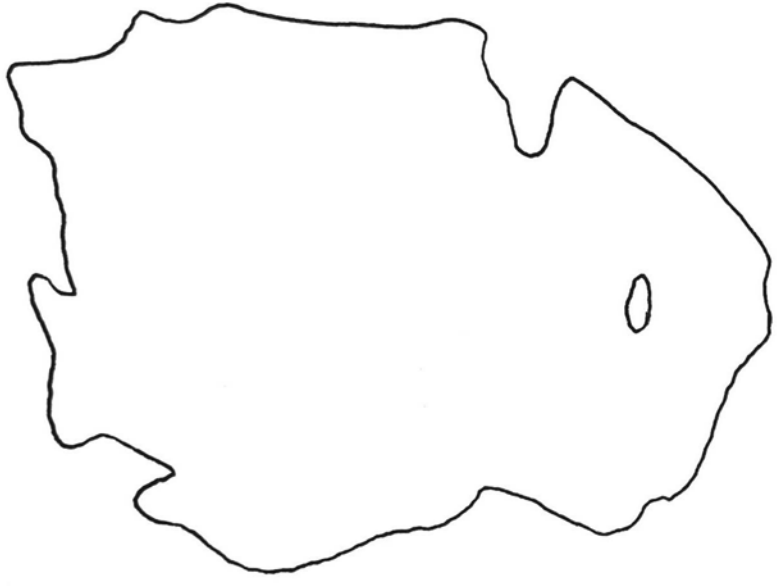
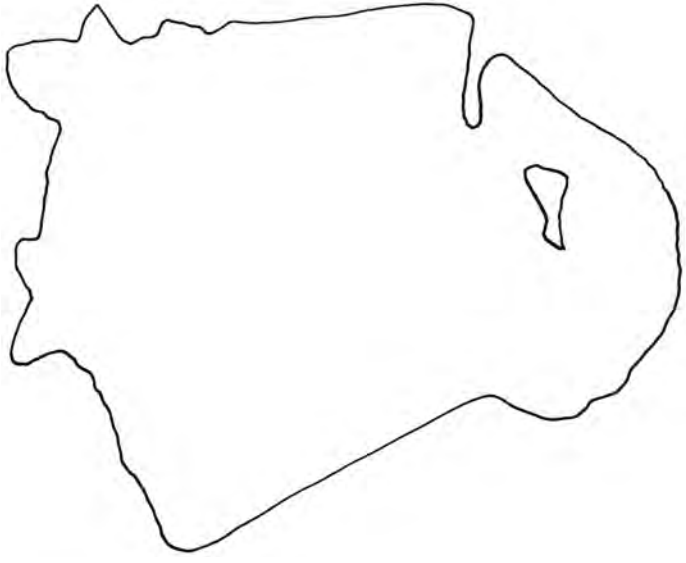


Look! A Negro!
Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa



> I came into the world
> imbued with the will to
> find a meaning in things,
> my spirit filled with
> the desire to attain to the
> source of the world, and
> then I found that I was an
> object in the midst of
> other objects.[1]

1.

Although I had been vaguely interested in ethnographic museums for several years, it was only when I travelled to Uganda in 2011 that I began to take them seriously. I have long been fascinated by the (re)production of collective memory, and my aim in travelling to Uganda that year had been, firstly, to begin to explore how, in societies indigenous to that country's central region, memory had historically been practiced through ritualized relations between the land, the building, and the body; and, secondly, to try to find out what impact the marketization of land might now be having on those relations—and hence on practices of collective remembering.

But shortly before my arrival in Kampala that October I learned, somewhat belatedly, that the country's national museum was under imminent threat of closure.[2] I had not, at that point, factored into my enquiry the "museum-as-memorial-form," but thinking that, in the broader scheme of things, it might at some point prove useful to have spent some time in it, I contacted Rose Mwanja Nkaale, the director of the Uganda Museum, to ask if I could photograph, video, and make sound recordings of the space and also interview her staff. Permission was

1 *Fanon, Frantz*, Black Skin, White Masks, *second edition, London 2008, p. 82* **2** *The Archival Platform, "Uganda's National Museum Faces Demolition," February 14, 2011, http://www.archivalplatform.org/news/entry/a_threat/ (accessed August 3, 2019); Wesaka, Anthony, "Battle to Demolish Museum Goes to Court,"* Daily Monitor, *March 10, 2011, https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/688334-1122304-ap4wvvz/index.html (accessed May 20, 2020); Kalumba, Robert, "Let Otafiire Demolish the Uganda Museum,"* Daily Monitor, *March 11, 2011, https://www.monitor.co.ug/artsculture/Reviews/691232-1130444-135f09z/index.html (accessed August 3, 2019).* **3** *The Vienna-based artist Florian Pumhösl photographed and filmed in the Uganda Museum while it was closed for renovations in 2000 as part of a series of works collectively entitled* Wachstum und Entwicklung *(Growth and development), which revisited European-designed modernist architecture in East Africa. See Pumhösl, Florian,* Florian Pumhösl: Wachstum und Entwicklung, *Frankfurt a. M. 2004; Galerie im Taxispalais,* Florian Pumhösl: Wachstum und Entwicklung, *Innsbruck 2004, http://www.galerieimtaxispalais.at/archiv_1999-2008/ausstellungen/pumhoesl/pumhoesl_progindex.htm (accessed August 6, 2019); Museum Moderner Kunst (MUMOK)/Stiftung Ludwig Wien,* Florian Pumhösl: Entwurf für einen Raum mit mehr als einer Videoprojektion, *Vienna n.d., https://www.mumok.at/en/entwurf-fur-einen-raum-mit-mehr-als-einer-videoprojektion (accessed August 6, 2019). A selection of the photographs I took at the Uganda Museum in 2011 were reproduced in a small artist's publication the following year and exhibited in the Uganda Museum itself in 2013 as part of an exhibition about Ernst May, the German architect who designed the building. Wolukau-Wanambwa, Emma,* Empfindliche Gegenstände, *catalogue (Künstlerhaus Schloß Balmoral Bad Ems), Bad Ems 2012. See also May, E., Huber, S., and Peters-Klaphake, Katrin,* Ernst May—Architecture and Urban Planning in Kampala: An Exhibition at the Uganda Museum Kampala, *exhibition catalogue (Uganda Museum Kampala), Kampala 2013; and Namakula, Elizabeth, "The Ernst May Exhibition at the Uganda Museum,"* Start Journal, *April 2013, http://www.startjournal.org/2013/04/the-ernst-may-exhibition-at-the-uganda-museum/ (accessed August 10, 2019).*

quickly and generously granted, and so I abandoned my original plans and, instead, over the course of the next three months, spent several days each week hanging around in the museum, documenting the space and talking to anyone who was willing to talk to me.[3]

The collection with which the Uganda Museum began was established on the instructions of the colonial administration in 1907, just seven years after the British signed the treaty with the Kingdom of Buganda that brought the Uganda Protectorate into existence.[4] The colonial administration's aim was, in the words of the then governor general of Uganda, Sir Hesketh Bell, to preserve "all articles of historical, ethnographical and industrial interest in 'native' life, particularly aspects whose survival was threatened by [so-called] 'modern life.'"[5] Bell is clearly drawing here on the discourse of "salvage ethnography" that was dominating Western anthropology during this period, and therefore it is fair, in my opinion, to describe the founding collection of the Uganda Museum as ethnographic in its character and intent.[6] According to Mwanja Nkaale, the first objects to be accessioned were magico-religious

4 *British Protectorates were colonies governed by indirect as opposed to direct rule. They tended to have small white populations, and to a considerable although varying extent, the business of administering the colony was delegated to one privileged indigenous group with whom the British signed a formal treaty—in this instance, the people of the Kingdom of Buganda, who were just one of the forty-three peoples (categorized by language) then residing within the boundaries of the territory of the Protectorate. For a detailed critical analysis of the British policy of indirect rule, see* Mamdani, Mahmood, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism, *Kampala 1996, pp. 4–6. It is worth noting that British government's investment (albeit limited) in establishing this collection predated, by several years, its involvement in the provision of either education or healthcare for the Protectorate's local population.* **5** *Sir Hesketh Bell, governor general of the Uganda Protectorate, quoted in* Kyeyune, George, Art in Uganda in the 20th Century, *London 2003, p. 52.* **6** *See* Calhoun, Craig, "Salvage Ethnography," *in* Calhoun, Craig, *ed.*, Dictionary of the Social Sciences, *Oxford 2002, p. 424.*

objects that had been confiscated by European missionaries from the communities they were converting to Christianity, and the collection was chiefly maintained as an educational tool for missionaries and British colonial administrators newly arrived from the West.[7] But because it was housed *inside* Fort Lugard, Britain's chief military installation in Kampala (the capital of the Kingdom of Buganda),[8] and therefore by design largely inaccessible to the communities from whom its contents had been sourced,[9] one of this collection's original functions was arguably also to serve as both a record and symbol of conquest.[10] No surprise, then, that it was popularly referred to by the Baganda as "Enyumba y'Amayembe" (the house of charms or fetishes): the collection both symbolized and helped to produce Britain's power over the peoples it was in the process of colonizing.[11]

This ethnographic collection was haphazardly preserved by a series of colonial agriculture and fisheries officers until 1939, when a woman named Margaret Trowell (1903–1989) was mandated by the colonial administration to transform it into a ethnographic

Wohukau-Wanambwa

7 *Mwanja Nkaale, Rose, "Interview with the Director of the Uganda Museum," Kampala 2011.* **8** *The British colonial administration was based at Entebbe, a town forty kilometers to the south of Kampala on the shores of Lake Nnalubaale (renamed LakeVictoria in 1862 by the British explorer John Hannington Speke). However, the administration maintained Fort Lugard, a military installation largely staffed in the early years by mercenaries from other British colonies, in Kampala, in close proximity to the royal palaces of the Kingdom of Buganda.* **9** *Kyeyune notes that "the natives (the local population) subscribed 200 pounds" to support the founding of the collection. See Kyeyune 2003 (note 5), p. 52.* **10** *Interestingly, the first post-independence government appears to have adopted the same approach: the only major expansion of the museum's premises to have occurred since Uganda became a republic in 1962 took place in 1967, when 708 square meters were added on the orders of President Milton Obote to house the royal regalia that had been confiscated following his abolition of the kingdoms. (Six of the forty-three peoples of present-day Uganda have historically had monarchical systems of government.)* **11** *Kyeyune 2003 (note 5), p. 53.*

museum and appointed its first "proper" curator. Trowell, who had trained as an art teacher in London, had moved to the Uganda Protectorate in 1927 with her husband Hugh, a doctor in the Colonial Medical Service. By the late 1930s Trowell had been, by her own account, studying and teaching indigenous Africans what she described as the arts and crafts of East Africa for several years, and was in the process of setting up what was later to become Anglophone East Africa's first European-style art school.[12] There were obviously productive synergies, from Trowell's perspective, in taking on the job of creating a "Uganda Museum" in conjunction with this arts educational work, and so she tackled both tasks with vigor and enthusiasm and for no pay. She moved the colonial government's collection to Makerere College to buildings adjacent to her art school, greatly expanded it, and ran the museum part-time until the Anglo-German ethnomusicologist Klaus Wachsmann (1907–1984) was appointed its first full-time (and paid) curator in 1945. In 1954, the museum moved into purpose-built premises designed by the German-born architect Ernst May, where it continues to cling on—the plans for its closure in 2011 having been shelved following a spirited international campaign.

At the time that I first came to visit it eight years ago, the galleries and public areas of the Uganda Museum appeared to have changed very little in the intervening decades. Although intermittently restored and repaired, most of its original features were still preserved. The main exhibition spaces continued to be wood-paneled galleries that Trowell and Wachsmann had designed in the typological style prevalent in ethnographic museums in mid-twentieth century Europe. The displays made little to no reference to political history—neither

12 *For a more detailed account both of the founding of the Makerere School of Art and of the ideas that underpinned it, see Wõlukau-Wanambwa, Emma, "Margaret Trowell's School of Art: A Case Study in Colonial Subject Formation," in Stemmler, Susanne, ed.,* Wahrnehmung, Erfahrung, Experiment, Wissen: Objektivität und Subjektivität in den Künsten und den Wissenschaften, *Berlin 2014, pp. 101–22.*

that of the diverse range of people who now share Ugandan citizenship, nor the fact of British colonialism that had brought the Protectorate into being—let alone of the anticolonial struggles that resulted, in 1962, in the creation of the geographically coterminous nation-state. Although a new Science and Technology gallery was opened in the year of Ugandan independence, and French universities had funded the creation of a modest paleontology gallery in the 1990s, I found these additions to be both spatially and symbolically peripheral. The galleries looked dated and visually unappealing. Some areas appeared either hastily and unmethodically arranged or were in a state of advanced disrepair.

The chief thing I noticed about the Uganda Museum that year was how few people visited it and how little time they spent there. Every few days I would see a school party—usually from a primary school—that would troop through in dutiful silence for forty minutes or so before retreating to a bus. I saw the odd European and/or Asian tourist, but rarely in groups of more than two or three, and not necessarily every day. I saw adult Ugandans in similarly desultory numbers.[13] In between were long tracts of time in which there were no visitors at all. The tour guides rarely had anyone to guide, and the gift shops did precious little trade. Most of the day seemed to be spent just sitting, waiting, and mopping the floors. After observing this state of affairs and looking closely at the museum's exhibits over a number of weeks, I came to the conclusion that something about this museum was not "working." And that this was not just to do with funding—or rather, with a chronic lack thereof: I began to sense, rather, that the economic neglect and the dearth of "practice"—in the de Certeauan sense—were perhaps symptomatic of a deeper structural dysfunction.[14] This is the point at which I started to think more deeply about the ethnographic museum as "form," and to wonder what an ethnographic museum might possibly be "doing" in post-independence Uganda.

2.

As Claire Harris and Michael O'Hanlon wrote in 2013, "Until at least the middle of the twentieth century" (which was when the present-day Uganda Museum was being designed and built), "displays in [Western] ethnographic museums were … the product of a rather simple equation: objects stood metonymically for the distant 'others' and distant places experienced and analyzed by anthropologists."[15] But within the context of Western cultures, the collection and display of ethnographic objects themselves were also, as James Clifford and others have argued, "crucial processes of Western identity formation"—particularly

13 *I assumed that these adult Africans were Ugandans based on the languages they spoke, their accents, and the fact that they did not look like tourists (by which I mean they tended not to be casually dressed—as if they were on holiday—and they did not carry cameras). When I questioned the museum staff, I was told that most of these visitors were students of travel and tourism, sent to the museum to do research. I have met few residents of Kampala who have visited the museum since primary school. I rarely saw an African family in there.* **14** *Certeau, Michel de,* The Practice of Everyday Life, *second edition, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1988.* **15** *Harris, Clare and O'Hanlon, Michael, "The Future of the Ethnographic Museum,"* Anthropology Today, *vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 8–12, here, p. 8.* 236–46, *here, p. 239.*

in relation to the idea of the self as owner.[16] Consequently ethnographic collections have historically served as key sites for the construction of the Western subject through the co-constitution of the non-Western "Other" as possessed object; and the ownership and display of such collections have played an integral role in the reproduction and ritualized performance of Western collective identities through their staging of various versions of "we" versus "it."

In his 1992 book *Colonising Egypt*, the political theorist Timothy Mitchell writes about the world fairs and popular exotic spectacles that were staged in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe (often alongside or in support of the development of ethnographic museums, incidentally). Mitchell describes such exhibitions as "symbolic representations of the world's cultural and colonial order" that reflected the "political certainty" of the age. But they were not merely reflections of this certainty, he argues; they were also, through their techniques of rendering history, progress, culture, and empire in "objective" form, the means of its production:[17] "[They] set up the world as picture. They ordered it up before an audience as an object on display, to be viewed, experienced and investigated."[18]

As Nora Landkammer has observed in the course of her ongoing research into the mediation practices of ethnographic museums in contemporary German-speaking Europe, many such museums continue to produce a version of the world to which they claim to give exclusive access—a rhetorical conceit that (I would personally argue) has if anything been strengthened during recent processes of ostensibly self-critical rebranding, as ethnographic museum after ethnographic museum[19] has rechristened itself with "names like *Weltkulturen Museum* (Museum of World Cultures) *Weltmuseum* (World Museum), or *Museum Fünf Kontinente* (Museum of Five Continents)."[20] And one of the key subject positions such museums continue to propose with considerable frequency, in both their scenography and their mediation practices, is that of the "world traveler": "Which subject positions are being proposed here? [Visitors] in Europe are interpellated as individuals who are capable of making the world their own, who as discoverers and explorers have unquestioned access, with all the allure of adventure, to

16 *Clifford, James, "Objects and Selves: An Afterword," in Stocking Jr., George W., ed.*, Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture, *History of Anthropology 3, Madison 1985, pp. .* **17** *Mitchell, Timothy*, Colonising Egypt, *Berkeley 1988, p. 7..* **18** *Mitchell 1988 (note 17), p. 6.* **19** *The German word "Völkerkunde" can be translated into English as "ethnology." Within common British English parlance, a* Völkerkundemuseum *would be described as an "ethnographic" museum, although, strictly speaking, "Ethnography focuses on single cultures or specific structures within one culture, while ethnology is a study of the members and structures of cultures and of the relationship of members to their cultures." Flemming, Isabelle M, "Ethnography and Ethnology," in Birx, H. James, ed.*, 21st Century Anthropology: A Reference Handbook, *Thousand Oaks 2010, pp. 153–161, here, p. 153.* **20** *Landkammer, Nora, "The Museum as a Site of Unlearning? Coloniality and Education in Ethnographic Museums, a Study Focusing on Germany, Austria and Switzerland," in Endter, Stephanie and Schneider, Karin, eds.*, The Museum as a Site of Unlearning: Materials and Reflections on Museum Education at the Weltkulturen Museum, *2018, pp. 1–23, here, p. 3, http://www. traces.polimi.it/2018/10/08/issue-06-the-museum-as-a-site-of- unlearning/ (accessed May 24, 2020).* **21** *Landkammer 2018 (note 20), pp. 3–4.*

the rest of the world."[21] And this, as Landkammer goes on to point out, is not a break from but rather a *continuity* of colonial distinctions "between subject and object; between those who *have* culture and those who *belong* to a culture; between those who seem to have no skin colour and others who are constantly reminded of theirs."[22]

The processes of subject formation to which Western ethnographic museums have historically contributed have been predicated (in Althusserian terms) on "hailing" their visitors as white Western subjects. Any other living body that happened to enter that space was precisely that—Other. And not only an Other, but an object: in *Colonising Egypt,* for example, Mitchell recounts how, in the nineteenth century, "Middle Eastern monarchs who came in person to Europe were liable to be incorporated themselves into its theatrical events"[23]

> Crown Prince Ibrahim of Egypt, [while] [v]isiting [England in]1846 … was unable to escape becoming something of an exhibit. He went out for a stroll incognito one evening and slipped into a show tent to see on display the carcass of an enormous whale. He was recognized immediately by the showman, who began announcing to the crowd outside that "for the one price they could see on display the carcass of the whale, and the Great Warrior Ibrahim, Conqueror of the Turks, into the bargain." The crowd rushed in, and the Crown Prince had to be rescued by the Birmingham police.[24]

22 *Her emphasis, Landkammer 2018 (note 20), p. 4.* **23** *Mitchell 1988 (note 17), p. 4.* **24** *Ebd.*

(And this is without even touching upon the numerous distressing accounts of the miseries and violences endured by those who spent years—if not decades—exhibited in Europe's human zoos. Those people were not monarchs. I doubt many policemen came to their rescue.[25])

3.

The state of the Uganda Museum today is in many ways, I believe, a reflection of the contradictions inherent in its founding aims. While the original collection was kept inside Fort Lugard for the more or less exclusive use of white Europeans, its epistemological and ideological configuration (i.e., that of the ethnographic museum) held good. But function, meaning, and practice became profoundly more complicated once the plan was initiated to transform it into a national ethnographic museum accessible to indigenous colonized people—although, admittedly, it appears to have taken some years (and, crucially, the departure of the British) before the fault lines really began to show.

Firstly, the museum, as a technology of memory, has no indigenous antecedents in this part of Africa. Unlike, for example, in the Kingdom of Benin in the west, few if any of the peoples who have historically resided within the borders of what is now Uganda have considered it important for the transmission of their culture and history to seek to preserve specific objects in perpetuity. My modest research suggests that, over the *longue durée,* memorial practices in this region have tended rather to be oral, performative, and intrinsically

25 *Because one example must stand here for the suffering of thousands, see Temi Odumoso's painful and painstaking research into the lives of Alberta Viola Roberts and Victor Cornelius, who were brought to Denmark in July 1905, aged just four and seven respectively, from St. Croix, in the Danish West Indies, to be exhibited at a colonial exhibition in Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen. Odumosu, Temi, "Sensitive Skin," in* The Holberg Symposium 2019, *Bergen 2019. http://todu1.theimageofblack.com/holberg-prize-2019-symposium-lecture/ (accessed August 4, 2019).*

linked to the land through rituals that are conducted at specific moments in the life cycle.[26] Much as colonial officials such as J. W. F. Marriott, writing in the *Uganda Journal* in 1934, might express, with a discernible hint of longing, that "the time cannot be very far distant when a first-class museum will be as essential to native culture as it is to that of Europe,"[27] the fact of the matter was—and in many respects, continues to be—that most of the Africans indigenous to the north and west shores of Lake Nnalubaale continue to do their remembering elsewhere and otherwise.[28] Since independence in 1962, without the apparatus of British colonialism to administer it and to impose its significance, the Uganda Museum has become culturally peripheral, and the extent to which certain indigenous populations have always felt indifferent towards it has become increasingly apparent. Otherwise it would surely enjoy more widespread support today.

One sign of this is the fact that, although they have, through acts of accession, been "musealized," certain objects' connections with their communities of origin have been actively revived in since independence.[29] When interviewed in 2011, the director of the Uganda Museum reported that groups of Baganda would occasionally come to the museum to worship the holy relics of Kibuuka, their god of war, and that objects had even been stolen from the collection for use in indigenous rituals. At that

26 *There are analogous examples from elsewhere on the African continent. "The Igbo of Nigeria, according to Chinua Achebe, do not particularly like collections: 'The purposeful neglect of the painstakingly and devoutly accomplished* mbari *houses with all the art objects in them as soon as the primary mandate of their creation has been served, provides a significant insight into the Igbo aesthetic value as* process *rather than* product. *Process is motion while product is rest. When the product is preserved or venerated, the impulse to repeat the process is compromised. Therefore the Igbo choose to eliminate the product and retain the process so that every occasion and every generation will receive its own impulse and experience of creation. Interestingly this aesthetic disposition receives powerful endorsement from the tropical climate which provides an abundance of materials for making art, such as wood, as well as formidable agencies of dissolution, such as humidity and the termite. Visitors to Igboland are shocked to see that artifacts are rarely accorded any particular value on the basis of age alone.'" Chinua Achebe quoted in Clifford 1985 (note 16), p. 241, fn. 4.* **27** *Marriott, J. W. F., "The Kampala Museum,"* The Uganda Journal, *no. 2, vol. 1, 1934, pp. 79–82, here, p. 81.* **28** *I do nevertheless concede that the museum sector has undergone a period of rapid expansion in Uganda in the past ten to fifteen years. I associate this with the ways that increasing urbanization and the marketization of land are beginning to result in changes on indigenous social and memorial practices, to the growth of tribalism in some areas of the country, to the embrace of "modern" Western lifestyles by the middle-classes and to a widespread desire to boost income from tourism, particularly outside the capital. I have not visited very many of these museums as yet, but the ones I have seen and have heard about anecdotally appear to imitate the display strategies of the Uganda Museum and are often ethnographic in character.* **29** *I am thinking here of the well-known Adorno quotation: "The German word museal (museumlike) has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are the family sepulchres of works of art." Adorno, Theodor W., "Valéry Proust Museum," in Adorno, Theodor W.,* Prisms, *London 1967, p. 175.*

time, the Uganda Museum itself was also running an innovative experimental project in the north of the country which involved returning objects from its collection to internally displaced communities in an attempt to support them in reviving cultural practices that had become wholly disrupted by decades of civil war.[30]

But above and beyond this, I locate the ongoing dysfunction of the Uganda Museum in the fact that it was, just like the Makerere School of Art that Margaret Trowell was simultaneously establishing, rooted in the project of colonial governmentality.[31] Together with the handful of schools that the British supported, the ethnographic museum and the art school constituted the aesthetic, pedagogical and epistemological apparatus of a "complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline" that aimed to train the Protectorate's indigenous elite to perform what Homi Bhabha has termed as "colonial mimicry."[32] Britain's need, here as elsewhere, was to produce "a reformed, recognisable Other … a subject that is almost the same, but not quite": "British enough," so to speak, to competently carry out the colonizer's orders but lacking the capacity to question colonial authority or challenge the status quo.[33] This was a policy that the British had been pursuing in their colonies since the late eighteenth century. Bhabha cites, for example, the influential treatise of Charles Grant, Chairman of the British East India Company, who, in 1792, proposed "an evangelical system of mission education for Indians to be conducted uncompromisingly in English," grounded, as Bhabha characterizes it:

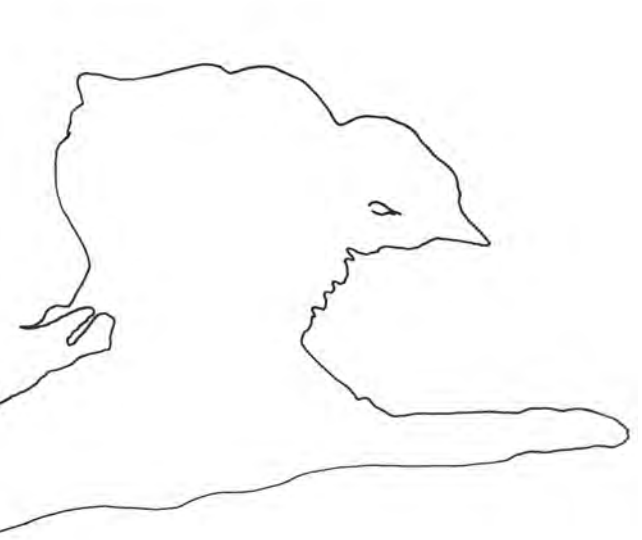
> partly [in] a belief in political reform along Christian lines and partly an awareness that the expansion of company rule in India required a

30 *Mwanja Nkaale 2011 (note 7).* **31** *For more on this, see Scott, David, "Colonial Governmentality," Social Text, no. 43, 1995, pp. 191; Wõlukau-Wanambwa 2014 (note 12).* **32** *Bhabha, Homi K., "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," October, 28 (Spring), 1984, pp. 125–133.* **33** *Bhabha 1984 (note 32), p. 126.*

> system of "interpellation"—a reform of manners, as Grant put it, that would provide THE colonial [subjects] with "a sense of personal identity as we known it" [that would result in] the *imitation* of English manners [but which would] induce [the colonial subjects] to remain under our protection.[34]

By the time the Uganda Protectorate came into existence in 1900, the inculcation of this partial, dependent status had become an institutionalized feature of colonial education. This is amply evidenced in Margaret Trowell's own writings about both visual art education and about the Uganda Museum, both of which she argues, have an "invaluable part to play" in precisely this process.[35] Take, for example, this extract from her memoirs, which she published upon her retirement in 1957 (lest we forget, the year of Ghanaian independence):[36]

> In the present state of African development … the mind of many an African is, and will be for a number of years, in a state of bewilderment. Western civilisation is sweeping into the country and is liable to knock him off his balance; he welcomes it and yet is resentful of some of its implications. The old way of life is gone, the new has not yet been assimilated; he is almost ashamed to acknowledge his old world, yet is not at home in the new. By careful study, preservation, and display of his material cultures, the museum can help to give him the right kind of racial pride in the achievements of his past; it can begin to widen his interests by showing him the differing ways of life of his immediate tribal neighbours, due, maybe to racial, climactic, or geographical reasons; and it can preserve the best of his past and present upon which to build his future.[37]



Here, as elsewhere in her writings, Trowell does not cite colonization as possible cause of the distress she observes the peoples and societies of this region to be experiencing. The violent imposition of Western culture and Western rule are again presented, rather, as natural processes—as things that "just happen," like a strong gust of wind—for which no person or set of vested interests can be held accountable. The need for indigenous Africans to adapt and assimilate, therefore, is a mere inevitability, and by providing (in this

34 *His emphasis. Bhabha 1984 (note 32), p. 127. Like Margaret Trowell, Charles Grant was an evangelical Christian.* **35** *Trowell, Margaret,* African Tapestry, *London 1957, p. 77.* **36** *Klaus Philipp Wachsmann, the museum's co-curator, also retired and left Uganda in 1957.* **37** *Trowell 1957 (note 35), p. 77.*

instance) a museum, the British have, in Trowell's terms, selflessly undertaken to provide pedagogical assistance with the important and necessary process of cognitive adaptation.

But Trowell exposes, perhaps unwittingly, the disciplinary agenda that underlies her claims here when she describes the museum as having the capacity to instill *"the right kind* of racial pride." For—setting aside for the moment her essentialist and monolithic concept of race—to delineate "right" from "wrong" in this way is not only to implicitly acknowledge the existence of alternative and/or dissenting forms of what I myself might haltingly describe as "ethnic pride"; it also signals that through the Uganda Museum, she and her collaborators sought to foster a specific, pre-envisaged and racialized subjectivity, and that they were conscious of their rights to exercise sanction in respect of it. Thus, the character of that subjectivity—and, more importantly, its parameters—were exogenously constructed and imposed—*in the same way as the ideas of Uganda and of Ugandanness are themselves imposed* as innate, stable organic entities through their representation in the Uganda Museum, when in fact the Uganda Protectorate was almost entirely a British-Buganda invention whose creation was violently contested by other ethnic groups.

The Uganda Museum, first at Makerere College and then later in its purpose-built premises on Kitante Hill, addressed the elite indigenous visitors for whom it was created in the register it had previously reserved for the white Westerners who had historically enjoyed virtually exclusive access to the ethnographic collections at Fort Lugard. But this mode of interpellation clearly has its limits, because it effectively requires the indigenous visitor to occupy the position of both subject and object within the same museological space. It invites indigenous Africans to look and learn from the position of a Western subjectivity (that is it "hails" them to that subject position), but at the same time the Western ethnographic museum form presents them and their cultures to themselves as static, inert objects to be looked *at* and learned *about*, devoid of interiority. This can engender a destructive internal dissonance, in connection with which the incident that Franz Fanon recounts in his essay "The Fact of Blackness" comes to mind. When a white child catches sight of him on a train (presumably

in France in the mid-1950s) and cries to its mother, "'Look! A Negro!'" Fanon's insight is that, although he had hitherto understood himself as a sovereign subject, imbued with knowledge and with the will and the right to know, his status in post-war French society is that of "crushing objecthood," without ontology.[38] In this moment, Fanon knows himself to be the "Negro" to whom the child is referring, but knows himself also to not be perceived by others as sharing the white child's capacity for subjectivity.

On the continuum between identification and disidentification, successful and unsuccessful interpellation, there are, of course, an infinite range of positions that the Uganda Museum's post-independence indigenous visitors can adopt in an encounter with the displays. These depend, I would suggest, on what Stuart Hall calls "particular or situated logics"—that is, such a visitor's awareness of and personal investment in *other* knowledges and *other* subjectivities, and "their differential and unequal relation to [in this case, colonial] power."[39] Those indigenous East Africans who, in my experience, have the most positive attitudes towards the Uganda Museum are those who express the strongest affiliations to the colonial project, to capitalist modernity, and to their status—lost, aspirant, or realized—as members of a Western-aligned elite. But this group is small in number, and I personally believe it is impossible to account for Ugandans' near ubiquitous indifference towards the Ugandan Museum without taking into consideration the complex conceptual difficulties it faces when, as an ethnographic museum in a postcolony, it seeks to interpellate indigenous postcolonial subjects.

4.

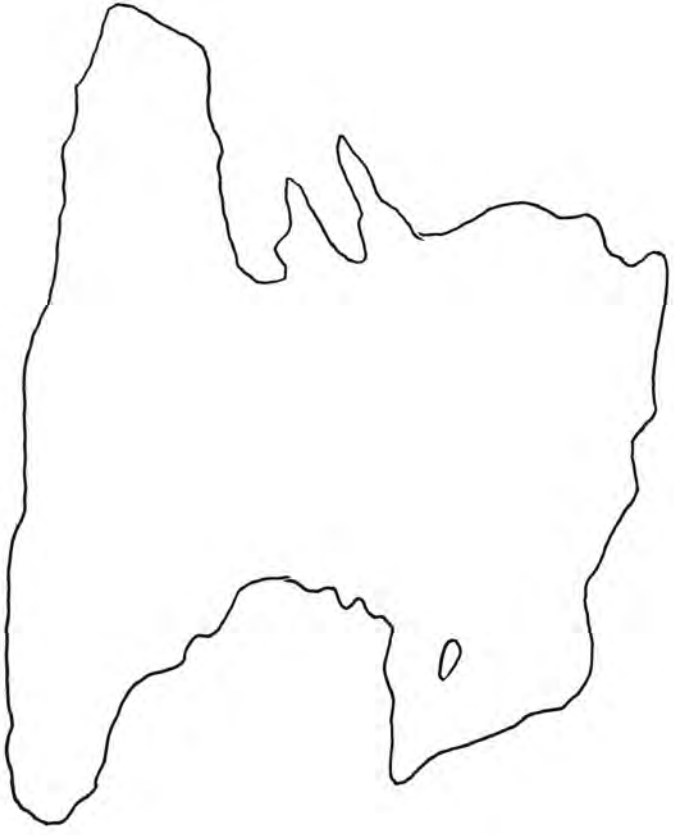
The Uganda Museum is problematic. And in difficulties—perhaps, rightly so. But visiting it has not and may still not necessarily be unproductive within the context of urgent ongoing struggles against racism and (neo)colonialism. As the continued preservation of this colonial-era "national" museum evinces, in Uganda, the process of dismantling colonialism's epistemic and aesthetic infrastructure remains incomplete. Expunging it at this point in time may be neither feasible nor wholly desirable. However, critical, self-reflexive learning about the history of the museum and about the purposes for which it was created, and close attention to its scenographic and mediatory practices—particularly to its erasures and exclusions—can have value. If such museums are approached head-on as "monuments of colonial injustice; they are above all monuments of the education of the White European subject in colonial thinking and of Eurocentric

38 *Fanon 2008 (note 1), p. 82.* **39** *Hall, Stuart,* Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse, *University of Leicester, Leicester 1973, p. 18. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/81670115.pdf (accessed September 23, 2019). In the course of their joint presentation during the opening days of Bergen Assembly 2019, Karin Schneider gave a fascinating account of a school's workshop on issues of rights and restitution relating to the Africa collection she had observed at the Weltkulturenmuseum in Frankfurt a. M. in 2017. At this workshop, young Germans of color, encouraged to comment based on the presumed connections between the objects under discussion and their sense of their own individual identities, gave responses ranging from ambivalence to total indifference. Bergen Assembly 2019, "Introduction Days and Opening of Belgin," March 2019, http://bergenassembly.no/programme/introduction-days-saturday/ (accessed August 7, 2019).*

fantasies of superiority, of epistemic and aesthetic schooling in exoticism and racism."[40] They can become spaces for such monuments' deconstruction. Mediation strategies that question the colonial-era museum and do what it specifically set out *not* to do—namely to situate its practices within a political and economic project of gross exploitation—would reveal, in Homi Bhabha's terms, the "strategic limitation[s] or prohibition[s] *within* the authoritative discourse" of the "reforming, civilizing mission," fundamentally and irrevocably undermining the museum's benevolent and emancipatory claims and producing another knowledge of it "as a form of social control."[41] History amply demonstrates the importance of such insights in struggles for freedom and equality. As a case study for the hypocrisy and contradictions with which the colonial project was riven therefore, an ethnographic museum in the postcolony can serve as rich and valuable resource for those who seek to unlearn colonial knowledge.

All photographs in this article were taken by the author in and around the Uganda Museum in 2011.

40 *"Die Museen sind nicht nur Monumente kolonialen Unrechts, sie sind vor allem auch Monumente der Erziehung des weißen europäischen Menschen in kolonialem Denken und eurozentrischer Überlegenheitsfantasie, der epistemischen und ästhetischen Schulung in Exotismus und Rassismus."* Kravagna, Christian, *"Vom ethnologischen Museum zum unmöglichen Kolonialmuseum,"* Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften, *"Der Preis der Wissenschaft," no. 1, 2015, pp. 95-100, here, p. 96.* **41** *Bhabha 1984, (note 32), p. 127.*



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