geography that have resulted from colonialism, imperialism and economic globalization, as well as the ethnocentric epistemologies that underpin museums, to show that descendant peoples, even when they self-identify as such, do not always agree to represent cultural classifications, particularly as they exist in these institutions. This paper discusses a symposium which was held at the Research Center for Material Culture in the Netherlands as part of the planning of an upcoming “Amazonia” exhibition curated by these conveners. Curators and directors – predominantly working in Europe – and specialists of Amazonian cultures were invited to discuss the challenges and complexities they faced conducting similar co-production/curation projects in the region. The event aimed to constitute reflexive critical praxis by first looking at recent related activities before reaching out to potential partners in South America.

This paper contextualizes the discussion that took place on the basis of relevant literature and recent exhibitions in the region. It aims to document curatorial evaluations and planning strategies that do not often happen with as much depth or formality. Furthermore, Anglophone museologies in the field of Indigenous collaborations have, with some exceptions, focused attention on projects developed between Peoples and institutions in Oceania and North America and so this paper, which describes Amazonian and European collaborations, seeks to broaden this literature. The authors of this article are the exhibition curatorial committee, based on a collaboration between the National Museum of World Cultures and Leiden University in the Netherlands, and the British Museum, with Andrea Scholz from the Berlin Humboldt Museum, who is an Amazonia researcher. As such, although the text was reviewed by all of the participants of the symposium, the written discussion is shaped by specific practical and intellectual interests.

APPROACHING THE EXHIBITION

Following studies that acknowledge the role anthropology and museums have played in colonialism, showing that they continue to reinforce hegemonic structures (Mignolo, 2011) and in light of broader social and political changes since the 1980s, including Indigenous intellectual critiques (Boast & Enote, 2013; Collison & Steedman, 2011; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010, 2020; Tapsell, 1997, 2018; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), various museologies worldwide have emerged that do not conform to the intellectual and operational logics that underpin the dominant paradigm. Examples of critical museologies in and about Latin America include; Berenguer Rodriguez and Torres Vergara (2011), Bonfil Batalla (1983), Buntinx (2007), Carter and Lleras (2021), García Canclini (1990), Longoni (2014) and Power and Escobar (2012). Among these, pioneering Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborations have taken place across Latin America as part of the museum projects designed by, for example, Ticio Escobar (Power & Escobar, 2012) in Paraguay, Bonfil Batalla (1983) in Mexico and Buntinx (2007) in Peru, all of which are under-recognized in Anglophone museological literature. This paper supplements discussions on participative museology by

examining the underlying intellectual and political frameworks of an exhibition project at its outset, in addition to contributing, as happens more commonly, post-rationalizations in a final written evaluation (Barnes & McPherson, 2019; Beaujot, 2020; Chipangura, 2020). Furthermore, the paper seeks to highlight and present the manifold initiatives that have been developed by the symposium participants. The nature and impact of co-curated exhibitionary work is often highly localized, primarily reaching audiences around the museum as well as the communities engaged in the creation of the exhibition. Due to operational constraints as well as the primacy, in many museums, of public-oriented exhibitions over academic publication, many curators do not publish reflections on their work, resulting in the non-inclusion of many valuable projects in the literature. This is aggravated by publication costs and distribution, and academic neoliberalism and self-referentiality, which hamper the networks between Latin America and the rest of the world.

The workshop described here was intended to be the first of three; the second was to be held at the International Meeting of Amazonian Archaeology in Lima in the autumn of 2020, and would have invited scholars and curators who work on Amazonia in Latin America, while the third would invite the local non-Indigenous and Indigenous or grassroots collaborators who would participate in the creation of the exhibition narrative and structure. The second of these workshops was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the third remains tentative for the same reason. This paper presents the first step of a plan to create a considered, longer-term exhibition development that, due to unforeseen circumstances, was interrupted and ultimately made impossible.

In recent years there have been a growing number of projects involving Indigenous curatorship in Amazonia. *Serpiente de agua: la vida indígena en la Amazonía* (2003), for example, was created by an Indigenous association of activists in the Desamparados Cultural Centre in Lima. Indigenous-led museums include the Museu Magüta in Benjamin Constant, Brazil, founded by the Ticuna in 1991 (Pacheco de Oliveira, 2012; Roca, 2015), the Museu dos Povos Indígenas do Oiapoque, also Brazil, and the Inter-Ethnic Association for the Peruvian Amazon Region (AIDSESP), among others. In 2020, the Pinacoteca in São Paulo opened the exhibition *Véxoa: Nós sabemos* (October 2020–March 2021) curated by Indigenous Terena curator and researcher, Naine Terena. This multimedia project highlights artists and collectives from Indigenous communities around Brazil (including many parts of Amazonia). There have also been a number of pioneering institutions in Brazil that have re-signified “Amazonia” under the aegis of the post-dictatorship Constitution of 1988, to establish and recognize Indigenous Land Rights as well as to structure legal processes related to land demarcation and territorial claims. The Museu do Índio (Rio de Janeiro), part of FUNAI, (the National Indian Foundation) created by Darcy Ribeiro and the *Memorial dos Povos Indígenas* in Brasília, have created major interfaces between the academy and the general public, an ethic that has also been championed by institutions such as the Museu Goeldi, the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro, the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at the University of São Paulo, and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of Goiás. Although the Museu do Índio has neither a permanent display nor does it use “Amazonia” as a category, this institution was responsible for some of the most influential Indigenous exhibitions focused on the region. The *Memorial dos Povos Indígenas* in Brasília, the inception of which coincided with the 1988 constitution, was initiated under the insistence of a coalition of

Indigenous leaders. It opened to the public approximately 10 years after, under the direction of Sandra Wellington, with the explicit mission of advocating for Indigenous Rights in the spirit of the constitution. In 2007, the Memorial came under the direction of Marcos Terena, an Indigenous intellectual and advocate from the Terena group.

Recent European exhibitions with a regional focus on Amazonia have also responded to museological and public critique, as well as to new research in the fields of Amazonian anthropology and archaeology. The exhibition *Hidden Peoples of the Amazon* (1985–1986) at the Museum of Mankind (precursor of the British Museum's Africa, Oceania and the Americas department), which was curated by Elizabeth Carmichael, for example, was criticized by Amazonian Indigenous groups, Survival International and museologists for historical inaccuracies as well as for the failure of the project to include sufficient reference to contemporary political struggles in the region (Bourne, 1985: 380–381; Gow & Harris, 1985: 1–2; Houtman, 1985: 3). The British Museum's subsequent Amazonia exhibition, *Unknown Amazon* (2001), curated by Colin McEwan, rather than politicize its content, focused on new archeological research relating to *terra preta* (black earth), to shift the narrative and show that rather than being an untouched, pristine landscape populated by “primitive” “wild” people, the region has been drastically shaped by human occupation and sophisticated environmental management for millennia (McEwan et al., 2001). Exhibitions in other European countries have represented Amazonia as a seat of contested narratives. One case in point would be a project in Portugal that led to four exhibitions on Amazonian memory, (1991 Coimbra, 1992 in Lisbon, 1994 in Oporto and 1996 in Manaus), which employed the Portuguese collections of naturalist Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira and later, *Os Índios, Nós* (de Brito, 2000) at the Museu Nacional de Etnologia in Lisbon, curated by Joaquim Pais de Brito. This last project was supported by the National Commission for the Celebration of Portuguese Discoveries, which celebrated 500 years of the “Portuguese discovery of Brazil”. *Memória da Amazonia* began as an academic project led by the São Paulo-based Professor Tekla Hartmann and was curated at the Museu Antropológico da Universidade de Coimbra by M.L. Rodrigues de Areia. Later J. A. Fernandes Dias collaborated with certain British academics who had been critical of the British Museum's *Hidden Peoples* exhibition, ultimately re-framing the exhibition to include themes such as territory and ethnicity, connecting the naturalist's legacy/memory to current political struggles. The exhibition was brought to the Governor's Palace in Manaus with a Portuguese-Brazilian presidential sponsorship that facilitated the unprecedented invitation of over 200 Indigenous leaders to Manaus to engage with the exhibition (Fernandes Dias, 1997). This political dimension was ultimately absent from *Os Índios Nós*, in spite of its strong academic programme and the acquisition of a Wauja field collection by Aristoteles Barcelo Neto. Within the highly problematic commemorative calendar and while reflecting on postcoloniality and conceptual dualisms such as ‘the Indigenous’ vs. ‘us’, as the title of the exhibition suggests, *Os Índios Nós* did not acknowledge a past before the arrival of the Portuguese to Brazilian shores. Furthermore, by excluding urban Amazonian settings, neither did it imagine a future outside the forest.

A strong focus in recent exhibitions about Amazonia has been on the subject of pan-Amazonian acknowledgement that nature has rights of its own and that societal harmony is based on the spiritual and physical well-being of all worlds. These theories were developed in South America both in the

context of the arts and stemming from collaborative projects with Indigenous intellectuals and activists. The experimental project *Selva Cosmopolítica* at the Museo de Arte – Universidad Nacional de Colombia (2014), which showcased Amazonian art was then re-curated in *The Rights of Nature: Art and Ecology in the Americas* (2015) at Nottingham Contemporary curated by TJ Demos and Alex Farquharson with Irene Aristizábal. This latter project explored the same theory on a continental scale (Demos, 2016). In terms of ethnographic programming, the Museu do Índio in Rio de Janeiro held the exhibition, *O poder da beleza* (2015), an exhibition on Ashaninka ideas of Kametsa Asaike or 'good living'. These projects inspired *Amazonia: The Rights of Nature* (2017) at MOA, UBC, a project described by its curator and symposium attendee, Nuno Porto, below.

In light of the above projects and in response to crises in the region such as the assassination of Indigenous leaders, racist attacks by political leaders such as Jair Bolsonaro, the intensification of extractive projects, and the impact of COVID-19 on many of the most economically disenfranchised areas, the symposium and, later, exhibition in the Netherlands seeks to follow certain of the above curatorial projects in the region by expanding collaborations beyond the typical museum/exhibition community to include activists.

Symposium in Leiden

The symposium took place over 2 days at the Research and Material Culture Centre in Leiden. The broad aim of the workshop was to bring together academics and curators with experience working in the Amazon and/or with Amazonian communities, in order to come to a better understanding of how to create collaborative exhibitions with different communities from this region. Each participant gave a 20-min presentation followed by a brief discussion and question and answer session. A longer group discussion took place on the final afternoon. This paper has divided the presentations as follows: (1) *Overall perspectives*, with presentations on history of Amazonian collections at the host institution, the perspectives of the convening curators, and the trouble with co-curation generally, (2) *Public Programming Amazonia*, in which presentations discussed short and long-term exhibitionary and collections research projects related to the region and (3) *Long-term Collaborations in Amazonia*, where two specialists in the region discussed their longer-term projects.

Overall Perspectives

Martin Berger provided the introduction to the workshop by presenting the aims of the exhibition and raising a set of questions that could frame the discussion during the 2 day symposium. These questions arose from earlier work carried out at the National Museum of Ethnology (NME) in Leiden, which included collaborative projects with the Ka'apor (López Garcés et al., 2017), as well as with the Kari'na of Suriname. Three main challenges became apparent during these endeavors:

1. The main aim of the planned exhibition project was that the museum would explicitly relinquish its interpretational authority, not only in terms of the interpretation of artifacts, but also in terms of structuring the exhibition narrative, exhibition design, and the items on display. In short, the exhibition aimed to be a platform for individuals and communities from Amazonia to explore those issues that they thought essential to represent. However, Berger asked; to whom should authority be relinquished? What is the best way to choose who to work with, when setting up collaborative projects? In earlier projects, the NME chose to collaborate with already established (self-)organizations, who in turn selected the knowledge-holders that acted as consultants. This process implied the exclusion of voices by those not affiliated with the organizations chosen. Berger went on to ask the group if they saw this as a problem that should be remedied, or whether museums should accept that collaborative projects are always partial.
2. Many cooperative and community-based undertakings take place on a project-by-project basis, and are thus contingent on the availability of funding for specific aims and goals. As a result, these kinds of projects generally do not tend to create long-lasting and sustained contact between communities and museums. Rather, they result in one-off cooperations, the benefits of which might not be evenly distributed. For this exhibition project the curators considered whether they might be capable of creating sustained engagements and relationships with communities which would survive beyond the end of project funding.
3. Related to the question of sustainability is that of expectation management and output. Since this exhibition project aimed to place the demands and desires of its collaborators centre-stage, it was essential that they create output that was of use to all parties. This meant that it was essential for the museum to assume a certain openness and flexibility to the outcomes of the collaborative process, not thinking of the exhibition as the only possible end result, but also considering other options, such as audiovisual material that could easily be shared through social media, educational material, or capacity building for local cultural organizers. However, this type of project output is often not considered to be valuable by museum administrators, who supply funding for exhibition projects that are geared towards the local (or international) community rather than for other endeavors. Berger asked; how can expectations from all parties involved be managed in a fruitful way, so as to avoid conflicts and deception, either on the side of the community consultants or on the side of the museum?

Mariana França presented her ERC research project *BRASILIAE: Indigenous Knowledge in the Making of Science*, which seeks to investigate the place and role of Indigenous knowledge in the process of creating what is presently known as the (Western) scientific canon. The project takes the book *Historia Naturalis Brasiliae* (Piso & Marcgraf, 1648) as its point of departure to investigate the many ways in which Indigenous Tupi (and, perhaps less systematically, Tapuia) actors were part and parcel of the Dutch colonial enterprise in Northeastern Brazil, and how their knowledge of the Brazilian landscape and environment was used for colonization purposes and later reused as part of scientific ‘discoveries’. In this sense, the project pays particular attention to the botanical and zoological knowledge that can be found in the book HNB and other textual and visual materials created

(allegedly) by the Dutch scientists and artists in Brazil. So far, the project has been able to unpack the botanical contributions of the HNB, identifying the useful plants and their Tupi names and uses (Alcantara-Rodriguez et al., 2019) as well as presenting a comparison between plant species and their uses in the seventeenth-century HNB and contemporary Brazilian markets (Alcantara-Rodriguez et al., 2020). For the purposes of the Amazonia collaborative exhibition, these results show that, with regard to useful plants, the HNB is far more representative for the entire country – including plant species native to the Amazonian biome – than one might expect, suggesting that Indigenous migrations from Amazonia to the Brazilian northeast included the successful transplantation of the particular plant species identified in the HNB. Furthermore, the similar patterns in floristic composition among present-day Brazilian markets and the HNB indicate the current wider distribution and trade of the species that Marcgrave and Piso described in 1648 in the northeast, which in turn reinforces the hypothesis of the botanical impact of Indigenous migrations to and from Amazonia in the recent past. The BRASILIAE project also looks at collections of Indigenous Brazilian materials kept at European museums. Currently, the project members are investigating a selection of Indigenous objects in Leiden, Vienna, and Rome, whose provenance records suggest they were collected in sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Brazil. Examination of historical documentation, alongside material culture analysis, will help to ascertain the possible chronological and regional origins of such objects, thereby contributing to a more complete record about the presence of Brazilian Indigenous collections abroad. This information can in turn be used not only by curators but also by descendant communities when accessing their ancestral heritage kept in museums.

To provide some complementary and contrasting projects at another world cultures museum, Laura Van Broekhoven, Director of the Pitt Rivers in Oxford, presented her perspectives on the praxis and trouble with co-creation by discussing various projects at her Museum in their institutional and intellectual context. She began by clarifying the broad components involved in the co-creative process, which involve co-production of knowledge, in which local or source groups work with the museum to generate new research, followed by co-curation, where this knowledge is translated with those collaborators to a larger audience through public programmes such as exhibitions. Notable recent exhibitionary projects at the Pitt Rivers that were designed with this ethical and intellectual position in mind include; *Performing Tibetan Identities: Photographic Portraits by Nyema Droma* (2018–2019), curated by Nyema Droma and Clare Harris, and *Kwibuka Rwanda* (2018), curated by Julia Viebach, Jojie Kettle, members of the Ishami Foundation and members of the Rwandan community in the United Kingdom. Van Broekhoven elaborated on some of the operational challenges involved in co-creative museum relationships, which are often unequal or asymmetrical and which require, for example, more substantial human resource, longevity, and financial investment than more traditional collaborations. Using theories of coloniality/decoloniality (Kino-Nda-Niimi Collective, 2014; Mignolo, 2000; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Todd, 2018; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), cosmopolitics (de Sousa Santos, 2014, 2018), and pluriversality (Escobar, 2020) she argued that in order to tackle the fact that anthropology and its related institutions are hostile exclusive spaces, in which privileged predominantly white agents who are disconnected from the material political struggles of the people whose culture and experiences they represent, study, and “manage” culture and knowledge, the discipline must undergo radical confrontation, deconstruction and change. This

fundamental overhaul pertains both to epistemologies, that is, how the principles of knowledge are framed and regulated, as well as to hermeneutics, in terms of the ways these principles are interpreted. Van Broekhoven acknowledged that a focus on universalism continues to result in cultural epistemicide and, referencing the institutional structures, systems and intellectual paradigms that underlie decolonising projects in museums, suggested that shifting our praxis of collecting and curating to be instead guided by the concept of pluriversality (Escobar, 2020; Wangoola, 2012), searching for other possible possibles, might help to create more expansive stories that are of relevance to more audiences and will reflect our disciplines more accurately. She highlighted the need for Museums that curate ethnographic collections to work with a wide variety of stakeholders, in particular Indigenous curators, to find narratives that speak of a pluriverse of ontologies and epistemologies and allow deeper understanding of worlds (gnoseology).

Amazonia Exhibitions in Europe and North America

Recent programming at the Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève (MEG) was presented in two individual talks given by Boris Wastiau, who discussed his exhibition, *Amazonie: Le chamane et la pensée de la forêt* (2016–2017) and Aude Polito, who spoke about an incipient plan to collaborate with institutions in America and Europe to create cross-institutional collection databases for Amazonian material. Wastiau's exhibition in the main gallery covered 1000 m², and displayed 380 items alongside 30 video captions, only 6 of which were made by non-Indigenous filmmakers, and contained 2 video installations and an 18-track soundscape. The museum received 210,000 visitors throughout the duration of the exhibition, 90,000 of which came solely for the exhibition itself. The show later traveled to Pointe-à-Callière in Montreal (2017), where it was also attended by 210,000 visitors over a period of 6 months, and later to the Château des Ducs de Bretagne, Nantes (2019–2020). The introductory texts in this exhibition point to sustained colonial, religious and capitalist attacks, since the sixteenth century, on Peoples' rights to safeguard and reiterate their essential symbiotic relationships, in which humans, other living beings, and spirits interact and mediate with the environment. This introductory text was presented alongside statements by three Indigenous leaders, Davi Kopenawa, Raoni Metuktire and Almir Surui. The exhibition was then divided into four sections, dealing with: (1) Early travelogues, exploration and mapping of the region, (2) Shamanism and Indigenous epistemologies with a focus on psychotropic plants and dream states, (3) the museum's substantial Amazonian collections, from 15 cultural and linguistic areas and, finally, (4) "The People of Amazonia in the 21st Century." This final section communicated issues regarding widespread cultural and economic disenfranchisement and marginalization, and the effects of health deprivation and attacks on environment and territory across the region, but it also focused on the various activist and mobilization projects directed by Indigenous leaders and organizations such as the Federation of the Indigenous Communities of the Upper Tigre (FECONAT). Activists Délio Firmo Alves and Jaelson Felix recorded over 20 personal statements from people in Amazonia, so that they might, through the exhibition, communicate with international audiences (see the catalogue edited by Wastiau, 2016 and Shelton, 2018). Wastiau emphasized that aside from the curatorial successes of the project, the MEG was required to reflect more deeply on its public reception, to understand why

it was received so well by visitors not just in Switzerland, but also in France and Canada. The exhibition is an example of a project whose themes engage with extensive institutional scientific research genealogies, which are in turn ultimately a distillation of a broader constellation of scholarly discussions. While this conclusion champions the importance of engaging with what the international audiences of such an exhibition “consume”, Aude Polito’s presentation looked to the descendant Peoples whose ancestors made and used the items held at the MEG. Polito acknowledged the political and ethical considerations of the museum’s effort to digitally “repatriate” the MEG’s Amazonian collections in order to mobilize these as “tools of resistance,” asking such pertinent questions as: How can the project tackle the hypocrisy inherent in creating a platform for “virtual repatriation” without also working to de-accession or dis-affiliate items, ultimately returning them to those Peoples who wish to recover them – and whose authority in their interpretation is arguably more legitimate than that of museum professionals. She briefly introduced the MEG’s collections, identifying their cultural provenance, and outlined the collaborations she hopes to develop with communities including Indigenous Peoples, museums, universities, polytechnic support groups, archives and NGOs in Europe and South America. Since the meeting, the MEG has agreed to work from 2020 onwards alongside various European and pan-American institutions to digitize and restore the Brazilian collections in response to the loss of cultural, linguistic and natural scientific knowledge lost in the fire at the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro in 2018.

Laura Osorio Sunnucks discussed a relatively short-term project conducted with Amazonian collections, first in her exhibition “Arts of Resistance; Politics and the Past in Latin America” at MOA UBC (2018) and was then joined by María Mercedes Martínez Milantchi to talk about the recent project “House of Shadows,” (2019) which was developed by Murui-Muina elders and knowledge holders Oscar Román-Jitdutjaño and Alicia Sánchez, Professor Juan Alvaro Echeverri from the Amazonia seat of the National University of Colombia, Ana Maytik Avirama, fellow of the Open Society, and themselves as part of the Santo Domingo Centre of Excellence for Latin American Research at the British Museum (hereafter SDCELAR) (Román Jitdutjaño et al., 2022). For the exhibition, “Arts of Resistance” at MOA, UBC, Osorio Sunnucks invited two members of a Shipibo-Konibo women’s art collective, Olinda Silvano (Reshijabe) and Silvia Ricopa (Ronincaisy), who were born in the Ucayali riverine region in Peruvian Amazonia but who now live in Lima, to create an 8 by 3 metre multi-sensory *kené* mural. The exhibition explored the ways Indigenous and popular artists use historical images and ancestral and local knowledge to document or mobilize against contemporary political struggles and injustices (Osorio Sunnucks, 2021). While much of the content of the exhibition was explicitly violent or activist, the project also championed more subtle forms of cultural resistance. The *kené* mural recreated various similar wall-paintings on the streets of Lima that continue to be made by the collective following the fire that destroyed the houses and belongings of the Shipibo-Konibo diasporic community in Cantagallo (on the outskirts of Lima). Silvano and Ricopa assert that the ancestrally learned practice of conjuring multi-sensory *kené* from their dreams and imaginations, and then materializing it in the form of art works – whether textile, ceramic, body paint or mural – has curative powers; *kené* is a balm for the struggles these women tackle in Lima, and a tool with which to generate the income necessary to live there (Silvano & Ricopa, 2018 pers. comm.).

The “House of Shadows” collection project was intended by SDCELAR curators to underpin the development of a case dedicated to Amazonia in Room 24, the “Living and Dying” gallery at the British Museum. The curators wished to expose the political history of the Murui-Bora collections, which were acquired during the rubber boom genocide, by inviting descendant survivors to create an exhibitionary project that would disturb the neutrality commonly associated with collections that are often presented as a benign byproduct of scientific and anthropological exploration. Murui-Muina elders, Román-Jitdutjaño and Sánchez, while comfortable in the roles of experts on this material, were not interested in the concept of co-curating their knowledge into a display that would “represent” their culture (Román Jitdutjaño et al., 2022). Román-Jitdutjaño’s main activity during the research visit, therefore, was to order the items in the collection; dividing them into wild and domesticated, hot and cold, the violence of the Rubber Boom and the present day. He described this process of ordering memory as healing, and concluded that the power of his elders was at the Museum, which he called “House of Shadows,” in a place where real life and context were missing, while his generation’s power was in the future embodied by his children, which he described as a “Basket of Seeds.”

Nuno Porto presented his recent exhibition at MOA, UBC: “Amazonia: Rights of Nature” (2017–2018), which stressed recent Indigenous intellectual and political movements in the region that actively resist the use and occupation of ancestral territory by projects based on Western ideals of process, largely measured by profit. The project troubled the common ecological bias (Amazonia as forest) to explore the region as a human-made environment with a long history, conflictive present, and threatened future. By beginning with two political constitutions, from Ecuador and Bolivia, Porto engaged in an ethnography of absences and emergences. By summoning multiple Indigenous perspectives from the present day, he re-qualified the Amazonian collections at MOA in their entirety (Porto, 2018, 2019). One long wall of the exhibition space was hung with informational banners, each dedicated to the nine countries that make up Amazonia. These communicated statistics on the political and economic management of Amazonian territory with a focus on armed conflict, deforestation and other extractive industries. This political framework to the exhibition was reinforced in the case design, where cultural material from the collections was displayed: Each case was dedicated to a cultural area, and items were placed on a shelf above props that represented incursions to ancestral territory; gun shells, for example, underlay Yanomami basketry. By clearly stating the countries that form part of the geographical region of Amazonia, Porto hoped to expand public perspectives, which commonly associate Amazonia with Brazil. He also included newly acquired items made from Brazil nut shells by members of the maroon community in Oriximiná, Brazil, in part in order to emphasize the diversity Peoples who inhabit the region. These acquisitions were made possible thanks to institutional relationships developed between the MOA, UBC and the Folklore Museum in Rio de Janeiro. The exhibition also pointed to historical collaborations between BC First Nations and Amazonian activists and leaders, who have shared comparable concerns regarding the relationships between Indigenous epistemologies and priorities, and neoliberal interventions. Porto hoped to prompt reflection among local (Vancouver) audiences who, due to the exoticisation of Amazonia, have lobbied against incursions in the region while ignoring similar projects, such as the construction of pipelines, in British Columbia. The exhibition included a series of hammocks strung from metal posts where visitors could lie back, rest, reflect on the space and listen to the rolling

soundscape recorded by various Indigenous collaborators in Amazonia. This experiential and multi-sensory choice disturbed the traditional othering structures of museum exhibitions, which privilege the eye by keeping the visitor standing, looking at things in cases and reading text.

Françoço and Van Broekhoven jointly talked about a collaboration between the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden, the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi and the Ka'apor People who live in the Terra Indígena Alto Turiaçu in the Brazilian state of Maranhão. Three representatives of the Ka'apor people – Te'on Ka'apor, Elizete Tembê and Valdemar Ka'apor – were part of the core project team throughout the collaboration, as was Claudia Lopez from the Museu Goeldi. The collaboration began in 2012 with a series of visits to the Museu Goeldi in order to study the Ka'apor materials held in their collections. These visits were organized so that the Ka'apor representatives could choose which objects from the collection they wanted to work with, in which order, for how long and so on. After an explanation of collections handling procedures, these delegates could touch and use the items and, in so doing, they started to tell stories evoked by the materials. The same procedure was adopted at a workshop organized in Leiden in 2013. It became clear that the Ka'apor collection at Museum Volkenkunde was strikingly similar to parts of the Goeldi collection due to the activities of wholesale collector Borys Malkin in the early 1960s. During the workshop in Leiden, the Ka'apor representatives decided that the result of this collaboration should be an exhibition about the *cauim* ritual. The richness of both collections at the Goeldi and in Leiden indicated that the project could accommodate a multi-sited exhibition. In the end, the collaboration resulted in an exhibition held at the Museu Goeldi entitled *A festa do cauim* (2014). Throughout the project, there were ongoing reports of human rights violations and threats to the Ka'apor in Brazil. Ka'apor territory is the site of ongoing violence due to land disputes and the illegal exploitation of lumber. For this reason, the group decided that the collaboration and its resulting museum exhibition would serve as a political platform that would draw attention to these issues and defend ancestral land rights. Furthermore, the project hoped to create international awareness of the struggles of the Ka'apor people, who have historically been made invisible as a result of dominant cultural and political structures. The curators emphasized that just as the project sought to counteract historical and ongoing racist attacks, the collaborating group were subjected to racism during the process of the exhibition itself. For example, a group of 60 Ka'apor visitors to the exhibition opening were rejected by a local hotel in Belém. The exhibition *A festa do Cauim* was on show for approximately 1 year and attracted a large public consisting of schoolchildren, local residents of the city of Belém, and tourists from other parts of Brazil and abroad (López Garcés et al., 2017).

Long-term Collaborations in Amazonia

Manuel Arroyo-Kalin from the UCL Institute of Archaeology and Andrea Scholz from the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, each presented overviews of long-term cooperation with Indigenous Peoples of the Northwestern Amazon. In both cases, the collaboration involves a specific partner in Brazil, the Instituto Socioambiental (ISA), a non-governmental organization which advocates, among other concerns, for the social, ecological and territorial rights of Indigenous and afro-

Brazilian communities, mostly in the Amazon. Both presenters talked about their involvement with ISA's Rio Negro programme, in which initiatives fostering Indigenous education play an important role. Among other activities, ISA supports AIMAS (Agentes Indígenas de Manejo Socioambiental), who are Indigenous socio-environmental agents, in monitoring social and ecological processes in their respective communities, based on the annual cycle of the constellations – observations which are then recorded in diaries.

Arroyo-Kalin is the principal investigator of the PARINÃ (Intercultural Archaeology Programme of the Northwest Amazon), a long-term research- and heritage-oriented programme of engagement with Indigenous peoples of the Northwestern Amazon. The PARINÃ is currently funded by the British Academy and involves a multidisciplinary cohort of Rio Negro specialists from several universities and museums (UCL, UFSCar, MUSA, MPEG) as well as ISA. Its stated goal is to develop new perspectives about the human history of the Negro River region through active engagement with Indigenous participants and joint research. The PARINÃ, which is based on community-level consultation and articulation with the Federation of Indigenous Peoples of the Negro River, thus promotes capacity building, participatory research, and policy-making related to the natural and cultural heritage of Amazonian Indigenous communities in the focus region. It bridges archaeology, oral history and documented history in that it involves Indigenous researchers and their communities through a research stipendiary programme and plans for archaeological field schools, heritage workshops, and initiatives that facilitate co-publication and co-curation of intercultural approaches to the human past in the region. In this way, the project fosters a reflexive and intercultural approach to heritage making and heritage management, building and augmenting on the long-term engagement of the ISA and other NGOs in the region, which have resulted in the demarcation and official recognition of Indigenous territories as well as Indigenous heritage sites, such as the Iauaratê waterfalls and the Ipanoré holes. Local co-curation with Indigenous peoples to produce heritage outputs, as well as potential exhibition of results in one of the participating museums (MUSA in Manaus, MPEG in Belém), and even a European museum, may be one of the possible by-products of the PARINÃ.

Scholz presented one specific outcome of her collaboration with ISA's Rio Negro Programme: a projection onto the façade of the Humboldt Forum that presented the socio-ecological annual cycle of the Upper Tiquié river. In 2017, ISA became part of a long-term project entitled "Shared Knowledge", which was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and the German Federal Cultural Foundation (2015–2020) with the aim of opening up the museum's Amazonian collection to heritage communities. The project involved cooperation with Indigenous organizations and Indigenous higher education institutions in Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela.

In 2018, representatives of all partners were invited to a symposium in Berlin. Immediately before that meeting, a 10-day workshop with the collections from the upper Rio Negro took place, during which the so-called "primordial objects" were discussed in detail. These items have a close connection to myths of origin and are therefore powerful protection instruments. Damião Amaral Barbosa, one of the AIMA who participated on behalf of ISA, questioned the fundamental

designation of these instruments as “objects”, a term commonly employed in museums, and emphatically pointed out that the instruments have a life of their own as beings. In his explanation, Amaral Barbosa touched on the complex field of relationships between people and things in Amazonia which cannot hope to be transferred to the museum space. Concerning the sacred flutes from the upper Rio Negro, Hugh Jones (1979) wrote that the difficulty of describing them lies in the fact that myths and rituals permeate society and material culture in a vertical and horizontal way. Thus, one is confronted with a tangle of analogies and references which, in principle, must not be spoken about linearly but always simultaneously and which, moreover, are interpreted differently depending on the particular perspectives of the group. The instrument that inspired the facade projection is an excellent example of this complexity. It is a so-called adze and is nowadays only used in the upper Rio Negro for carving the Tukano benches (*kumurō*), while at the same time it stands for the sign *sioyahpu* (adze in Tuyuka) in the astronomical annual cycle.

The encounter with *sioyahpu* in the museum depot prompted Amaral Barbosa to present his and the other AIMAs’ works on the annual cycle, which are based on the constellations and are illustrated with beautiful drawings. The rise of rivers in the form of floods (*poero*) is named after the constellations, and goes along with certain reproduction and maturation periods in the animal and plant world. The representatives of the ISA expressed their wish to present the calendar in an exhibition, ideally together with their drawings and the instruments. Since the Humboldt Forum as the new exhibition venue of the Ethnological Museum was still under construction, this was not possible. Instead, representatives of the Humboldt Forum proposed to include the idea in the celebrations for Alexander von Humboldt’s 250th birthday in September 2019. What followed was a collaborative large-scale project with Indigenous illustrators, AIMAs, representatives of the ISA, media artists and anthropologists from Germany and Brazil, financed by the Humboldt Forum. A script was developed from the different versions of the myths about the constellations and the corresponding changes in the environment, which the Indigenous drawers executed on a Plexiglas panel. These performances were filmed from the other side. As a result, the illustrators on the façade looked like giants interacting with the shapes made by the windows. Several of the participants from the Upper Rio Negro were present at the presentation of the projection.

DISCUSSION

The projects presented in the symposium illustrate a diverse range of audiences, collaborators, and institutional mandates. While some of these tackled the issues arising from co-curation and Indigenous community collaborations, others focused on how to make public programming relevant to local audiences, while still others dealt with the need for museums to move away from essentialising narratives by disrupting cultural stereotypes. During the discussion on the last afternoon of the symposium, in consideration of the questions raised by Berger in his introduction to the workshop, most of the participants agreed that collaborative exhibitions should tackle issues surrounding project sustainability, power asymmetries, the relinquishment of authority vs. co-curation, the burden of representing Amazonia, and the politics of choosing intermediaries in the region.

The symposium participants acknowledged that collaborative projects should be sustainable in the long term in order to overturn the older museum model in which items are documented and institutional value is bolstered using community expertise, while co-producing participants reap no benefits past the duration of that exchange. However, they also pointed to the difficulties inherent in this practice: Laura Van Broekhoeven asserted that long-term sustainable projects require not only significant human resource investment but also sustained sources of funding, which is problematic since, in most cases, funding is limited to the time frame of an exhibition. Porto's exhibition *Amazonia: The Rights of Nature* (2017–2018) engaged this challenge by effectively galvanizing collaborations between his various partners, by fostering relationships between certain First Nations and Canadian activists. In other instances, as illustrated in Osorio Sunnucks and Martínez Milantchi's "House of Shadows, Basket of Seeds" project (Echeverri et al., 2020; Román Jitdutjaaño et al., 2022), the participants were interested in short-term projects and relationships for their own specific reasons; for example, Román-Jitdutjaaño and Sánchez did not view the Murui-Bora collections at the British Museum as material representations of their culture or People. In this sense 'collaborative museologies' that seek to reconnect ancestral material with people identified as 'source communities,' even while attempting to engage in postcolonial concerns, can impose uncomplicated relationships between contemporary cultures and material heritage (Román Jitdutjaaño et al., 2022). In spite of these exceptions, Andrea Scholz and Manuel Arroyo-Kalin, who are specialists in Amazonian culture and have long-standing projects in the Upper Rio Negro, rejoined that where local participants are keen to engage in international heritage projects, sustainability should be designed into the initial scope of the project, exhibitionary or otherwise. However, if projects cannot practically be long-term (as the majority of museum funded projects presented at the symposium attest), then it falls to curators to devise collaborative projects that can become productive for all involved and to continue to be critical about what participating communities get in return, as well as to sustain the reflexive institutional critique that can make museums relevant (Osorio Sunnucks et al., 2020). In her presentation, and again in the discussion, Scholz stressed that none of the participants in her project had imagined that they would ultimately create a video projection. This example points to the need for flexibility on the part of institutional partners and a willingness to create outputs beyond 'classic' museum activities such as improved catalogue/database documentation and exhibitions. A suggestion raised by several participants in the discussion was to create video or shareable digital content that might easily be shared in Amazonia via WhatsApp, a technology that is widely available in the region. While museum catalogues are considered to 'eternalize' exhibitions and provide important teaching materials for universities, these kinds of publications are often not accessible to communities who have worked on the exhibition, even in rare cases where they are in local/Indigenous languages. Arguably, by creating shareable digital content, collaborative projects can be made more accessible and can have a lifespan that extends beyond the timeframe of the exhibition.

It has been shown that the digital content stimulated by museum projects is not always a democratizing tool, however (Boast & Enoté, 2013). In order to consider compensation for "source community" knowledge sharing and collaboration in exhibitions, the group reflected on the art intervention at the Humboldt Forum in Berlin curated by Andrea Scholz as well as Olinda Silvano and Silvia Ricopa's *kené* mural made for MOA, UBC, to conclude that financial remuneration (if

commensurate) and an international platform to display normally less visible work can have a positive impact on creative and art producing communities. However, Laura Van Broekhoven stressed that while both of these displays have been important in showcasing cultural resilience in the context of the vibrant creativity of Indigenous groups in Amazonia, any compensation for knowledge is inadequate, since knowledge cannot be attributed a finite value. Françaço and Osorio Sunnucks concurred, adding that museums can show solidarity with descendant Peoples from whom they hold collections by serving as a platform to represent and create conversations regarding political struggles that are relevant to them.

The symposium participants then discussed whether if and when museums share representational authority, to what extent curators should be involved in the ‘interpretation’ or ‘translation’ of the messages of their collaborators, given that many museums insist on substantial cultural contextual detail and didactic editing in the process of exhibition making, so that a range of local audiences can participate in these programmes. In the process of text-writing, whose epistemologies should be foregrounded? Should concepts and objects be contextualized within European frames of thought and through European terminologies and ontologies, or should audiences be challenged to understand other cultures and lifeworlds? Ultimately, the answer to these questions might depend on which indicators for success a museum prioritizes. If visitor numbers and local impact are considered key, translation and interpretation seem inevitable. However, if providing a platform or creating new ways of cooperation/empowerment are deemed more important, didactic editing would be less relevant. Furthermore, the *carte blanche* approach, while important in certain cases runs the risk of becoming uncritical by replacing one position with another, and may result in museums failing to generate conversation and criticality in visitors (Snoep, 2020; Tapsell, 2018). The presentations illustrated that many of the curators present chose to rely on long-term engagement in relevant cultural and socio-political developments, through some sort of intermediary in the region, such as Instituto Sócioambiental (ISA), FECONET, or Museu Goeldi. Arguably, even though these local institutional collaborators certainly contribute a deeper intellectual and more relevant engagement with the region to an exhibition, grassroots or non-locally endorsed groups and collectives are frequently overlooked. By showcasing the same voices, European (and South American) curators have perhaps reinforced certain perspectives, which correlate with the interests and ideologies of relatively few enterprises. Therefore, the group concluded that, if an exhibition were to delegate authority entirely to Amazonian voices – something that none of the curators who presented had done – the political decision of whose voices to include would remain. Additionally, both Scholz and Berger raised the issue of the representational burden, when working with a select group of people. As shown in Osorio Sunnucks and Martínez Milantchi’s example of the ‘House of Shadows’ project, participants can and do find the responsibility of having to ‘speak for’ or ‘represent’ an entire community problematic. This becomes further complicated when working with diasporic Peoples who, living outside of the traditional homeland of communities, may self-identify plurally.

The ensuing discussion touched on representation in terms of audience expectation and the profile of Amazonia internationally. Can Amazonia even be considered as one entity? Scholz vehemently argued that indeed Amazon should not be represented as such. More specifically, she remarked that

many representations of Amazonia perpetuate culturally exoticizing images, in which Peoples are the passive victims of the globalized economy and neoliberal projects. Scholz went further to question the political position of exhibitions such as *Amazonie: Le chamane et la pensée de la forêt* at MEG curated by Wastiau, which in her opinion, perpetuated the exoticised image of the “Shaman” in Indigenous societies and the stereotypical association of Amazonian Peoples with mind-altering drugs. Wastiau rejoined that not only was the public interested in these themes, evidenced by the high visitor numbers for the exhibition, but that it was necessary to engage in these topics, as they were grounded in conversations with Indigenous leaders who, for the exhibition, self-represented their views on shamanism and “psychotropic” substances. Wastiau added that by highlighting various groups and Indigenous activists, the exhibition did not represent Amazonia through a singular voice. Unsatisfied, Scholz reminded Wastiau of his ethical responsibility not to perpetuate exoticising images of Amazonia. Following Scholz, Arroyo-Kalin pointed to exhibitions dedicated to expansive and diverse regions to say that the only way to create representation is to work with multiple actors and communities. That said, however culturally limited the representation of museum display may be, identities, voices and non-conforming community positions risk exclusion. The traditional tendency of museums to work with community knowledge bearers (such as elders or ritual specialists) should be highlighted here, as this praxis can exclude voices from non-traditional specialists, such as young people, women, members of the diaspora and other individuals outside of the traditional leadership structures.

A last issue raised was that of institutional hypocrisy and complicity, when discussing issues of climate change and environmental degradation. To what extent does the museum itself contribute to the exploitation of natural resources in Amazonia? The ethical issues to be resolved in this regard range from corporate sponsorship of museums by the oil industry, to the sourcing of coffee beans for the museum café, or the sustainable design of exhibition furniture. Which strategies can be employed to minimize the environmental impact of exhibition-making such as, for example, curtailing trans-Atlantic travel by project participants? Porto’s project provided an interesting example here, since recycled (and further recyclable) materials were strategically employed for the exhibition furniture.

CONCLUSION

Decolonising methodologies and critiques of the gate-keeping epistemology of coloniality in scholarship call for museums to be transparent in their operational, political and theoretical positions and to acknowledge the implications of these choices. Grassroots movements, such as Black Lives Matter, reflect the increased public pressure for museums and related institutions to confront their role in upholding systemic injustice. However, the steps taken by certain institutions in solidarity with these theories and movements are hampered by certain governments and funding bodies. One such example is the United Kingdom, where the removal of the Edward Colson statue in Bristol sparked a governmental backlash in which Oliver Dowden, UK Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport threatened funding cuts for public institutions who would eschew “neutrality” to engage in activism. Meanwhile, co-curation requires continual critical reflection and relies on organic and

flexible development, which are both complicated by the structures embedded in large institutions and external political pressures. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only meant that the following two symposia planned in advance of the exhibition were canceled, museum budgets have also become more strained, and staff and local collaborators have not been able to travel to conduct fieldwork or research collections. The dramatic advance of the pandemic throughout both urban and rural Amazon has also changed the priorities and needs of Indigenous and other communities around the region. Realistically, careful collaboration planning will not be possible as envisioned. Nevertheless, the curatorial team is building pockets of organic development into the exhibition which will, hopefully, relinquish authority and provide a platform for Amazonian voices, while at the same time the group will create sustained critical and transparent reflections on this process.

In spite of the multiplicity of limitations associated with collaborative or solidarity work in world culture and arts museums, symposiums such as that described and discussed above are useful for curators to learn about the successes and failures of previous projects, which may not have been published. Furthermore, this paper provides a culturally specific case study that considers praxis in Amazonia, an area that is under-represented in Anglophone museological and curatorial literature. **END**

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