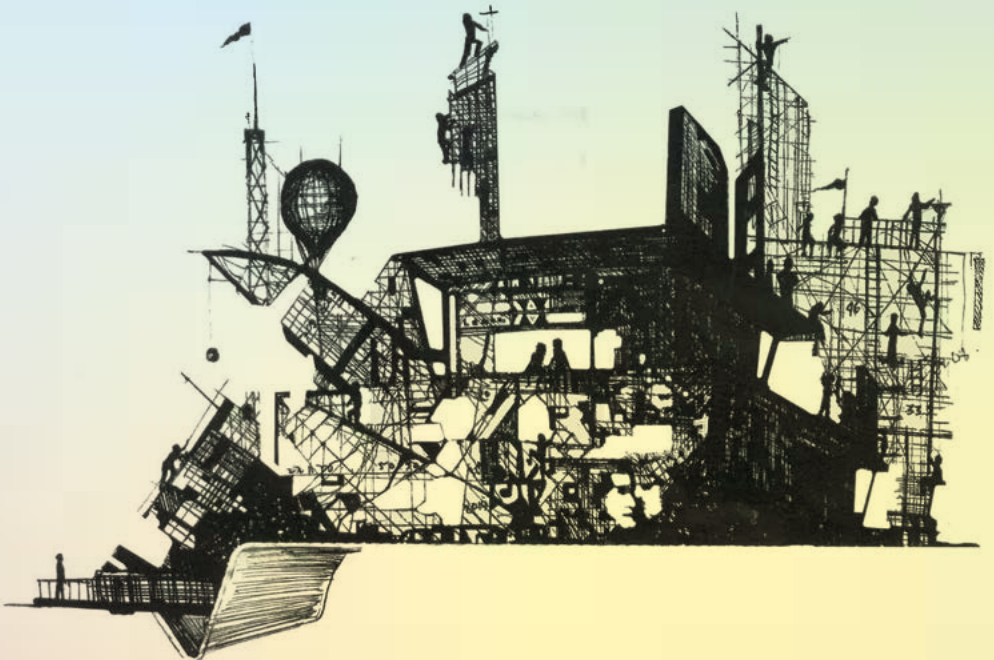


Linköping Studies in Arts and Sciences No. 859

# “Not All Museums”

MEMORY, POLITICS, AND MUSEUM  
ACTIVISM ON THE MOVE

Olga Zabalueva



**li.u** LINKÖPING  
UNIVERSITY



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Memory, politics, and museum activism on the  
move

Olga Zabalueva



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# **Abstract**

*“Not All Museums”*: *Memory, politics, and museum activism on the move* is a study of the institutional ontology of museums: how it is being changed and which issues and actors are calling for such change.

A museum project that started from scratch in the mid-2010s – the Museum of Movements in Malmö, Sweden – is used as a lens to examine how the global processes of (re)imagining the museum are unfolding in the local Swedish context. The research questions addressed in the dissertation consider the use of politics in the process of museum making (and unmaking); framing of “difficult issues” which cultural institutions are dealing with in both the global and the Swedish museum context; and constituting socially relevant and sustainable museum practices based on agonistic memory framework and museum activism.

Addressing these research questions, the text moves constantly between analysis of theories and empirical material. Each chapter also discusses existing research in the relevant field, be it museum politics, memory studies or the concept of “difficult issues”. The study relies on the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the process of the Museum of Movements’ making and unmaking (2018-2020) and brings in theoretical frameworks to connect museology and memory studies in order to explain museum- and memory politics and museums as processes.

**Keywords:** museum activism, museum politics, Sweden, memory studies, museum definition

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Norrköping, June 2023  
Olga Zabalueva

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# Introduction

Whenever a critical discussion on the role of museums in the contemporary world takes place, or when the social relevance of the museums is being questioned, one can frequently hear the classic argument “yes, but”: yes, museums are still colonial/too white/Eurocentric/not accessible for everyone/not inclusive enough/you name it, but we also have these wonderful programmes, or that one temporary exhibition, or this entire project team of LGBTQI+ and/or BIPOC staff. We are trying our best to lower thresholds and be inclusive and to give space to marginalised voices.

I acknowledge these efforts and by no means plan to diminish them; in fact, the museum project that I am focusing on (the Museum of Movements in Malmö, Sweden) represents one of them. However, in this dissertation, I also want to look beyond specific examples and investigate structural problems in the field, to ask what it takes to create a *socially relevant* museum “shaped out of ethically-informed values, that is intended to bring about political, social and environmental change” (Janes & Sandell, 2019, p. 1) – and whether there is a need for such a museum, in both a Swedish and a global context. My interest lies in the question – what is the problem with museums? Is a socially relevant museum possible and what might it look like?

Museums are institutions of modernity, born alongside contemporary notions of nation, history, and patrimony. Benedict Anderson (2006) names the census, the map and the museum as three institutions of power that shape the construction of the nation-state and create identities within it. All three are essentially means of detachment, ways of thinking abstractly about peoples, territories, and cultures. No wonder that the emergence of museums as we know them today – as *public institutions* – coincides with the formation of the *public* itself (Agamben, 2000; Jonsson, 2008), with the British Museum opening its doors in 1759 and the Louvre in 1793<sup>1</sup>, followed by the first “museum boom” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> These are the most iconic examples in the Western world, which are usually referred to in discussions of the introduction of the museum as a nation-building tool (cf.

Museums are also a “powerful epistemic technology” (Tlostanova, 2017, p. 74), responsible for producing and shaping knowledge within societies, as well as for the coloniality of knowledge systems globally (cf. Mignolo, 2015). In a way, the museums of modernity serve as “objects of deculturation, as the final resting place for evidence of the success of missionizing and colonizing efforts, among others, that preserve (in the museum) what was wiped out (in the community)” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2017, p. 77). There is a broad field of scholarship “that points to the multiple frictions and contestations built into the institution of museums” (with reference to Karp et al., 2006; Vawda, 2019, p. 79).

This point of view has been challenged and critically addressed many times, both in scholarly work and by museum practitioners. For example, Andrea Witcomb in her book *Re-imagining the Museum*, investigates the friction between the traditional role of museums and the demand for more inclusive policies. She sees both the critique that addresses museums’ “conservative political meanings” and the defensive stance of “those who respect and treasure traditional museum practices” (2003, p. 3) as contributing to the polarisation in the contemporary debate on museums.

The current state of the art in the field of museum practice and museum studies, however, indicates the ongoing crisis – one might even call it an “identity crisis” – of museums (Merritt, 2009). Institutions are being called out for their disciplinary origins, past colonial practices and current questionable policies (cf. Cairns, 2018; Sarr & Savoy, 2018). Museums have been deemed to be “beyond salvation” (Hage, 2000)<sup>2</sup> and incapable of being decolonised (Kassim, 2017). In the 2020s, this kind of activism originates not only from outside, but from inside the institutions as well.<sup>3</sup>

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Aronsson & Elgenius, 2015; Schubert, 2000). The difference compared to previous institutions, such as cabinets of curiosities or royal galleries, which were also often open to visitors to some extent, was the issue of ownership. The new type of museum was not only open to the general public (or what was conceived of as “the general public” at the time) but was designed to become an asset of the entire nation.

<sup>2</sup> See also initiatives such as the *Death to Museums* series of talks (e.g. Death to Museums, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> See the fight for anti-racism and for BIPOC employees’ rights in Canadian museums (Pauls, 2020), as well as the recently introduced community practice of openly discussing wages and precarity jobs in museum institutions (Small, 2019).

With the same passion, other voices decry the devaluing and victimisation of museums, emphasising the importance of heritage institutions as the caretakers of fragile and valuable treasures (e.g., Raposo, 2020a, 2020b) that are threatened by today’s politicisation of the field (Petrunina, 2021). Another strand of research studies museums as places for empathy and care, which are not as hopeless as they are sometimes made out to be (Witcomb, 2015). Wherever there are allegations of museums being authoritative institutions that impose certain narratives (Bennett, 1995; Smith, 2006), there also emerge numerous examples of museums that are working for social change and trying to transform their practices (see, for example, Adair & Levin, 2020; Modest, 2018; Perla & Ullah, 2019).

Not all museums, though.

Ironically enough, this kind of crisis is nothing new in the museum world. The divide that I address in this dissertation has existed for a long time, from the very invention of the modern museum as an institution, and is grounded in its contradictory nature.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, one can talk about multiple divides here, and this study aims to investigate several of them. Museums are essentially trapped between two paradigms: that of the treasury/archive (hidden from the gaze) and that of the fair/shopping mall (exposed to the gaze), between practices of conservation and of exhibition, between neutrality and politicisation, “pure science” and activism. Most of the prominent museum debates of the last century deal with the dichotomy of “collections” (authentic objects) and “publics” (subjects).<sup>5</sup> The question that remains, however, is what makes these dichotomies so real and prominent? And what happens if the third actor – “the museum” itself – enters this stage?

The focus of my study – the Museum of Movements in Malmö, Sweden – exemplifies this debate between public engagement on the one hand, and preservation of “pure scientific knowledge” on the other, embodied in an institutional form. The Malmö-based museum project

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<sup>4</sup> As early as 1936, the dichotomy between “museums of things” and “museums of ideas” was addressed in the *Science* journal (Gregory, 1936) as part of rethinking the purpose of natural history museums. The point of contention was the educational role of museum institutions: again, their *public* purpose.

<sup>5</sup> There are also examples of how this divide can be bridged, such as the Norwegian-Swedish project *Tingens metod* (RAÄ, 2019), which employed the Latourian approach to reimagining the process of meaning-making in museums.

focused on a broad range of subjects, including migration, human rights, popular movements, and civil society-based activism. Introduced in 2015 as an initiative for a new “national museum for democracy and migration in Malmö”, it went through a series of decisions and investigations, developing alongside the unfolding “refugee crisis” of 2015 in Europe (and its lasting media and political echoes), and operated with support from the Swedish government as the Museum of Movements project/working space in 2018-2020, before both local and national funding was stopped.

Designed in the very place where civil society-based activism was coming together as a response to the urgent situation (Nikolić, 2017), the project from the beginning had a connection to the unfolding “crisis”. It had several political implications: first, it was introduced from above – the idea was suggested by the City Council (*Malmö kommunstyrelse*).<sup>6</sup> The feasibility study was organised by the City’s Cultural Department (*Kulturförvaltningen*) with support from state institutions (the Swedish History Museum, the Museum of World Culture, and the Swedish Exhibition Agency) and received funding from the Swedish government. The other reason for the museum project being “politicised” was the hot debate around immigration, which is still very relevant both in Sweden and worldwide.<sup>7</sup>

These frictions – of museums being/becoming political – became very visible in the context of the so-called Swedish museum debate (as I argue elsewhere, see Zabalueva, 2019) and the international discussion on the museum definition in 2019-2020 (see, for example, the special issue of *Museum International: “The Museum Definition: The Backbone of Museums”*, 2019), both of which I address in this dissertation. The crucial questions highlighted in both these discussions were: are museums inherently apolitical, neutral institutions based on the experts’ knowledge? Is it allowed for a museum to think and act politically?

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<sup>6</sup> All the translations from Swedish included in the text are made by the author. For Swedish governmental bodies, I mainly use the translations suggested by CKS – the Centre for Local Government Studies at Linköping University (*Sveriges kommuner och landsting: Begrepp för översättning till engelska*).

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the Swedish media narrative on the “migration crisis”, see Dalia Abdelhady’s chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Migration Crises* (2019).

What is this snapping point, then, that makes it impossible for museums globally to continue business as usual – and that led the Swedish government to the decision to stop funding the Museum of Movements?

Is it the “recentness” of the subject in the chronological sense? The politically loaded issues that the museum project aspired to deal with? The demand for public dialogue and collaboration in regards to “difficult issues”? The case of the Museum of Movements can help to shed some light on these questions.

In this dissertation, I am studying the process, rather than the “final product”, of museum-making in the contemporary world. The Museum of Movements project provides the essential insights into how this *becoming* unfolded, from the clean slate to the functioning organisation; what the conditions were for the *coming-to-be* of this new type of museum; and what challenges it encountered on the way.

The demand for radical change in the museum world has been voiced by researchers (Azoulay, 2019; Doering, 2020) and activists (Roque Rodríguez, 2017) alike, and even by international bodies such as ICOM (International Council of Museums). This demand is not new, but it is somewhat telling that we still have the same issues before us 20, 70 and 100 years on from the moment they were raised for the first time.

Museums are wonderful and inspiring. They also *are* political – politics is being ingrained in every institutional structure, starting from the museum mechanics itself. However, we, as human beings, are political too, whether we want to be or not. The troubled and challenging *contemporary* we are living in, and that heritage institutions are trying to make meanings of, calls for a “new political imagination” (Tlostanova & Fry, 2021) which will be “able to grasp the dynamic of relational complexity” and maintain “a coexistence and correlation of many different interacting and interesting positions with equal rights to existence” (ibid.). My dissertation aims to contribute to this discourse in the fields of museum studies and museology. In the following text, I bring diverse narratives and political agencies together and argue that it is possible for the museum to be humble, responsive, and helpful – but only if the different political agencies of groups and individuals are combined in an intricate fabric of the living practice.

## *Inledning / Introduction*

The notion of “dialogue” is frequently referenced in the museum world (including the Museum of Movements’ working process studied here). However, dialogue implies *two sides*, introducing unnecessary dichotomies and divides; in my research, I want to make it a polyphonic process – and follow up all these sides and voices (including my own) through the analysis of memory, politics, and museum activism on the move.

# Chapter 1. Setting the scene

This chapter's objectives are to survey the (inter)disciplinary context of museum studies; to introduce the analytical frameworks underpinning the research; to evaluate my methodological choices and their possible shortcomings; and to present the research design.

## 1.1. Aim and research questions

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the institutional ontology of museums: how it is being changed and which issues and actors are calling for such change. I am using a museum project that started from scratch in the mid-2010s – the Museum of Movements in Malmö, Sweden – as a lens to examine how the global processes of (re)imagining the museum are unfolding in the local Swedish context.

To unpack this aim, I will focus on how museums globally address politically sensitive topics or “difficult issues” that evoke emotionally charged responses. What happens when these topics are placed into museums? I will examine the power relations that shaped this process, what role memory plays in it and how it affects the museum's position in the contemporary world and changes its institutional ontology.

In doing so, I want to find out if the very cultural practice of *musealisation* can help to interpret and discuss these sensitive, “difficult” topics, and what the implications are of memory politics, especially in connection to the historical *recentness* of the issues that many museums are addressing today. To achieve this, I plan to focus on the gaps and tacit controversies inherent to museums and identify what the incentives are that are making these gaps and controversies (all of a sudden) visible in the contemporary museum landscape.

The research questions that I aim to investigate are:

- How is politics being employed in the process of museum making (and unmaking)?

- Why are some issues “difficult” in both the global and the Swedish museum context?
- What is the role of memory politics in the museum-making processes?
- What role do individual agencies/actors play in constituting socially relevant and sustainable museum practices?

To answer all these questions, I plan to use museology as a starting point and bring in concepts and frameworks from other disciplines. I am addressing museum politics as a complex area which includes the fields of *realpolitik*; the politics of remembering and forgetting “difficult issues”; the epistemic politics of museums as the institutions of knowledge production; as well as the actual practices of collecting, exhibiting, and curating this knowledge.

The overall purpose of the dissertation is to elaborate on what can stimulate change in museum institutions and instigate new practices, what role does politics, memory, and museum activism play in this change. Is it possible to develop a form of museum which will address “difficult issues” and “contested contemporary” without authoritative, paternalistic standpoint of museum neutrality? What are conditions and possibilities for the new museum imagination?

Museums today are increasingly interested in stepping into the contemporary arena and engaging in the public debate on pressing societal questions, therefore bringing together all these strands can help to answer the challenges and opportunities of the museum’s mission and role today.

## **1.2. Dissertation structure**

In order to address the research questions, this text moves constantly between analyses of theories and diverse empirical material. Each chapter also discusses existing research in the relevant field, be it museum politics, memory studies or the concept of “difficult issues”.

This first chapter introduces the aims of the dissertation; provides the background for the museological field and existing museum

ontologies; addresses the overarching theoretical framework and approach; describes the methods; and introduces the material. It also includes a discussion on ethics, positionality, and the researcher's role in this specific study.

Chapter 2 delves into museum politics. Starting from the global scale and the role museums play in the contemporary world, the first subchapter, "Museums as political devices", addresses two paradigms of museum-making, starting with the emergence of these institutions in the modern sense: on the one hand, national museums, especially the museums of cultural history which stage the nation and define "us" against "others", and on the other, cosmopolitan/global/postcolonial museums that deal with narratives, complex identities and marginalised communities.<sup>8</sup> This division is important for the whole thesis, as it is often perceived (by publics, opinion-makers, museum professionals, politicians and academics alike) that the first category of museums (as well as the concept of "museum" itself) is neutral and apolitical and the second is not.

The second part of Chapter 2 addresses the process of museum-making of the Museum of Movements: how *the political* was exercised both from above (by the municipality and state cultural administration) and from below (in the sense of grassroots initiatives and civil society). It also analyses parallel processes in the Malmö Cultural Department that were focused on similar themes and issues as the Museum of Movements project, such as the Safe Havens/ICORN network for artists, writers and journalists at risk and the Rescue Archive of the endangered materials – both of which were aimed at overlapping audiences and source communities and envisioned sometime in the future being part(ner)s of the Museum of Movements. These examples, as well as the adherence to employing research in the museum practice, represent the museum mechanics that all the projects obtained at one point or another.

Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the political nature of the decision to close down the Museum of Movements and its supposed rivalry with another museum project: that of the Swedish Holocaust

Museum. This implication poses the question of how, in the cosmopolitan museum-of-ideas paradigm, one topic can be politically preferred over another. From this discussion, the main question for the third chapter emerges: what are the “difficult issues” in museums and how are they affecting museum-making processes?

Chapter 3 begins by framing “difficult issues” in heritage and the museum world. The first subchapter draws on North American examples, which are relevant to the museum project case I am studying in that the intention to follow these examples in Sweden was voiced several times by different actors. The second part of Chapter 3 examines which issues are considered “difficult” in Sweden, and the ways in which attitudes to these have changed over recent decades. The third subchapter focuses on the “museum debate”, a series of articles in Swedish newspapers which discussed the role of museums in society as custodians of expertise and objective/neutral knowledge. The concluding remarks of the chapter introduce another important divide in the museum mechanics in addition to the other dichotomies mentioned in previous chapters: that of past and present, history and memory, thus suggesting the approach on which the fourth chapter is built.

Chapter 4 begins with an assessment of frameworks from memory studies and the emergence of this interdisciplinary field of knowledge, with specific focus on the theoretical background for cultural and communicative memory, agonistic memory, and memory activism. Through the lens of these theories, the chapter provides an analysis of two Swedish museum projects – the Holocaust Museum and the Museum of Movements – and, more to the point, the subject matter that these projects planned to collect, research and exhibit.

Chapter 5 returns to the issue of politics and reimagining the museum in the global contemporary, but this time with more focus on individual actors and the vision from within the project. It is the most empirically dense chapter, which draws on the several features of how did the Museum of Movements worked and the multiple perspectives informing its inception, development, and the memories it left behind.

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<sup>8</sup> These categories are, of course, very broad and vague and sometimes overlapping, but can also be seen as the modes of survival for museums in the contentious politics of the

The overall aim of the chapter is to investigate what the conditions are for thinking museums differently in the contemporary world and how they played out in the Museum of Movements.

The chapter is arranged around certain topics, such as the role of collaborative effort, the precarious status of the museum project and its team, their ability to (re)act and take a proactive stance to address complex circumstances, and also the ambitions, visions and affects which individual members of the team connected to the museum project.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions and raises the questions for the future research.

### **1.3.1. What does it mean to be a museum?**

What are museums today? The question is frequently debated in academic and institutional contexts, such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and, recently, these discussions have also reached the general public (Marshall, 2020; Seymour, 2022).

However, is it even possible to define museums across the spectrum? Do smaller regional or community-driven museums and the great universalist institutions of modernity such as the Louvre, the British Museum or the Met have anything in common? What about the diversity of the disciplines that lie at the foundation of these institutions? The natural history collections assembled at universities differ prominently from those of art museums, be it a former royal collection of antiquities and Renaissance paintings or a contemporary art venue; the open-air museums of cultural history and/or ethnography are facing different challenges than those based on the artifacts of colonial expansion, which are also called ethnographic museums.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, which institutions have the right to be called a “museum”? In the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world

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global contemporary.

<sup>9</sup> I presented this spectrum of questions on several ICOFOM symposia as materials for discussion, including the 42<sup>nd</sup> ICOFOM symposium *The Future of Tradition in Museology*, Kyoto (Japan), 1-7 September 2019 (Zabalueva & Perla, 2019) and the 45<sup>th</sup> ICOFOM symposium *Taboos in museology: Difficult issues for museum theory*, Prague and Brno (Czechia), 22 - 27 August 2022 (Zabalueva, 2022b).

witnessed the emergence of museums without collections, or “museums of ideas” (Gabriel, 2011; cf. Padiglione, 2016), and the second half of the 2010s was marked, for example, by the appearance of Instagram-friendly “museums” that offer backdrops seemingly designed for taking photos (Pardes, 2017). One can also name science centres based on immersive technologies, which are often referred to as “museums”. At the same time, other museums are leaning towards different institutional denominations, such as “galleries” or “centres”. Art historian Dan Karlholm argues that the more obvious the cultural value of the collection, the less it needs to be scaffolded by the inclusion of the word “museum” in the title of the institution (2015).<sup>10</sup>

Yet, despite all these differences, there remains a core idea, a “matter of museums” (Hein, 2011) that holds this diverse crowd together, which is recognised by museum visitors, curators, academics and policy makers alike. Hilde Hein suggests that this matter is the *relationship* between experience and objects, “legitimately exposed by museums” (p. 179). I want to take that argument a little further and discuss the whole complex system of relationships on which museums are built, and especially the part which I call “museum mechanics” – the ability to decontextualise (objects and narrative from the living practice); and to bring in *the divide* – Ariella Azoulay calls it the “imperial shutter” (2019) in the context of colonial history<sup>11</sup> – that makes such relationships even possible. In this dissertation, I look at how this “matter of museums” functions in the case of a specific museum project, and how it reflects the global changes in the museum world.

The matter of museums is a complex matter. Although many museum researchers tend to focus on one or a few sides of the knowledge production that is happening at these institutions – be it collections, curatorship, management, communication with the public,

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<sup>10</sup> For the extended overview of museums’ typology and taxonomy see also *The Museum in Transition* by Hilde Hein (2000).

<sup>11</sup> Azoulay bases this concept on the art of photography, where the camera shutter functions as a tool to obtain a “legible, sharp and precise image out of the flow of light”, and argues that the same mechanics of detachment was employed in the process of collecting (and looting) objects for the imperial museums: “It commands what sort of things have to be distanced, bracketed, removed, forgotten, suppressed, ignored, overcome and made irrelevant” (p. 2). For the related notion of the “imperial gaze” see e.g. E. Ann Kaplan (1997) and for an account of museums as centres of calculation and detachment see *Collecting, Ordering, Governing* (Bennett et al., 2017).

heritage maintenance, museum architecture, or politics – each of them is equally important. The disciplinary field that studies museums from the complex perspective, and to which this dissertation can contribute, is *museology*.<sup>12</sup>

### **1.3.2. Museum studies and museology**

French museum theorists André Desvallées and François Mairesse in the *Key Concepts of Museology* (2010) in their definition of “museums” and “museology”, suggest the concept of *museal* as a theoretical field dealing with museum- and heritage-related issues “in the same way that politics are the field of political reflection” (p. 19). This concept allows the focus to shift from museums as institutions to a more general sphere which would include both museology (museum theory) and museography (museum practice), as well as international bodies and regulations. Another asset of the museal as a field of study is that it addresses both the practices and the purpose of museums.

Museum studies or museology (the discipline is named differently depending on the academic tradition and language)<sup>13</sup> has become established as one of the traditional humanities disciplines<sup>14</sup> and equipped with the methodological apparatus of historical sciences, art history and, sometimes, other field-oriented disciplines (such as natural history for natural history museums, zoology for zoological ones etc.). Kylie Message calls museology a “boundary discipline” (2015) to contextualise its interdisciplinary nature and relationship to other branches of the humanities and social sciences. It is worth noting that the concept of “boundary” here comes from sociology via the museum context and the notion of “boundary objects” (Leigh Star & Griesemer, 1989) in museum collections, which have the ability to inhabit different social worlds simultaneously and facilitate the translation between

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<sup>12</sup> In the following subchapter I am using my own literature overview from the MA thesis (Zabalueva, 2018c) and materials for discussion from the ICOFOM symposia in 2019 and 2022 (Zabalueva, 2022b; Zabalueva & Perla, 2019) with the necessary edits and later additions.

<sup>13</sup> I use both terms interchangeably, but prefer to lean towards “museology”, since this is the term used in the Swedish and Russian academic traditions (in which I am schooled).

<sup>14</sup> Though the Lusophone tradition of sociomuseology positions it, for instance, among the social sciences.

these worlds. Museums as objects for scientific inquiry, therefore, can “inhabit” different disciplinary discourses, and museology becomes a *lingua franca* for addressing diverse problems and challenges which these institutions encounter across fields.

However, despite this fluidity and interdisciplinarity, the core problem remains the same: every theoretical framework that is based on “borderlands”, “contact zones” or “boundaries” relies on the very idea of the border/boundary that defines “us” against “others” in any given taxonomy: natural sciences and humanities, hard and soft knowledge, arts and technologies, academic scholars and practitioners... The list continues. As Jami Weinstein (2021) argues, the very toolbox used to describe this framework is based on the sense of estrangement integrated into the humanities’ epistemic politics. The unnecessary and repetitive jargon used to describe what a discipline is *actually studying* can obscure the mechanisms and objects of study to a point, at which “expertise as a distancing device has gotten out of control, especially in some academic forms of expression, to the extent that they have become antidemocratic and even anti-intellectual” (Said, 2004, as cited in Weinstein, 2021, p. 173). The focus on binary oppositions also tends to overlook the hybrid and fluid identities which continue to exist and multiply in the “borderlands”.<sup>15</sup> In this dissertation, I am focused on the complexity of issue, following Madina Tlostanova and Tony Fry’s claim that “the reductive disciplinary modes of thought that attempt to understand [the contemporary crisis] by *abstracting* an individual element are attached to the kind of thinking that created the problem” (2021, p. xi, italics mine) in the first place.

The field of museum studies is diverse and multi-layered, even within the specialised ICOM’s committee (ICOFOM – International Committee for Museology) sphere of research. Thus, for example, there is a clear distinction made between the Francophone and Anglo-American schools of museology,<sup>16</sup> especially within the movement that

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<sup>15</sup> This concept is further developed in the section 1.4. “Analytical framework”.

<sup>16</sup> Another branch named in the *Key Concepts* (Mairesse & Desvallées, 2010) is the Central and Eastern European tradition of perceiving museology as a science. However, Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries and their museological discourses are barely mentioned in this specific publication, even though a lot of ICOFOM’s research is being conducted in Latin America (for example, MINOM, or the International Movement for a New Museology, and the whole field of sociomuseology). For a more

is called *New Museology* (or, sometimes, critical museology) which, according to the *Key Concepts*, has both French and Anglo-Saxon origins in the late 1970s - 1980s.

## New Museology

In France, the concept of *la nouvelle muséologie*, which emphasises the social role of museums and their interdisciplinary character, was introduced in the late 1970s (Mairesse & Desvallées, 2010, p. 55). It originates from the prominent theoretical tradition within ICOM institutions and Georges Henri Rivière's *ecomuseums*,<sup>17</sup> which is focused on local identities and communities. In Rivière's vision, "the ecomuseum [...] on a given territory expresses the relationship between man and nature through time and space on this territory" (1978, cited in Mairesse & Desvallées, 2010, p. 59). This approach integrates a local natural and cultural environment into the cultural landscape that consists of diverse forms of heritage.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, the concept was introduced in an anthology edited by Peter Vergo, *New Museology* (1989). According to Vergo, the "old" museology was "too much about museum *methods*, and too little about the purposes of museums" (p. 3). He argues that museology can be perceived as a narrow field of knowledge; a discipline that studies museums and is interesting only for museum professionals. On the other hand, museums at the time were addressing almost every possible subject, which allowed them to reach much broader audiences. Vergo appeals for a "radical re-examination" of the museums' role within society.

Deirdre Stam (1993) argues that what the new museology addressed first and foremost was the *information base* of museums, as it is focused on the "processing of knowledge" (p. 58). She suggests that all the levels of this underlying information base, from the paper catalogue

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detailed account of different branches and directions of the discipline (as well as their mutual unawareness of one another), see Peter van Mensch's *Towards a Methodology of Museology* (1992) and Bruno Brulon Soares' *Decolonising the Museum?* (2021).

<sup>17</sup> The term was introduced by the French museologist Hugues de Varine in 1971 and developed further by Georges Henri Rivière, the first acting director of ICOM and founding father of French museology.

cards to the personnel record, contribute in one way or another to the museum's mission. Furthermore, by reconsidering this information base, it is possible to achieve the new museology's endeavour to transform museums into socially relevant institutions, or at least answer the "fundamental question of New Museology: what is the purpose of the museum?" (p. 59). Stam describes "the information to be derived by public from the museum" as the primary museum product (p. 60), rather than the ways of preservation and display of the artefacts. In a sense, the new museology has followed the "linguistic turn" and then consequently the post-structuralist movement in the broader field of cultural studies.

In the context of this dissertation, the new museology can be conceived of as a twofold field. On the one hand, it represents the state of the art or previous research as a shift in museal knowledge from the authoritative homogeneous narrative to participative representation, from collections to communities, and from objects to stories. On the other hand, it is still an intensely theoretical area. Stam points out that the new museology "has not so far explained exactly how [its] theoretical framework should be translated into practice" (1993, p. 55); 20 years later, in a study on British cultural institutions, Clive Gray and Vikki McCall stated that "the 'new museology' is less useful for praxis – museums have been left to find their own routes to link ideas around the 'new museology' to what they are actually doing" (2014, p. 21).

It also worth mentioning that the whole new museology discourse has repeatedly been challenged as "not so new" (e.g., Nomikou, 2015; Starn, 2005), not only from a geographical (other than Anglo-Saxon or Francophone) perspective, but also from a chronological one. The point that Nomikou makes is that when the museology that focuses primarily on *museums* was labelled as "old", the deficiency was filled by the "ideology and discourse of cultural theory and postmodern critique" (2015, p. 205) and deemed to be focused on *society* instead. Speaking of new museology today, "one cannot ignore its political role in reaffirming traditional inequalities that sustain a hierarchical division between experience and normativity in the museum field" (Soares, 2021, p. 447) – in other words, the whole idea of bringing the social role of the museum into the museology highlighted and supported some features of the established structures instead of questioning them.

However, the further developments in the field show that there is a demand for more a complex approach.

Post-post-: museum activism

Recent strands in museum studies have continued the direction suggested by the new museology and the adjacent field of critical heritage studies (Harrison, 2013). All kinds of museologies have emerged on the way (and also preceding it; e.g. sociomuseology in Latin America): transformative museology (Weldon, 2010), reflexive museology (Butler, 2015), human rights museology (Carter & Orange, 2012), radical museology (Bishop, 2013), and post-critical museology (Walsh, 2015), to name just a few. The discussion in the literature around the separation between theory and practice often includes a critique of the critique, as in the case of art museums (Dewdney et al., 2013). In the very study of museology as a field and a discipline, certain gaps have been revealed, as in Bruno Brulon Soares' *Reflecting on a Reflexive Museology*: between, "on the one hand, the desire of most thinkers to conceive a *unity* for the scientific subject of museology, [and] on the other the empirical *diversity* observed in the different manifestations of the museum" (2015, p. 50).

Self-consciousness, reflexivity, and irony are named among the features of postmodernity used in museum practices (Butler, 2015, p. 166) – but they can also become a ground for a critique of elitist academic "detachment", exercise of thought that is disconnected from "everyday struggles" (p. 165).

I suggest that one of the ways out of this controversy, without adding deconstruction to deconstruction, is through a series of consecutive analytical steps: museums as institutions in general address the question "What does it mean to be Human?" (by organising reality and knowledge systems). To turn from *matters of fact* to *matters of concern*<sup>18</sup> in this context means, among other things, the museum

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<sup>18</sup> Bruno Latour suggests "matters of concern" as a way out of the circle of critique and critique of the critique. If matters of fact, in the Latourian sense, are descriptive tools of knowledge production which are used for debunking and deconstruction – and, I might add, as a powerful instrument for scholarly detachment – the matters of concern make it possible to transform "the critical urge in the ethos of someone who *adds* reality to

taking a reflexive approach to its own history that can allow for the institution to consciously take a *standpoint*. There is no need for reinventing or reimagining the museum by a detached observer or investigator, but rather an urgent need to reassess the question “What does it mean to be a Museum?” by the institution itself. The idea of “museum as activist” (cf. Leshchenko, 2017) entrusts the institution itself with agency and responsibility. The museum becomes an actor alongside the collections, building and staff; the participatory engagement which is coming *from within* such an institution can prevent the museum narrative from turning into an authoritative (or even preachy) one. The existence of other actors and stakeholders, on the other hand, mitigates the risk of reflexivity growing into self-absorption.

“Museum activism” is a notion used in contemporary museum studies literature to explore the role of museums as socially relevant institutions (Janes & Sandell, 2019; Message, 2018). What is significant here is that the empowerment of communities does not diminish the role of the expertise, but rather gives to “lived experience” as much value as to “expert knowledge” (cf. Sandell et al., 2017). The turn to reflexivity, which perhaps has been more obvious and dates further back in other disciplines (such as oral history), becomes more and more clear not only in museum practices but in museum theory as well.

There is, however, a third analytical step that needs to be made: challenging museology's own detachment from its object of study (museums), akin to the often-criticised detachment of the museum visitor who studies the artefacts and specimens displayed in the glass cases; the need to critically re-examine the discipline itself (cf. Soares, 2015).

Kylie Message (2018) appeals for the new forms of critical knowledge and new forms of practice which she calls “writing about museums”. This appeal follows the developments in the museum practice itself, whereby knowledge production is moving towards a

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the matters of fact and not *abstracts* reality” (Latour, 2004, p. 232). Matters of concern are “highly complex, historically situated and richly diverse” (p. 237), and they also speak to attachment, not detachment, to acknowledging and reflecting on one's position, to the ability to care for and cherish – which, coming from the field of science and technology studies, strikingly resembles the core functions of museum institutions.

“nothing about us without us” approach (e.g., Janes & Sandell, 2019). Nevertheless, museum scholarship often remains in the position of “*describing* curatorial social activism or change”, instead of “*contributing* to this activism” (Message, 2018, p. 38). Museum theory not only needs to be decolonised (Soares & Leshchenko, 2018); there is also a demand for new forms of museological research which would reflect on the conditions of the knowledge production process in exactly the way that museums are struggling to do. As I suggest elsewhere (Zabalueva & Perla, 2019), “museum activism” can be complemented by “activist museology” as a reflexive and participatory scholarly practice.<sup>19</sup>

In their recent book *Queering the Museum*, Nikki Sullivan and Graig Middleton suggest the same epistemological shift from the “matters of fact” to the “matters of concern” in the Latourian sense; from museums as the sites of “neutral” and “objective” knowledge production to the *inclusive museum* – not only in a sense of including marginalised voices and unspoken (hi)stories, but also as in *being included*, the institution that is “both shaped by and shape[s] the socio-political landscapes in which [it] operate[s]” (2019, p. 107). The authors propose rethinking the museum “as a method, a heterogeneous and situated set of activities: a verb as much as a noun” (p. 109), a *process* rather than a rigid structure (cf. Cameron, 2015). The Córdoba Declaration issued by a group of South American sociomuseologists states: “A museology that is not life-oriented is not worthy” (MINOM, 2017) – putting a strong emphasis in the discussion of the social relevance of museology.

All these changes in the disciplinary field of museum studies do not belong exclusively to academia; moreover, museum practice sometimes follows the lateral route and arrives at the point of radical rethinking even faster than scholarship<sup>20</sup> (and much faster than regulations, issued by the international bodies, as we will see in the following subchapter).

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<sup>19</sup> Which, to distinguish it from reflexive museology, for instance, includes the (political) standpoint of the researcher as the part of the research process.

<sup>20</sup> As Bruno Brulon Soares puts it, the ICOM definition of museum from the 1970s ignored “the new experimental forms of the museum that were thriving around the globe since the 1960s, among which the ecomuseums in France, social and indigenous museums in Latin America, and the neighbourhood museums in the United States” (2021, p. 445).

### 1.3.3. Museum definition debate

It is possible to identify two major discourses in both museum theory and practice. They are particularly apparent in the discussion that took place between 2016 and 2020 around a possible new version of the universal museum definition by ICOM. These two discourses can be called *preservation expertise* and *museum activism*, and are seemingly grounded in two basic groups of museum functions: one of collecting, conserving, and researching heritage; and another of communicating, educating, and interacting with the surrounding society.<sup>21</sup> As both groups of functions have been inherent to museums from the very establishment of this institution in a modern sense, this internal controversy also dates back a couple of centuries.<sup>22</sup>

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

(International Council of Museums (ICOM), Statutes, 2017, p. 3)

This museum definition has existed since 1974 (the latest version since 2007), but in 2017, ICOM launched a Standing Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials (MDPP) to reassess it.<sup>23</sup> The proposed new definition, published by the MDPP in July 2019, provoked a lively discussion which continued at the ICOM general conference held between 1-7 September 2019 in Kyoto, Japan. The new alternative museum definition read as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> These discourses also reflect, in a sense, a Latourian divide which will be addressed in the next subchapter: the one between “man” and “reality”, or “nature” and “society”.

<sup>22</sup> Taking into account that the “social” function paradigm somewhere shifted from entertaining and serving the curiosity of individuals, to educating and civilising the populace and then to contributing to human rights and equality – without negating the previous paradigms which keep (re)appearing in the museum practices. For a historical overview of these two paradigms in the museum definition, see “The definition of the museum through its social role” (Brown & Mairesse, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> The mandate for the MDPP included “identifying the museological and epistemological imperatives for revision of ICOM’s museum definition, as a shared and international framework that reflects current conditions, potential, and priorities for museums” (MDPP, 2018).

Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.

Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.

(ICOM, 2019)

One of the issues with this proposal, which its critics have repeatedly emphasised, was its “political” or “ideological” nature (e.g., de Varine, 2019). According to the former ICOM president François Mairesse, the “terms which gave rise to the most discussion” were “polyphonic”, “social justice”, etc. (2020, p. 76). Several active participants in the museum definition debate also articulated that the discussion highlighted “the rift” or “the fissures that separate us”, even if the entire Kyoto debate was more complicated than the “feud” between reformers and conservatives (Etges & Dean, 2022).

If we compare the two definitions – from 2007 and 2019 – against each other, we can see that the same functions (collecting, preserving, researching, interpreting, exhibiting) are mentioned in both. The alternative proposal, however, focuses very much on *how* museums should perform these functions (by being democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces, etc.) and, more importantly, on *why* they do so (cf. “for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” in the current definition, and “to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing” in the 2019 proposal). Furthermore, the new proposed definition problematised a somewhat essentialist idea of “society and its development” which, precisely because of its “neutral” nature, allows for diverse readings along the length of the

political spectrum.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is the questions of *how* and *why* that engenders “ideological” debate which, at the Kyoto conference, postponed the decision about the new definition until the next ICOM General Assembly.

During the heated discussions that took place in Kyoto in September 2019, the words “politics” and “ideology” could be heard as often as “neutrality” and “knowledge”. The delegates were clearly divided alongside these lines, with one party calling for preserving heritage and staying objective (by any means necessary), and the other in favour of acting for social change. It is impossible to determine which side in this debate held more moral capital; but the problem (in my opinion) is that both sides were operating within the same framework, which either took the institutional structure of museums as a given or reinvented the same structure in a new form, without questioning it in the first place.<sup>25</sup> In a way, this debate perpetuates the divide between an “object-/research-oriented” museum and a “public-/society-oriented” one which is, as I mentioned in the introduction, nothing new in the museum world (cf. O’Neill, 2006). Indeed, “defining the museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has proven to be a political and ethical challenge” (Soares, 2021, p. 441) which, among other things, had difficulty to apply “the participation of communities” in the inherently authorised, universal discourse of museum definition (ibid.).

Some of the more substantial critique in Kyoto 2019 towards the MDPP’s proposal addressed the fact that ICOM’s international museum definition is frequently used in public discourse and even in legislation, so it must be very short and concrete – and translatable into the multiple languages. One of the suggestions proposed at the plenary

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly enough, the idea of “society” here originates from new museology and its focus on communities (Brown & Mairesse, 2018). However, the political issue with “society and its development” (as in, for example, can we perceive authoritative, statist, or even fascist ideologies to be in service of certain societies and their development?) was never taken up, whereas “social justice” and “advocacy” were broadly criticised; moreover, in the time of changing the definition in the 1970s, adding the societal role of museums to it was perceived as progressive and “political” (see Soares, 2021, pp. 444, 446).

<sup>25</sup> One can recall Walter Mignolo’s discussion of Sylvia Wynter’s work, which, rather than providing a new definition of the universal Human to replace that of the white Christian Eurocentric Man, urges us to ask the question: “What does it mean to be Human?” (Mignolo, 2015, p. 122).

sessions on the museum definition issue was that the new proposal could play the role of a mission or vision, rather than becoming a part of national and international legal frameworks as the “old” definition had done. Another suggestion was to vote for the new proposed definition as a “pilot” version and adjust it during the following year, to be approved at the next General Assembly. However, none of this ever happened, and the question of voting “for” or “against” the new definition transformed into voting “for” or “against” postponing the decision (with 70% votes in favour of postponement).

The museum definition debate did not end with the postponement in Kyoto. A new committee – MDPP-2 – was established by ICOM in January 2020, with a focus on the inclusion of underrepresented voices, as one of the main criticisms of the 2019 proposal was that it did not “faithfully reflect the contributions submitted by members or associations to ICOM” (*Invitation to Postpone ICOM’s Extraordinary General Assembly in Order to Continue, with the National and International Committees, the Reflection on a New Museum Definition*, 2019). The next round of discussions came in June 2020 and started with the resignations of the chair and some of the members of MDPP-2, as well as two members of the ICOM Executive Board and then president of ICOM, Suay Aksoy (Marshall, 2020). Both ICOM in general and the standing committee in particular became the arenas for political argument, accusations and mutual implications in non-transparent decision-making.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly enough, part of this ongoing debate was happening on open social media platforms such as Facebook, and also attracted public attention to the museum definition question (cf. Etges & Dean, 2022).

The media coverage and heated discussions on social media resulted in a demand from several national and international committees for ICOM to be more transparent – at least in its explanation of what was happening with the museum definition project (see *Message from the Executive Board of ICOM*, 2020, for example). Some information was provided to the organisation’s members; however, due to the extraordinary situation of COVID-19, uncertainty left after the

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, *Open letter to the president, executive board, and general director of ICOM from the Board of IC Ethics*, 22 June 2020 (ICEthics, 2020).

resignations until the new working group on museum definition has emerged – the reformed MDPP-2 which turned into ICOM Define, re-established as the Standing Committee for the Museum Definition in 2020.

ICOM Define developed the new methodology for the revision of museum definition which was implemented in 2020-2021, which included a “call to open consultations involving members and non-members of ICOM” and stated “a will to change not only the words and concepts in this operational text but ICOM’s decision-making processes” (Soares, 2021, p. 451). The process included constant movement back and forth between the working group and the participants, suggesting variety of proposals and cutting down/merging/developing some of them. One of the co-chairs of ICOM Define, Bruno Brulon Soares, argues that this methodology provided an opportunity for international and national committees “to share their authority with societies, including subaltern groups and marginal populations... finally being perceived as living creators rather than subservient participants in the heritage field” (p. 452) – and by this, the process of redefining the museum globally in 2020-2022 can be considered as a way to contribute to museums’ decolonisation.

After two years of work, the Standing Committee presented the new museum definition, which was approved on 24 August 2022 in Prague, by the Extraordinary General Assembly of ICOM with 92,41% votes for the change.

Following this adoption, the new ICOM museum definition reads as following:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.

(ICOM, 2022)

This ICOM Museum Definition of 2022 will certainly produce more academic and public debates in the future, however, at the moment of voting it represented the consensus for the international forum of museum professionals and scholars, which is ICOM General Conference, balancing between being “political” but not quite as much as the 2019 proposal. As Brulon Soares puts it, “it can be used to reproduce power structures and to materialise inherited authorities, but it can also be used to defy authority and to allow the emergency of new empowered subjects into history” (2021, p. 452).

If we are going to talk about (re)defining the museum, it will be useful to clarify some key concepts – and also what kind of museum ontology lies at the foundation of this text.

#### **1.4. Analytical framework**

The theoretical framework on which this research is based provides an understanding of *museum mechanics*: how do museums work, and what does it mean that they work this way? How do these impossible institutions, so full of controversial impulses – to preserve, to keep safe but at the same time to be open and accessible – even functioning?

This dissertation is written as an interdisciplinary theory-driven study. As Kylie Message puts it, “[b]eing interdisciplinary is not about casually incorporating elements in a pick-and-mix style, and it requires engaging with a field in a way that is discursively defensible” (2018, p. 67). In my inquiry – and specifically the following subchapter, which presents the theoretical overview – I focus on the concepts of *detachment* and *divide* in various senses. Theory and practice, “preservation drive” and “museum activism”, neutrality and politics, history and memory – all these dichotomies continue to exist in museum scholarship, museum practice and public discourse around museums. What this dissertation is aiming at is to identify Latourian “matters of concern” in this field, question the relationships within and in between the binaries, and narrate the history of one specific museum-making and unmaking by theoretically contextualising it. In order to do so, I will briefly sketch the museum mechanics’ theoretical origins, followed by the overarching conceptual framework of the whole thesis which draws on both the (Non-) Modern Constitution of Bruno Latour (Latour, 1993) and the concept of coloniality of knowledge

(Mignolo, 2010; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). To elaborate on writing (with) museums as the “borderwork” (Message, 2018) I will further identify what the “difficult issues” are in the museal field and how they transcend the boundaries and create a space of opportunity for “thinking museums politically” (Zabalueva, 2022b). Theoretical concepts from memory studies, which are also overviewed in this subchapter, allow for identifying a “matter of concern” around which the argument of this dissertation is assembled; they provide the analytical apparatus for explaining the contentious, “difficult” and political in the museum world.

The use of these diverse frameworks enables different scopes of analysis, from geopolitical – be it at local, national, or global levels – to practical/theoretical (in focusing on one specific case vs the discipline of museology as such) approaches in the museal field, and allows for depicting a complex, multifaceted and engaged understanding of the current institutional ontologies of museums.

Museums have a specific relationship to both time and space. One of the fundamental texts that helps to condense both is *Of Other Spaces* by Michel Foucault (1986). Foucault conceptualises museums (among other public spaces) as *heterotopias*, or spaces of *otherness* that tend to encapsulate time and space and disengage objects from their contexts. When museum scholars describe specific features of museums, they also emphasise, along with the sensory nature of museum experiences, their ability to *marginalise reality* (Mairesse & Desvallées, 2010, p. 50) or to *create a space* through separation and decontextualisation. This separation can take diverse forms and can be explained from the resemblance with academic disciplines, for example, history: “Museums and history are close kin, each with proprietary claims on gathering and interpreting materials from the past” (Starn, 2005). While Randolph Starn states that all museums are in a way historical, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett maintains that “museums, by their very nature, aestheticize what they show, even when the objects they display are not intended to be viewed as art” (2006, p. 375). Both scholars, however, are appealing to the same ability to decontextualise, which distinguishes museums from other cultural institutions – but at the same time reveals their belonging to the Constitution of Modernity (Latour, 1993, see also the next subchapter). Following the lead of both

Starn and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, I prefer to say that all museums by their very nature are *producing heritage* of cultural and natural objects and collectives by inducing the distance between said collectives and what ends up being on display.

Museum philosopher Beth Lord argues that the ability of museums as heterotopias to be self-reflective and perform a discursive analysis on objects is underrepresented in the museum studies field. As Lord points out, a “negative view of the museum as an Enlightenment institution that embodies state power and strives to order the world according to universal rules” (2006, p. 1) makes somewhat obscure the analytical power that is embedded into museums as institutions (and here we can remember Edward Said’s “expertise as a distancing device”, 2004). According to Lord, the Foucauldian “space of representation” is the space “between things and ways of conceptualizing them”, something that makes possible “an institution that *interprets* objects” (p. 5) – unlike the cabinets of curiosities and collections that predated museums and were often designed to mediate meanings instead of creating them. The space of representation is, therefore, the gap created by the work of museum mechanics.

In the recent field of decolonial critique, where museums are described as sites of epistemic violence, the same feature is often mentioned: since museums are “by nature” places of “deep epistemological unjust practices and clashes”, they also have the potential to be reflexive and address or showcase those injustices (Vawda, 2019, p. 79).<sup>27</sup>

This spatial feature of museum’s mechanics is accompanied by certain visual patterns. Among other things, the “second Enlightenment” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century introduced new ways of seeing which “entailed a detachment of the viewer – thinking of themselves as outside or above that which was represented” (Macdonald, 2003, p. 4). The world for the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Western bourgeois gaze was organised as an exhibition, a display – from museums to department stores – made up of “spaces of emulation, places for mimetic practices whereby improving tastes, values and norms of conduct were to be more broadly

diffused through society” (Bennett, 1995, p. 30).<sup>28</sup> This created an illusion of an objective viewpoint and self-evident organisation of knowledge – through taxonomies, evolutionary progression, decisive *events* and unquestionable hierarchies revealed to the detached observer. The “Cartesian idea of the ‘*museum*’ designed, as a metaphor and literally, in the rationalist system of knowledge fabricated in Western Modernity” (Soares, 2015, p. 55) still prevails in the field of museum studies, practices, and international regulations, as we can see from the museum definition debate.

However, here the master’s tools<sup>29</sup> are partly doing their job of dismantling merely by the fact of being used: “The museum has certain Enlightenment *capabilities* – including critique, autonomy, and progress – and can use those capabilities to question and overcome the power relations that have historically been based on them” (B. Lord, 2006, p. 11) – or, in the Latourian sense, to question the critique *per se* which has “run out of steam” (2004) and debunked itself.

In order to develop this theoretical framework, I will now look more closely at the concept of the Modern Constitution proposed by Bruno Latour in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993).

### **1.4.1. Museum mechanics as an epitome of modernity**

“Museums are institutions of modernity...” – but what does that really mean? One again recalls Benedict Anderson (2006), who names the museum alongside the other mechanisms of power that shape the identities of “imagined communities”.

Why was the detachment needed in the first place? What Bruno Latour suggests as an answer to this question is the analytical model of modernity, based on a clear epistemological divide between two poles:

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<sup>27</sup> Here, one can, again, employ Azoulay’s notion of the “imperial shutter” as the metaphor for the abrupt action that creates such gaps, especially visible in the case of collections based on colonial violence.

<sup>28</sup> The world exhibitions were also meant for the working class to feel that they too could obtain the white, civilised, bourgeois gaze “outside or above that which was represented”, the spectacle that promised participation in white civilisation (cf., for example, Buck-Morss, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Which, to quote Audre Lorde, will never dismantle the master’s house (1984).

Object/Nature/Non-Human and Subject/Society/Human (1993). This model also entails a certain paradox: Nature and Society are totally distinct, but at the same time both are simultaneously transcendent and immanent; the laws of Nature are given, but at the same time are constructed in the scientific laboratory; Society is a social construction, but at the same time surpasses it infinitely (p. 32). The process that divides these poles Latour calls “the work of purification”, and it basically describes each mode of knowledge production employed by “the moderns”: starting from the Great Divide of the First Enlightenment and the emergence of critique, this process of decontextualising, sorting, and rearranging reality never stopped in the modern dimension. The reverse process is that of “mediation” or “translation”, which reassembles essences from the Nature-Society poles and creates hybrids (or quasi-objects) that stay underneath the surface of the modernity’s worldview.<sup>30</sup>

The Modern Constitution determines the modern perception of temporality as an irreversible arrow, the expansionist mindset that sees no limits to progress and capitalisation. “The modern passage of time,” Latour argues, “is nothing but a particular form of historicity” (p. 68). According to him, it was “moderns” who introduced the idea of a past forever lost for the sake of progress and thus in need of being protected,<sup>31</sup> but, in reality, the “modern temporality does not have much effect on the passage of time” (p. 69). The past remains and even returns – but the modern perception keeps repressing it, which, in turn, leads to the proliferation of research addressing the notions of “haunted”, “contested” or “difficult” pasts.<sup>32</sup> This “separation from the past” coincides with the burgeoning historicity of the European 19<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Lowenthal, 1985) – again, the time of the emergence of the modern museum and the concept of heritage. Thordis Arrhenius (2012)

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<sup>30</sup> This invisible world of hybrids, I would argue, allows the paradoxical situation around neutrality and politics in the museums: they exist, yet are systematically overlooked as the museum mechanics itself stays out of modernity’s order but at the same time endorses it.

<sup>31</sup> “As Nietzsche observed long ago, the moderns suffer from the illness of historicism. They want to keep everything, date everything, because they think they have definitively broken with their past. The more they accumulate revolutions, the more they save; the more they capitalize, the more they put on display in museums. Maniacal destruction is counterbalanced by an equally maniacal conservation” (Latour, 1993, p. 69).

<sup>32</sup> One can also recall such terminology as the “ghosts” or “spectres” of Derrida (1994).

argues that in order to be preserved as a part of heritage, an object needs to be on the verge of destruction: threatened and homeless objects can find “safe haven” in museums. One of the big questions, however, is: what leads to this destruction? Is it only natural decay that threatens heritage?

Latour dates the formation of the Modern Constitution back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to the divide between Nature and Society, “separating the relations of political power from the relations of scientific reasoning while continuing to shore up power with reason and reason with power” (p. 38). But if we look for the *conditions* that made this Constitution possible, we can find another Great Divide: that of “us” and “others”, and the emergence of colonial/imperial epistemologies.<sup>33</sup> Decolonial thinkers describe this idea of the Divide as follows:<sup>34</sup>

Imperial epistemologies emerge alongside the widespread coloniality of knowledge: Christian theology, secular philosophy, and sciences that were formed and shaped under European geographic monarchies and nation-states (which also provided the unification of Western knowledge systems in six modern/imperial languages grounded in Greek and Latin).

(Mignolo, 2015, p. 108)

To explore this divide further, one can look into Ariella Azoulay’s *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019), a seminal work on the history of imperial violence, extraction, and disfranchising of objects, separated from their communities, and the emergence of masses of well-documented collections and undocumented people.

Coloniality of knowledge refers to the way in which the Modern Constitution has been imposed on “others”, “non-modern” peoples who “did not know the scientific reason” and, therefore, were unaware of the

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<sup>33</sup> Latour, on the other hand, argues that the first Great Divide (between Human and Nature) made possible the second, or external one, between the West and Others. This, however, may be perceived as a mental exercise or a kind of chicken-and-egg problem: no matter what came first, these two divides are inalienable from each other.

<sup>34</sup> There is an alternative dating of the “two intellectual revolutions of humanism, the first which took place in the Renaissance Europe, the second which took place at the end of the eighteenth century in Great Britain” (Wynter cited in Mignolo, 2015, p. 121). Latour, meanwhile, pinpoints the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Britain and the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the context for the ascent of human sciences, but nevertheless they both (Latour and Wynter) refer to “humanist revolutions”, concerning both the Humanities and the human condition as such, and placing these revolutions in the broader concept of modernity.

very division between Nature and Human. These peoples needed to be civilised, “cultured” – and, at the same time, their fascinating non-modern cultures had to be preserved in the museums, after being thoroughly eradicated from the modern world.<sup>35</sup>

Mignolo suggests a *decolonial option* (2010) or *reconstitution* which will make it possible to “recontextualize our global nodes of space, time, and subjectivity” (2015, p. 117). Latour, on the other hand, argues for a *Non-Modern Constitution* which will place hybrids and practices at the centre of the analytic inquiry and acknowledge the work of mediation.<sup>36</sup>

As my specific object of inquiry is *the museum*, I want to bring another option into this theoretical set of tools for reimagining knowledge production in the global contemporary, using the issue of modern temporality as a starting point to dig deeper into the Divides it creates.

### **1.4.2. Bridging the divide between history and memory**

If the museum mechanics, which is based on the Modern Constitution, supposes *detachment* and decontextualisation of objects and narratives, what instrument can maintain the linkage, bring them both to life and reconstitute the *attachment* which has been severed in the sorting process? The complicated relations between memory, remembering, emotion, and imagination lie at the core of people’s understanding of their heritage (Smith & Campbell, 2015, p. 454). Memory, media and cultural studies scholar Silke Arnold-de Simine (2013) sees the “recent memory boom” as an (eventual) turning point in the museological paradigm.

Indeed, the flourishing field of memory studies suggests a diverse variety of theoretical frameworks to choose from, most of which are in one way or another connected to museums (sometimes referred to as

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<sup>35</sup> Returning to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s description of museums as “objects of deculturation” (2017, p.77).

<sup>36</sup> Some museum studies scholars employ Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of *assemblages*, which combines bodies and thoughts, humans and non-humans “as affected and affecting things” (cited in Cameron, 2015, p. 351). Tony Bennett, for instance, suggests the concept of “governmental assemblages” to characterise museal institutions (Bennett, 2015).

“memory institutions”)<sup>37</sup>. “Memory” seems to somewhat displace “the past” and affirm its elusiveness. One of the key frameworks here is Jan and Aleida Assmanns’ theory of cultural and communicative memory, where the “cultural memory” is a form of institutionalised relationship to the past, the structural system for representing, archiving and symbolic order (Redin & Ruin, 2016) which can be related to canonical history-writing (and the traditional museum setting). “Communicative memory”, on the other hand, is the living collective memory of the recent past that individuals share with their contemporaries (J. Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). If we look at the recent developments in the museal field, it becomes apparent that museums’ traditional domain is the former, while they are nonetheless advancing more and more towards the realm of the latter.

The second concept from memory studies that I aim to employ is that of “agonistic memory” suggested by Anna Bull and Hans Hansen (2016). Their work draws inspiration from the writing of Belgian political scholar Chantal Mouffe, who introduces the notions of “radical democracy” and “agonism” into political philosophy.<sup>38</sup> There are two models (or modes) of memory, according to Bull and Hansen, that can be identified in “practices of collective identification” (2016). First comes an “antagonistic memory”, which concerns the construction of the historical narrative of the nation-state. The main focus of the antagonistic memory model is the distinction between “us” and “others”. The heritage here is regarded as something canonical and monumental. The second model can be called “ethical” or “cosmopolitan memory”. It represents “good” and “evil” in abstract terms, and its main focus is victims of atrocities of the past and their suffering. Here, one can use the commemoration of the Holocaust as an example, or universal human rights advocacy. This second model is “characterized by reflexivity, regret and mourning” (ibid., p. 390). It is

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<sup>37</sup> One can also name the discussion on museums as the collective spiritual memory of mankind and its previous generations, which proliferated in Russian philosophy in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fedorov, 1913; Florensky, 1922).

<sup>38</sup> Mouffe advocates for reintroducing “the political” into politics, and claims that “it is impossible to understand democratic politics without acknowledging ‘passions’ as the driving force in the political field” (2013, p. 6), and the notion of “agonism”, according to her, can help “to provide an understanding of pluralist democracy which reintroduces the political dimension” (p. 138).

also closely related to the “second modernity” and globalisation processes. Bull and Hansen follow Mouffe’s arguments on cosmopolitanism and claim that the rise of neo-nationalist movements in the world highlight first and foremost failures of cosmopolitanism as an ethico-political project. Due to technological progress that allows people to connect on an unprecedented level, modern far-right movements spread internationally thus creating the new tensions between “us” and “others”.

Bull and Hansen are introducing the third model: “agonism”, in order to bring in an agency of an individual, especially when it concerns the “difficult issues” of remembrance practices. They also aim to open a new dialogue, the one that would take into account individual emotions and passions instead of focusing on consensus. The researchers claim that “agonistic memory” is not going to “shy away from addressing politicized representations of past conflicts” (ibid., p. 400). What is important here is to take into consideration the context of crimes of the past as well as political and social struggles of that time.

Adopting agonism mode and letting it in the exhibition halls would be rather demanding for the museum professionals for a number of reasons. First of all, an acknowledgement of the modernist mindset and the currently prevailing memory mode will be necessary in order to begin the reflexive museum thinking. The agonistic approach also implies a special focus which will resist the impulse to simplify these complex issues and either to conflate them into the abstract notions of “good” and “evil” or to demonise one side of the conflict in the contrast to the imaginary community of “us”. It can be said that the agonistic mode of memory strives to reintroduce the individual human being into the field (which therefore returns us to the question “What does it mean to be Human?”), but still as a part of the (democratic) political collective.

If the framework of cultural and communicative memory helps to trace the process of institutionalisation of “recent” into “past”, the agonistic mode of memory provides a dialogical way out of traditional dichotomies (either “us” and “others” in the antagonistic memory framework or “good” and “evil” in the cosmopolitan one), where enemies become adversaries and the struggle moves to the field of political debate. It supports Azoulay’s appeal to “unlearn imperialism”

through the lens of “potential history” (2019). Michael Rothberg’s recent work *The Implicated Subject* (2019) adds to this discussion by introducing a “new figure to critical theory and to the political imagination <...> not an identity but rather a figure to think with and through” (p. 199). The concept of the implicated subject allows for thinking agonistically not in relation to the separate adversaries, but *from within*: as an individual, a group or community, or even as an institution, such as a museum (which are by no means implicated subjects of modernity). To acknowledge contested histories and find the resources and impetus to work against the grain of hegemonic narratives is also an issue for the divide between museum theory and praxis in many specific cases.

Last but not least, another recent work in the memory studies field that informs my research is Lea David’s book *The Past Can’t Heal Us* (2020), which brings into question one of the most basic, deeply embedded assumptions in the fields of human rights and transitional justice fields: that “proper” memorialisation is a crucial step in establishing moral responsibility for past atrocities and, consequently, human rights values in conflict and post-conflict settings. Based on empirical studies from the Balkans, Israel and Palestine, this work highlights the shortcomings of the antagonistic and cosmopolitan memory frameworks (without naming them, however), but also questions the possibility of the agonistic approach from a perspective “on the ground”.

Taking all these analytical tools provided by the field of memory studies, I intend to apply them as the instruments for my museological inquiry, as they can serve to fill a gap in the methodology of museology.

## **1.5. Methodology, fieldwork and sketching out the material**

In this subchapter I will discuss my methodological framework and approach to “the field”, present the empirical material, my main methods of analysis as well as argue for the selection of material and the focal point of my research: the Museum of Movements project.

Museology as a (relatively young) discipline has for a rather long time struggled to establish a firm methodology in the sense of a toolbox that can help us to “describe and understand museological phenomena” (van Mensch, 1992). Bruno Brulon Soares mentions that the difficulty of defining museology as a “human or social science” and the lack of specific methodology comes from the “very inability to define its subject of study” (2015, p. 50).<sup>39</sup> In many aspects, it remains a meta-field of knowledge (or a “boundary discipline”, see Message, 2009), where theoretical inputs and analytical devices are brought in from other disciplines and practices, despite the flourishing field of diverse “museologies” mentioned in section 1.3.2. For example, exhibition and conservation have methodologies of their own, as well as diverse subject-matter disciplines of specific museums. Relatively recent works on epistemology and methodology in the museum field (e.g. Nomikou, 2015; O’Neill, 2006) indicate that despite the “coming of age” of museology, there still exists a somewhat irreducible divide between museum theory and practice which has been addressed many times in literature, academic conferences, and museological research. This lack of coherent methodological guidelines becomes a token question for both museum practitioners (“We are doing our best amidst funding cuts and accountability exercises, tell us what else we can do?”) and museum scholars (“We need practitioners to tell us how to make our research applicable and have a positive social impact”),<sup>40</sup> outlining once again the epistemological divide between theory and practice, or at least one of the layers of this divide which permeates many interdisciplinary fields of knowledge.

With my research, I am contributing to the further development of methodological frameworks of museology as such, and to provide more material and analysis to promote an integrated approach (Nomikou,

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<sup>39</sup> Hardly surprising, given the issues we have seen with defining “museum” so far; Soares, however, suggests a move from the “gnosiologic paradigm” towards a “*reflexive* paradigm that suppose the reevaluation of the very tools that create our paradigms” (2015, p. 56) which goes in line with Beth Lord’s argument on the analytical powers of museums and my suggestion that we need to start focusing more on the master’s tools.

<sup>40</sup> Both points, if not in these exact words, I heard made several times in the course of my fieldwork; e.g., at the ICOM General Conference in September 2019.

2015, p. 206).<sup>41</sup> Nomikou argues for the potential of ethnographic methods in museology as a way to overcome the theory-practice divide by using “an empirically-grounded methodological strategy... that would enable the re-examination of museum processes as they happen” (p. 209).

In the introductory chapter to the recent publication “Doing Diversity, Making Difference: Multi-Researcher Ethnography in Museums and Heritage in Berlin” (Macdonald, 2022), Sharon Macdonald also emphasises the value of ethnography as a tool which allows “to examine processes as they unfold over time” (p. 13) and “enables an in-depth understanding of a particular setting and moment” (p. 33).

In my research I use a holistic qualitative method based on ethnography. Where the museum ethnography implies studying the objects, the audiences, the museums themselves, their relationship with society (O’Neill, 2006, p. 101), I want to bring into the picture museology as a discipline and its relationship with museum practice. However, here comes the trick: speaking of understanding the processes taking place *in* museums does not always equate to understanding museums *as* processes, and museum ethnography differs from museological ethnography; it is the latter that I have aimed for when designing this research.

What I suggest by this is adding another layer to the study’s frame: bringing museologist (myself, in this specific text) and museology into the museum field, to the ground, and developing a collaborative effort towards understanding (a specific) museum as a process together with my research participants.

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<sup>41</sup> In “Museology without a prefix” Effrosyni Nomikou follows Mark O’Neill’s (2006) argument on the need for epistemological integrity in the field of museology. However, if O’Neill focuses more on epistemology of museums, Nomikou suggests rethinking museology as a “disciplinary framework that seeks out connectedness rather than rupture” (2015, p. 207). This is just one example of the “what the problem is with museology” issue, as in many cases in the literature (including “critical museology”, “radical museology”, “reflexive museology” and so on), the object of museological research, i.e., museums, is conflated with the process of the said research – the problem, originating from the boundary, fluid and multi-layered nature of the discipline. Even Nomikou focuses on the Visitor Studies as an example when talking about methods.

As already mentioned, this dissertation is theory- and concept-driven. I focus on the museum's development and institutional ontologies and bring into the picture other examples and questions which can help to contextualise the scope of research in a particular setting and moment; but also frame the Museum of Movements project against global processes, such as the museum definition debate.

By locating the research at the intersection of theory and practice, it was possible for me as a museologist to engage actively with the ongoing museum project. To bring together theory and practice, I suggest the notion of “activist museology” (Zabalueva & Perla, 2019)<sup>42</sup> as the complement to the “activist museum” (Leshchenko, 2017; Schellenbacher, n.d.), as the Museum of Movements project can be defined as an activist museum. This approach allows for actively involving museological research in the process of museum-making, where the museologist is not a distant observer giving the “scientifically proven” verdicts (or matters of facts), but rather is considered to be a part of the community and one of the stakeholders of the museum project; someone who is not only extracting the material for knowledge production, but rather directing the information flows in and out to enrich both the process and the disciplinary field in the broader sense – and whose museological thinking benefits from this embeddedness.

The methods employed for collecting, organising, and examining my material is derived from ethnography (especially *reflexive ethnography*, see Davies, 1999; and *feminist ethnography*, see McNamara, 2009). It acknowledges the complexity of the social worlds we are inhabiting and argues for the situatedness of knowledge, which is relevant for the processes of knowledge production performed *at* museums as well as the same processes performed *about* (and *with*) museums, such as this dissertation. It also brings forward and

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<sup>42</sup> It is worth mentioning that the entanglements and intersections with the research participants worked both ways: the “activist museology” concept was coined during my work with the Museum of Movements and together with one of its team members, Armando Perla, and presented at the ICOM General Conference in 2019. Armando was also an important conversation partner of mine, and thinking together with him on the museological dilemmas was and will always be a pleasure and a privilege. The same can be said about every member of the project team with whom we had conversations during my research – each encounter did not so much provide “data” as improve my thinking and inspire further research.

reformulates one of the theoretical concepts mentioned in previous section: namely, the implicated subject (Rothberg, 2019). Apart from being an important analytical concept in the memory studies field, the implicated subject provides an additional angle of analysis regarding the researcher's standpoint: in doing my research and being a product of Western academic knowledge, I myself am very much implicated in the entanglements of "difficult issues" that permeate both the museum world and academia (see also section 1.6 on positionality and ethics). At the same time, as Patricia McNamara points out, ethnography of this kind "requires some considerable input of 'self' on the part of the researcher" (2009, p. 173), which in this specific context can be considered as a part of the relationship between the researcher and "the field". What, then, is my relationship with "the field"?

Ethnographic work as such presupposes constant going back and forth between gathering the information, writing down insights and going back to gather more.

As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson showed in their analysis of "the field" as site, method and location (1997), there was (and still is) a need to "decenter and defetishize the concept of 'the field'" (p. 5). The field of this particular study is not a distant exotic location, nor a specific social situation or practice (of museum-making) as such; it is more of an analytical concept which includes a "flexible and opportunistic strategy for diversifying and making more complex our understanding of various places, people, and predicaments through an attentiveness to the different forms of knowledge available from different social and political locations" (ibid., p. 37). However, in line with my general museological tenet, which follows decolonial thinking, I would like to argue further on this historical overview of "the field" that Gupta and Ferguson are making – because the very thought of the disciplinary development from the "colonialist and evolutionist ideas of natives in their natural state" somewhat denies the situatedness of the objective, detached (civilised?) observer and of the knowledges they are producing.<sup>43</sup> Here, Gupta and Ferguson's suggestion to see "the field" as

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<sup>43</sup> Paradoxically, the critique of the disciplinary origins of ethnography and anthropology often overlooked these sciences and their methods as the tools of estrangement, similar to the Azoulay's "imperial shutter" or the museum's ability to decontextualise reality.

a site for strategic intervention and political action makes much more sense for such studies as mine, which are building their argument on the interconnections and processes rather than on the raw “neutral” data.

“The field” of this specific study was constituted not only of physical trips to the place of museum-making – and not only because of the global pandemics which affected the research process and accessibility of such visits (see 1.6.3. “The impossible research”). The field expanded to the web-presence of the Museum of Movements, the social media debates, and the intellectual sphere of the museum world. Cultural analytical tools, such as “looking for the break points” (Ehn et al., 2016, p. 21) and focusing on the contrasts and the importance of emotions, were also very helpful in the process of writing.

#### Empirical material

When I start reflecting on how to present the material of this dissertation, the question arises: what, then, is not my material? What is not situated in this fluid and permeable “field”? In order to answer this question, it is convenient to separate what is there at my disposal as a researcher into different segments. This can be done geographically: on the international, national, and local level, or concentrically: from the wider museal field in general and the general perceptions of the museums, down to policy documents, public debates and, at the very core, fieldwork “on the ground”, individual actors and voices, and the Museum of Movements *per se*.<sup>44</sup>

Since the Museum of Movements project is the museum I am *thinking with*, I will start listing my empirics from it, and elaborate further on the other segments that gravitate towards this focal point of my study.

The work on this dissertation began in 2018; however, the pre-fieldwork had been taking place since 2016-2017, when I started to follow the project. I draw on the empirical material collected as part of

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<sup>44</sup> For example, as I am writing from within the museological perspective, the museological debates used in the Chapter 1 to describe the background of the dissertation fall in both cases in the first categories; whereas the Swedish “Museum debate” from the Chapter 3 would be the “national museal field” category of material.

my master's thesis in 2016-2017 (Zabalueva, 2018c) on museums and civil society activism, where relevant – for instance, when narrating the early development of the museum project. This earlier work can be considered a “ground zero”, from which the present dissertation project was developed.

My approach to working with the Museum of Movements can be described as a “go-along” in a broader sense: in the beginning I was literally going along with the museum-making process. In the ethnographic research a *go-along*, a “hybrid between participant observation and interviewing” implies that “ethnographers are able to observe their informant's spatial practices *in situ* while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time” (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 463).<sup>45</sup> In one way or another, my own spatial practices even before starting the dissertation – during my previous studies and part-time work in Malmö – were overlapping with those of Malmö residents who were interested in the creation of this new museum. This almost unintentional and occasional pre-fieldwork introduced me to many people and ideas in Malmö that were moving around in somewhat overlapping social worlds; the Museum of Movements project emerged from these intersections.

A total six field trips during the dissertation work provided me with an archive of notes, presentations, minutes, plans and policies which include, among other things, the participatory observations from being with the museum team during the process. This material consists of my fieldwork diary from March 2019, when I had the opportunity to spend two weeks in Malmö following the project very closely, including attending planning meetings and talking with the team; field notes from other (often one- or two-day) events that I attended either in person or online, such as the dialogue meeting in March 2018, team meetings in June 2018, December 2018 and August 2020, and a Museum and Oral History Ethics workshop in November 2019; as well as notes and observations from a meeting with Malmö civil society representatives in November 2020.

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<sup>45</sup> There is also such a methodological concept as “deep hanging out” (Walmsley, 2018) which is probably more relevant to ethnographic work in cultural institutions; however, due to the processual nature of the phenomena I am studying and the concept of “being on the move”, I decided not to include it in the study design.

There are two clusters in the empirical material: one for 2018-2019, before the museum's venue was opened and the museum was more or less still in the planning stage, and after the decision to stop funding which was made in late 2020. Therefore, the interviews dated 2020 and later are already addressing the Museum of Movements as a "finished" case, whereas earlier material brings out plans and expectations. By moving around interview accounts in the text and not placing them in the linear timeline, I aim to bring out the complexity of the museum process which I am studying.

Qualitative interviews (Agar, 1996; Bryman, 2016) were conducted between 2018 and 2021 with members of the Museum of Movements team. The interview material was acquired both on site, during the field trips to Malmö, and remotely via Zoom (partly due to restrictions in place in Sweden during the COVID-19 pandemic). Each interview was semi-structured, lasted between half an hour and one hour, and followed the most recent developments around the museum, but also took the form of story-telling and sharing experiences – between interviewer and interviewee. I would rather call these "conversations" and the research participants "interlocutors".

The interview material includes seven recorded and transcribed qualitative interviews with five members of the Museum of Movements project team<sup>46</sup> (two of these interviewees agreed to discuss the project again at a later stage, which added more depth and context to the material). Of my five interlocutors from the project team, two were hired during the museum's active phase, but also left during that period; two were there from the beginning of the "museum for migration and democracy" stage and took part in the feasibility study; and one arrived after the start of the Museum of Movements' governmental assignment and stayed until the closure of the project.

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<sup>46</sup> There is, of course, the problem of making choices and seeing the delimitations, where I as a researcher using ethnographic methods have to constantly ask myself: is the interview that I carried out with a temporary team member relevant? Should I reach out to the people whom I missed meeting during the fieldwork; will it, again, be relevant to ask them about certain processes long after the project they probably held dear was closed? Nevertheless, since the core team was mainly represented by a small group of people, this variety of voices from the team means that at every stage of the museum-making process and me (re)visiting "the field" several persons were accounting for it.

It is also important to note that the makeup of the team was somewhat unusual for a museum, as it included people with a migrant background, having been refugees themselves or children of refugees. This however reflects the activism narrative specific for Malmö, known as “the capital of love”, which promotes anti-gentrification, anti-racism, anti-fascism, migrants’ rights and feminism (C. Hansen, 2022). To a certain extent, the Museum of Movements process embodied the “nothing about us without us” way of thinking; however, it remains debatable who really has “the right to the city” and who is considered to be a “proper” activist in the local political landscape.<sup>47</sup>

During my talks with the museum team, we touched upon the processes taking place in the museum project’s backstage, the rationales behind certain decisions and events; but more often, we spoke about emotions, feelings, and aspirations, about what museums can and should do in the contemporary world, and what values the team were trying to bring forward with their work.<sup>48</sup> These types of conversations include not only the recorded interviews but also occurred during my fieldtrips whenever I was meeting with the project team individually or in groups.

I also draw on interviews with two politicians of Malmö municipality, one recorded in 2018 and one written down in form of notes in 2020. They were among the initial authors of the City Council’s proposal to the Ministry of Culture to establish the museum for democracy and migration in Malmö.

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<sup>47</sup> As one of the project team members puts it: “The strongest grassroots organisations in Malmö right now, not historically, but right now – they [are] made up of mostly middle-class white people. Not all of them, of course, there are grassroots movements in Hermodsäl, in Rosengård, I wish we had more in Lindängen for instance... but the other... grassroots that are *etablerade* [accomplished] in Malmö, they’re made up of middle class. <...> that does not mean that they are not doing a great job - because they still are, so this is not a critique to the grassroot as such” (Museum of Movements employee, 2019.03.06). (For more discussion on storytelling, activism and right to the city see Hansen, 2022; Nilsson Mohammadi & Wolgast, 2021).

<sup>48</sup> Kylie Message refers to this kind of research as “affective writing” or even “activist writing” (2018, p. 74); I prefer the term “activist museology”, taking the ethnographic toolset as a starting point.

The Museum of Movements from the very beginning existed in several contexts,<sup>49</sup> both as a political endeavour on the pages of newspapers and municipal reports and as a real movement composed of all the potential stakeholders and collaborators who gathered around the project. Therefore, I make use of media coverage, official documents issued on different governmental levels on a par with the interviews and fieldnotes.

The Southern Swedish newspaper *Sydsvenskan* closely followed the process of the museum-making in their cultural news and opinions sections, and a series of publications from 2015-2020 are being used as the media sources. It is complemented by the webpages, including social media accounts, such as *Kultur i Malmö*, Facebook page of Malmö City's Cultural Department. These publications were accumulated during my "going-along" with the museum project and following its traces, mostly via the Internet.

To cover the museum's development, a selection of published and unpublished documents from different authorities and entities was also collected, starting from the official Cultural Department's reports on the museum (the feasibility study from 2017 and following reports 2018-2020) and more general cultural policy documents (both on municipal and state level), to the internal presentations of the project made by the team and inquiries commissioned for the project (Gradén, 2018). The research publications and presentations, as well as conference materials, represent the boundary case of source material and previous research in the field.

The empirical material which does not directly concern the Museum of Movements, but still revolves around it, consists of examples of projects, events and institutions which are connected to it. Two of such examples in the closest "orbit" of the museum project are the Safe Havens series of events and the Rescue archive project, both of which were included in the dissertation's fieldwork. This material is based

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<sup>49</sup> Here, as I did in my previous studies (Zabalueva, 2018c), I am employing Annemarie Mol's (1999) discussion on ontological politics and the notion of multiple realities or ontologies that are being *enacted* or *performed* rather than observed (p. 77). Unlike the *perspectivalist* approach, where the world is seen differently from different standpoints, or the *constructivist*, which is about construction of alternative stories that have been possible in the past, the *multiple realities* according to Mol are existing simultaneously as the product of different practices.

mainly on participatory observations and a selection of associated written sources.

Moving in the same manner concentrically, the wider national context of the Swedish museal landscape is represented by the Museum debate in media (2016-2017), the material concerning the Swedish Holocaust Museum project (since 2019) and the travelling exhibition on popular movements and activism “100% Fight: The History of Sweden” (since 2017). Of these three examples, the Swedish Holocaust Museum is addressed separately due to the similarities and differences with the Museum of Movements project. However, the empirical part of these two museum initiatives diverges remarkably: if in the Museum of Movements case I was following the project closely, involved in different stages, the Holocaust Museum is not addressed in this dissertation from the personal experience, rather I base my analysis on diverse publicly available reports and media coverage.

The international context is illustrated by the example of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the response of the North American museums to social movements such as #BlackLivesMatters and other political topics, and by the ICOM-level Museum Definition debate.

Concluding this overview of the dissertation’s sources, it is necessary to mention limitations. There is certainly some disparity in the material, as aside from what do I have as the empirical base, there are also the issues and perspectives that I *do not* cover. I did not interview every single member of the museum team at each chronological point during the process, and therefore cannot claim to have a full and complete picture of the processes inside the museum. Some of the accounts given by the different actors might also contradict each other; and some are missing from the published narratives, and therefore could have been occasionally and unknowingly disregarded in the process of my research.<sup>50</sup> Some conversations and observations I

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<sup>50</sup> One very telling example of this: there is very little in the Museum of Movements reports and media coverage about the Archive of Labour Movements’ involvement in the pre-conception stage, including field trips by the City of Malmö’s political representatives to the People’s History Museum in Manchester in order to learn about what a democratic museum of popular movements could look like; if not for the advice of Robert Nilsson Mohammadi, for which I am very grateful, I would have missed this completely.

decided not to include in the final text (for the further discussion on this see subchapter 1.6 on ethics and positionality), as they address (or more likely, pose) questions that go beyond the aim and scope of this dissertation.

Analytical strategy: activist museology writing

In the writing process I have been constantly going back and forth between different levels and categories of both material and theoretical frameworks. I am certain that they are not to be studied separately (e.g. in separate chapters) but intertwined in all aspects of the museum-making, becoming, being and unmaking. Therefore, in each empirical chapter of the dissertation, I am revisiting relevant theoretical frameworks, be it the notion of museums, power, and “global cosmopolitan continuum” (Levitt, 2015) in Chapter 2, discussion on “difficult issues” and contested topics in Chapter 3, memory studies approaches in Chapter 4 or Latourian “power of association” (Latour, 1984) in Chapter 5.

My analysis starts with the Museum of Movements, as I was following the project closely and thoroughly, and it, in a way, became not only an analytical subject but rather a subject position for my research, the frame or lens through which I am addressing my research questions. Then I bring in the other examples that were moving along, across and in-between, to use them as a contrast (as in the Swedish Holocaust Museum case), a source of (in/a)spiration for the Museum of Movements (as in the case of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights), or even as something that could have been done in potential development (side projects as Safe Havens and Rescue Archives or the exhibition on activism and human rights). I am also referring to global examples, such as museum responses to political activism or museum definition debate (and its Swedish counterpart on museums’ neutrality). These are providing a framework and a context against which both the Museum of Movements and the changes in museum world in general can be understood and examined.

The other important conversation which I have in this dissertation concerns the scholars and museum people who are *writing with* and

*thinking with* museums. By putting the Museum of Movements in the field of museological research, I am bringing in new participants in this evolving dialogue around museums' role and importance in the contemporary world. As Kylie Message formulates it, "both museums and writing about museums have the potential to offer new ways of understanding contemporary life" (2018, p. 82), to address museum practice in the context of and in dialogue with the broader field of politics. And, I want to continue, this is what activist museology would do to the *museal* world, not only specific practices and institutions. This kind of writing intends to bring more questions rather than to suggest solutions, it presumes that if we can "think museums politically" (Zabalueva, 2022b) then the museum landscape can become an arena for the new political imagination in the troubled and challenging times of our shared world (Tlostanova & Fry, 2021).

In summary, I have conducted interviews, participated in the activities, had informal meetings, hung out in the working space, helped with the organisation of one side-project (*Safe Havens* conference 2017), and investigated another (the *Rescue Archives* initiative). I have also written extensively about the museum project in different contexts, and have presented my research in several seminars at other universities and at international conferences. The Museum of Movements became a case study for my lectures on museums, cultural heritage, memory, and migration both at Linköping University and in other contexts. In a way, the material also was – and is – co-created by me as a researcher in a constant work of (re)thinking and (re)interpreting it. Here, the ethnographic approach of being immersed in "the field" comes into the picture, and is also a way to form(ate) this field, bringing into it certain perspectives from international museological discourse – while also bringing "the field" with me everywhere I go.

It is worth mentioning that I have had the joy and privilege to follow almost every *move* of the Museum of Movements, from the inaugural conference at Malmö University in May 2016, through the times of uncertainty, periods of waiting for decisions, the comings together of the community that was brought into the museum's orbit, the meetings, the farewells, and the discussions; perhaps not in as deep and engaged

way as the members of the museum team, but this project nonetheless became a big part of my life, not only part of my dissertation.

The Museum of Movements is, in every sense, a *matter of concern*.

## **1.6. Ethics, positionality, limitations, and further research**

The reason why this subchapter is organised this way can be traced to the meta-nature of my research. *Museums* are collecting and studying cultures and societies. *Museology* is studying museums. I am studying both museums and museology as the field, as well as the relationship of both to culture and society; therefore, there is a need for different layers of examination and analysis. It is also important to position myself both in the “field’s” field and in disciplinary area, especially considering the previous section on methodology that appeals, among other things, to the situatedness of the researcher in the field.

### **1.6.1. Research ethics and ethics of the researcher**

The following meta-analysis of the ethical considerations involved in my research includes both the operations of the museum project in the museal field and my own role as a researcher studying the project.

First, I will touch upon the institutional structures of museums, what ethical challenges they face, and how this relates to my research. Second, I will discuss the methods I use in my research and the issues that can emerge at the intersection of traditional museum research, engaged research, participatory observation and autoethnography.

In recent decades, there has been a turn towards the “nondiscursive museum practices” and “pedagogy of feeling” in the museum field (Message & Witcomb, 2015). The problem here, as I see it, lies in the discursive/rational nature of museum practice itself and in the interconnection between this mechanism and the perceived neutrality and objectivity of the museums as cultural institutions (which they perform through decontextualisation of objects). Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell (2015), in their piece on museums and emotions, argue that museum professionals sometimes experience a sort of aversion to

emotional matters; they can perceive emotional engagement as something negative or even tainting professional objectivity. On the other hand, the “stress of not being emotional, on maintaining professional objectivity, may be [...] itself an emotional state” (p. 448).

This internal contradiction becomes especially visible when museums are stepping into the realm of the “recent past” or “contemporary heritage” and touch upon emotionally charged political issues, be it societal conflicts, discrimination, hatred or violence in the modern world. Museums, therefore, are also situated in the field of applied ethics, just as academic researchers are, since they are contributing to knowledge production, education and, more recently, promoting emotional intelligence.

Why is this important in my study? The Museum of Movements project from its very inception faced criticism in the field of ethics, since it was proposed as “the museum of immigrants”, the “Ellis Island of the city of Malmö” (Nilsson, 2014). This concept was problematised in the public debate by ethnographer and museum professional Dragan Nikolić in an article published in *Sydsvenskan* newspaper (“*Do not raise political points in my name*”, 2015). In the responses to this article (Karlsson, 2015; Thomé & Johansson, 2015), the discussion of “immigration” turned into one about “migration” and “democracy”, which would also become an important part of the future museum’s focus. However, this discussion, which took place on the local newspaper’s pages before the actual museum project even began, shows how the very concept of such a museum might turn (in theory) into the exhibiting of “immigrants” as exotic Others. The so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015 and documentation of it by cultural actors and institutions made the issue even more complicated, considering the position of the people, whose life stories were documented and archived in Sweden.

The ICOM created a professional Code of Ethics in 1986, which then was revised in 2001 and 2004 (ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 2004) and is under the review at the time of writing.<sup>51</sup> This Code

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<sup>51</sup> Following the 25th General Conference, held in Kyoto in 2019, ICOM decided that the Code should be reviewed and, if necessary, revised (141 Session of the Executive Board). After the 26th General Conference in Prague, where the new museum definition was

establishes core values and principles shared by the international museum community. It states, among other things, that all research conducted at museums (including fieldwork and documentation) “should be conducted in accordance with guidelines that comply with academic standards and relevant national and international laws” (as cited in Pabst, 2017, p. 134). The Code also refers to sensitive materials as those which should be treated with great delicacy and respect. However, recent academic research suggests that there is a need for a “new museum ethics” (Marstine et al., 2015; Pabst, 2017), which would address such issues as “radical transparency”, “social responsibility” and “institutional morality” and would be a more dynamic and flexible system than the existing Code, which is focused mainly on the management of objects and collections.

At the 25<sup>th</sup> ICOM General Conference in Kyoto in 2019, a new international committee was established, the International Committee for Ethical Dilemmas (IC Ethics), to support and broaden the scope of the issues dealt with by the existing Standing Committee on Museum Ethics (ETHCOM) is dealing with. The need for this new organisational unit was voiced at the international conference *Difficult Issues* organised by the Nordic national ICOM committees and ICOM Germany in Helsingborg in 2017 (ICOM Deutschland e.V., 2019), and also fits into the “new museum ethics” discourse. The Museum of Movements also became a part of these developments, as then-project manager and member of the founding team Armando Perla was selected to the IC Ethics board, partly for his prominent experience in co-curating exhibitions and programmes with historically marginalised populations (ICEthics, 2019).

Craig Middleton and Nikki Sullivan (2019), who see ethics as a dynamic process and as a critical practice, suggest the notion of *queer ethics* – not in the sense of representation of LGBTQI+ communities in museums, but as a practice that troubles and questions the *status quo* of inviolable (moral) categories, and avoids the pitfall of replacing “[b]ad’ old grand narratives” with “‘good’ new decentered” ones (Bradburne, 2011, as quoted in Sullivan & Middleton, 2019, p. 35).

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voted on, the need for revisions to the Code was indicated, and this work has been ongoing since then (with the latest round of consultations starting in June 2023).

The ethical problem I have in front of me is directly linked to these developments and the nature of the museum as an institution. As a researcher studying a museum project “in the making”, I am situated in a kind of meta-level of research ethics, since one of the important challenges regarding “study subjects” here is also an ethical one (which should conform with “academic standards”, as we recall from the ICOM Code of Ethics). I am studying a museum which sought to address politicised “difficult issues”, and to work with vulnerable and marginalised categories of the population. Will my research have an indirect impact on the “study subjects” of the museum itself? (My tentative answer would be: yes, it will, as neither the museum nor the researcher are disconnected from the social context in which they perform their practices). How will it be reflected given the reluctance of the museum team to regard their collaborators as “study subjects”, preferring to aim instead for shared authority and co-creation practices?

This issue can be defined as a part of “third party considerations”. The Swedish Research Council’s ethical guidelines state, for example: “If the author foresees a risk of over-interpretation in the media, he or she has a responsibility to try to preclude or prevent that risk, especially if it might cause harm to the research subjects or any third parties” (*Good Research Practice*, 2017, p. 56). However, is there any real possibility to foresee such a risk? I have aimed to design the research in such a way that the third parties who are indirectly involved with it will not suffer from any negative effects; but the prevention of “over-interpretation”, especially in the social media era, seems close to impossible.<sup>52</sup>

An alternative way of tackling this issue is, oddly enough, to bring my own expertise as a researcher into the field I am studying. The Museum of Movements’ mission statement reads as follows: “MOM is committed to work together with civil society to broaden the current understanding of migration and democracy, by developing new ways of collaboration in a space for story-telling, artistic expression and knowledge production” (Kulturförvaltningen, 2019). In the name of this

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Bruno Latour for a discussion of scientific discourse, media, and climate change denial (2018).

co-creation and collaboration, in 2019 the museum started work on designing ethical guidelines to regulate an equitable and just museum practice. I participated in a museum ethics workshop that was held on 11-12 November 2019 in the museum working space, bringing together around 30 museum professionals and scholars from all around the globe. During the intensive two-day workshop, we discussed the various ethical challenges that could appear in the process of the museum's development, including collecting, archiving, research, interpretation, community participation and exhibition practices – and also exchanged ideas, fostered our networks, and created a sort of research community driven by shared goals and values. The possibility to *be there* and *act* was an invaluable experience of making our voices heard by an institution which was eager to listen. During this workshop, “museum ethics” was unfolding as a verb – a way of *being*, *knowing* and *doing* in a sense which is probably not possible in a more traditional institutional setting. It was also a beautiful moment of being able to make a socially meaningful impact as a researcher, rather than being deprived of agency and reduced to a mere observer. Whatever happens to the research on museum ethics in the future, the critical momentum of creating the ethical guidelines exists in its timeline and propels further work, publications and research (e.g. Perla, 2020).

The second aspect of my dissertation project that involves ethical considerations is not located on this meta-level, but rather concerns the classical issue of the ethnographer's position in relation to their research participants. In her book *Reflexive Ethnography*, Charlotte Aull Davies (1999) describes the “intrinsic multi-layered reflexivity” of the ethnographic research, which at the same time should not lead to a state of “complete self-absorption that undermines our capacity to explore <...> societies and cultures” (p. 24). In my case, a reflexive positioning in the field was essential due to my pre-existing relationships with the museum project team: I had followed the project from 2016, first as a participant in dialogue meetings (in a sense, this was a reversed role in relation to what I am doing now); then as an intern at the City of Malmö's Cultural Department, as an unaffiliated consultant; and now as a researcher studying the project. This position invokes certain ethical dilemmas *per se*. I have been granted very broad

access to the field and very responsive research participants; our relationship is based on trust and mutual respect. However, extra care must be taken to adhere to research ethics guidelines and avoid exploiting these good relationships (e.g., when asking for written consent, explaining that participation can be withdrawn at any stage; discussing quotes selected from interviews, etc.). I have also gained, sometimes unintentionally, knowledge of my participants' life contexts, satellite events, pivotal experiences – everything that makes up the relationships between us as human beings and which has to be discarded in order to maintain “good research practice”. Nevertheless, by writing this dissertation text, I am also making a statement – of my intentional and unintentional biases, of my position in the intricated entanglements of politics, memory, and (museum) activism that surrounded the Museum of Movements project. This is a statement addressed for all the participants in the project as well: by presenting my perspective, I hope to contribute to future discussions in the orbit of museum-making in Sweden and globally.

One of the particular issues concerning the research ethics was working with the interviews' material. For all the interviews conducted and recorded the written consent was obtained from participants. With the members of the museum project team, it was decided colloquially that interviews will be anonymised. I was negotiating with myself back and forth how to introduce the research participants to the text in order to keep the (illusion of) anonymity and preserve the integrity of individuals, but at the same time organise the space of the text so their voices won't lose the agency (and passion). In the end, the interviews from the museum team are denoted by the timestamps (all seven interviews were conducted on different dates), as in this specific study I wanted to highlight the process, rather than individual stories, and multiple perspectives, rather than multiple voices. We were also corresponding with the former museum team members on the later stage of the dissertation when they had an opportunity to revise and approve the interview excerpts which became the part of this text.

The potential for conscious or unconscious biases which I as a researcher might adopt due to my close relationship with the project team is another issue which must be handled with care. In this dissertation, I will need to ensure that I neither champion the idea of

such a museum (though I personally see many positive sides of the project), nor debunk it with excessive critique (though I see a number of shortcomings as well). At the same time, I will describe my standpoint in the following subchapter 1.6.2, as it implies not only certain biases and limitations, but also the ways in which I can contribute to the field and broaden it, bringing together disciplines, praxis, and lived experiences.

The key point of this research lies precisely in this particular relationship with the museum team: my endeavour is to work in a collaboration that is informed not by the nature of the assignment or by a client-employee contract, but by shared values and mutual trust and respect.

In the *Good Research Practice* guidelines published by the Swedish Research Council (2017), collaboration implies either joint efforts with other researchers or different kinds of assignments from funding bodies or other organisations (pp. 41-51);<sup>53</sup> there is not so much attention given to research as a collaborative practice performed together with the research participants. One example of such practice may be the emerging field of action research (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003); however, although it focuses on the integration of theory and practice and on the changing agency of the researcher, it does not say much about the agency of participants. Moreover, an “action researcher” is still seen as an educator (ibid., p. 19), an aide who provides a community with the tools and methods to conduct “real research”.

This latter type of research correlates in a way with the recent turn in museum practice, where “objective” knowledge production inclines towards participatory or activist methods (see, for example, Schellenbacher, n.d.; N. Simon, 2010). In this dissertation, I argue that my methods and research design entail an “activist museology” as a methodological framework.

My role as a researcher in this project is to critically address the question of museums’ evolution and development towards democratic arenas for political confrontation; of introducing current “difficult

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<sup>53</sup> There are different forms of such collaborations in Sweden, such as *följeforskning* – an ongoing evaluation of, for example, a technological development which can be commissioned by a company; and *uppdragsforskning* – a specific assignment from an organisation to a researcher.

issues” into museum spaces; and, among other things, of the power relations around this kind of new museum project. But I also have other roles as well: that of a friend who sympathises with the project team’s efforts; of an outside expert who can provide links and connections into the network forming around the project; of a young female immigrant who wants the stories of her kind to be represented in the public space, and for the “difficult issues” that Swedish society is facing today to be addressed with respect for human dignity.

The challenges that I face in conducting this research are not so much to do with “research ethics” but rather “researcher’s ethics”: each step that I make in my PhD-journey is to be weighed against both ethical guidelines and codes, but also my own moral judgement (*Good Research Practice*, 2017, p. 17).

### **1.6.2. Finding my place with museums**

Knowledge is always situated, and the way in which we construct narratives depends very much on our own identity and positionality, especially in an academic context. I have argued extensively in the sections above against the point of view of the detached observer – concerning both my own writing and the work with material, but also in the broader sense of museology and museum practice. All the ethical considerations regarding my work as a researcher demand for acknowledging the scope of expertise and lived experience, the inherent biases and possible shortcomings, as well as describing my standpoint.

The Museum of Movements started for me with a chain of coincidences and concurrencies, with my search for a place to start anew in the Swedish museum world after years of work and research in Moscow museums. It started with the museology course at Lund University and an opinion piece by then minister of culture Alice Bah Kuhnke on the accessibility of national museums (2016), where she mentioned plans for a “new museum of migration history” to be established in Malmö. The Museum of Movements was woven into my reality in diverse and intricate ways: from a conference at Malmö University in May 2016 titled *Museums in Times of Migration and Mobility*, where I first heard about the project and met project manager Fredrik Elg, to the Master’s thesis and PhD proposal I crafted a year later; from the work placement internship at Malmö City’s Cultural

Department to the line of acknowledgement in the feasibility study report: “Thank also to... Olga Zabalueva, museology student” (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b, p. 90); from the chance connections and interactions that repeatedly led me back to the museum project – to this text.

To finish delineating my position in this study, it is necessary to state that I identify as a white, LGBTQI+ cisgender woman; a recent immigrant to Sweden from outside the EU, but still an inhabitant of the Global North in the broad sense; a museologist and museum professional; and, what is also important, I identify strongly as a part of the Museum of Movements *process*, without establishing any official relationship on paper.

(Well, there is *this* paper).

I share the values, if not all the meanings and wordings, of the alternative proposed definition for museums issued by ICOM in 2019, and stand firmly on the position that museums as institutions need to undergo a radical change (though I do not believe that museums are beyond salvation). My standpoint is built on the importance of reflexivity and critical knowledge, but also of empathy and affect. To put it simply, I believe in museums and the positive role they can play for the surrounding societies. I also believe that *writing with museums about museums* can be a form of resistance; a mode of knowledge production that does not sit silently on the library shelves, but can promote social change.

### **1.6.3. The impossible research: ambitions and immobilities**

If I look back at the chronological timeline of this research, I must say that the difficulties I encountered being “in” and “outside” “the field” was often spatial. Restrictions put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented me from participating in certain events and processes as I had planned to. The uneven and unpredictable pace of the museum project’s development made it impossible to plan the fieldwork in advance; for example, during autumn 2017, when I had the opportunity to do a work placement for my MA thesis at Malmö City’s Cultural Department, the museum itself was not moving anywhere, and instead I was assigned to work with two adjacent projects. And in

autumn 2020, just when things were unfolding very quickly and I felt that my participation could play a role, our living worlds were locked down, stuck in one place, or moved online due to the global pandemic.

Apart from these very tangible time-space limitations, there are of course constraints on the possible analytical frameworks it was possible to apply and on the scope of the research.

In this dissertation I do not dwell so much on *objects* or *collections* (although a discussion on creating a new museum without collections would be an interesting subject for a separate study).<sup>54</sup> Hence, there is no focus on the material turn in museum studies as a discipline, and no strict distinction made between collecting of oral histories and of material testimonies, as both practices in my analysis are included in what I call the *museum mechanics*.

There is also a chronological framework for the material which is implied by the focus on museums and politics: I study the Museum of Movements from the moment of its inception as a political project (2015-2016) and follow it up until the political decision to shut it down (2020), and all the movements and struggles that happened in between.

Another important question has been how to limit the collected material and make a proper selection of it. As I have mentioned in section 1.5, the scope of the collected information is broad, and some things have had to be left out of this dissertation's focus. The sheer amount of data, however, leaves me with possibilities to further develop some of the research questions into separate studies; for example, taking other national contexts as cases, elaborating on aspects of museum mechanics that I deem not to be central to this text, or focusing on diversity and homogeneity in the Swedish cultural sector (cf. Edström & Hyltén-Cavallius, 2011; Högberg, 2013).

And, of course, there is always the scope of the material that is omitted, missed out and overlooked, due to both my own unconscious

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<sup>54</sup> The “lack” of objects or collections could be seen as “problematic” in the traditional museum paradigm (as was demonstrated by the development of the ICOM museum definition and other international bodies regulations; even the notion of “intangible heritage” was introduced quite recently into them), however, there is a whole growing body of literature that focuses on people, relationships, and social sustainability rather than on, for instance, iconic design and marketplace economics (MacLeod, 2017). This new type of museum also introduces ethics as a critical praxis (Marstine, 2011; Sullivan & Middleton, 2019).

biases and a certain degree of home blindness that is unavoidable in the context of a long-running research project. In this dissertation, *reflexivity* plays a role not only as *sine qua non* for conducting ethical research and following “good research practice”; it is also something that I want to have ingrained in museological research at large, to continue questioning the existing theories and practices not only within the scope of my research questions, but also in the broader field: why do we perceive something as natural, professional, scientific, etc.? What is the genealogy of these perceptions? And how can this specific text contribute to the field?

## Chapter 2. “Politics starts in the Museum”

With this quote from Ariella Aïsha Azoulay’s seminal work *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019), I will begin my analysis of the making and unmaking of the Museum of Movements project and the role played in it by politics. In this case, politics was exactly *where* the museum started, on the local, national, and partly even international level; and it is also where the museum stopped functioning in its active form.

In my investigation of the new museum ontologies, and the place of museums in the contemporary world, the Museum of Movements can be considered as *a case*,<sup>55</sup> and its relatively short but turbulent history as a lens through which I address the questions that prompted this research. From the very beginning, it was important for the actors involved to create this new institution as *a museum* – with all of its inherited advantages and flaws. The feasibility study which preceded the establishing of the project, was, among other things, focused on the question of form:

When we asked people in the initial dialogue meetings to challenge the idea of the organisational form, for us to know if this subject matters, and the voices we want to create a space for - if the museum form was the right way to go, or if it should rather be an institute perhaps or just a meeting place of some sort, and people said: no, we want it to be a museum, because we want it to be solid, we want it to be about learning, and about knowledge, we want to trust this place, because there will be science behind it.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

The museum mechanics, therefore – which operates the divides of modernity, demands the disentanglement of “learning”, “knowledge”, and “science” from mundane everyday practice, and allows for “trust” –

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<sup>55</sup> Kylie Message cites critical theorist Lauren Berlant on how the “case, as a genre <...> ‘hovers about the singular, the general and the normative’ but can also incite an opening, an altered way of feeling things out, of falling out the line” (2018, p. 70), and calls the case study approach “a political exercise” – or, as I would argue, an exercise of political imagination (cf. Tlostanova & Fry, 2021) which allows for challenging the existing paradigms.

was an aspiration of both the initiative group behind the project and larger audience. Museums seem to be something important, thus we need to create a museum in order to discuss important topics, and, consequently, to look at the divide itself and identify our positions and values in relation to it. As the Museum of Movements was taking form in the process (and as the process) of its *becoming*,<sup>56</sup> it clashed constantly with the limitations of the museum mechanics, since the topics it addressed were often subjects of hot political debate. Therefore, this chapter's part of my analysis aims to apply museum politics to the Museum of Movements case, before moving on to the "difficult issues" as a subject for a museum institution and how the memory-related frameworks affect it.

The Museum of Movements existed in Malmö between 2016 and 2020: first as an ambition to establish a "museum for democracy and migration" for which a feasibility study (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b) was conducted, then as the actual everyday operations of the *försökverksamhet* (experimental organisation), and in 2019-2020 as a physical working space.

As mentioned in the introduction, the project emerged in the midst of crisis<sup>57</sup> – and went on to survive several smaller crises such as a change in reporting relationships inside the City's Cultural Department, the high turnover rate among the staff, uncertainties around the issue of ownership, and the requirement to apply for the next chunk of

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<sup>56</sup> The concept of "becoming", which has its origins in posthumanism and new materialisms studies (e.g., Braidotti, 2002), is used extensively in the text to describe the process of the museum's coming-to-be as distinct from the time-constrained narrative of its development, as a radically immanent process and a window of opportunity as opposed to the linear evolutionary narrative of inception, development, and disintegration.

<sup>57</sup> As I describe elsewhere (Zabalueva, 2018b), in 2015-2016, the European Union faced a "migration crisis", that, according to some analysts, "threatened core European rights and values". Tightened borders, changing rules and the rise of populist rhetoric both inside and outside the EU have once again highlighted the importance of the migration narratives communicated by the cultural institutions and museums in particular (Hutchinson & Witcomb, 2014; Levitt, 2015; Johansson, 2015). In 2015, the Network of European Museum Organisations published the recommendations for museum work regarding the subject of migration (NEMO, 2015).

For Sweden, the importance this issue was and is obvious, as the country received more asylum seekers in 2015 than ever before (Migrationsverket, 2016). The influx propelled the public debate, and most Swedish museums were, in one way or another, addressing the questions of (im)migration (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017, p. 41).

funding each year. The latter of these minor crises turned out to be a big one in August 2020, when the Swedish government decided not to continue funding the project (Gillberg, 2020b).

The decision to call off the project came at a time when it already had a team of seven staff members, a working space, a diverse programme of activities, detailed plans for future operations, and the engagement of local civil society groups. However, some of the warning signs were already in the air: in autumn 2019, the museum received the same amount of funding as the previous year from the Swedish government, even though it had been promised that the amount would be increased from year to year (Gillberg, 2020a). Still, according to both museum staff and Malmö politicians, the project had always received very positive feedback on its yearly reports from the government (e.g., Kulturförvaltningen, 2019). Another point of rupture that is worth mentioning was the appointment in May 2020 of an “acting operations manager” (*tillförordnad verksamhetschef*) to serve as an intermediary between the museum project and the City’s Cultural Department. In an interview in August 2020, this person stated that the City of Malmö “does not have the resources to fund the museum project”, explaining their appointment as a temporary necessary measure before the decision from the government on the “cultural budget” came (fieldwork notes, 2020.08.14).<sup>58</sup> Following that decision, it was made public that the museum should continue its operations until the December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020 and then close down, as the City of Malmö already had plans for the property where the working space of the museum was located.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> As one of the museum project team members recalled later: “In one way you can say that now, when I look in the back mirror, when they asked [them] to join us, then it was probably like... [they] was joining us to like avliva oss [execute us]...” (interview 2020.12.22).

<sup>59</sup> From the same conversation:

O: “But, the politicians said that you have to leave the place or?”

“- (almost inaudible) Ja [Yes]. From 31<sup>st</sup> of December. And we no longer can enter the building (both laughing bitterly) - that’s what we’ve heard. So they’ve been there, taking all the electronics, erm, but the furniture is still there because it cannot look empty when we have... prospective buyers coming and looking and such” (interview 2020.12.22).

What was the reasoning behind the decision? The press secretary of the Ministry of Culture made the following comment to the newspaper *Sydsvenskan*:

The museum was a pilot version that now has no funding from the Swedish government. The reason behind that is that the museum vision proposed in the Museum of Movements report overlaps with the fields of other institutions: the Living History Forum, but also the Institute for Language and Folklore, National Historical Museums and the Museum of Work among others. The City of Malmö, which was responsible for driving the project, can, however, continue this work if they want to.

(Gillberg, 2020b)<sup>60</sup>

However, the City Council decided not to continue and the project was closed down (for more detailed account see Gradén & O'Dell, 2022). Thus, the whole dissolution process was initiated and processed “from above”, on both the national and local levels. However, the project was only made possible by combining the top-down and bottom-up agency. From its very inception, the museum project attracted great interest from diverse groups, and in this chapter, I aim to investigate how the process of museum politics developed from different starting points.

I suggest dividing this process of *becoming* the Museum of Movements into several distinct periods:

- The preconception period includes the time **until 2015**, when the idea to create a museum of immigration in Malmö appeared in media and political discourse. Several sources point out that the original idea came from a 2014 editorial titled “Build an Ellis Island in Malmö”, published in *Dagens Industri* newspaper (Nilsson, 2014). However, there is a broader picture. For example, the idea of establishing a state-funded museum of immigration in Malmö had been raised already in 2006,<sup>61</sup> but “the proposal did not spark any public debate and an immigration museum never materialized” at

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<sup>60</sup> ”Museet har varit en försöksverksamhet som nu inte får fortsatt stöd av Regeringen. Anledningen är att den verksamhet som föreslås i Rörelsernas museums rapport till stora delar överlappar Forum för levande historias verksamhet, men även verksamheterna vid bland annat Språk- och folkminnesinstitutet, Statens historiska museer och Arbetets museum. Malmö stad som är ansvariga för verksamheten får dock fortsätta verksamheten om de vill.”

<sup>61</sup> This was suggested by then Minister for Higher Education and Research Lars Leijonborg in an article titled “Let’s Create a Museum of Immigrants in Malmö” (2006).

that time (Johansson, 2014, p. 124). The other strand of discussion that would eventually lead to the museum project was around musealising the history of labour movements, initiated by the *Arbetarrörelsens arkiv* in Skåne (Representative of the Labour Movement's Archive, 2022-08-19).

- The **feasibility study** period started in **2015** when politicians from Malmö assigned the city's Cultural Department to investigate the conditions for establishing a new National Museum on Democracy and Migration, and the study received funding from the Swedish government. This period lasted until the mid-**2017**, when the feasibility study report for the Museum of Movements (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b) was published, submitted to the Ministry of Culture and, subsequently, received further funding to establish an experimental museum.
- **2018-2019**<sup>62</sup> was the period when the museum conducted in-depth investigations into possible locations, policies, ownership, and organisational form. New members of the project team were coming and going, and a working space was prepared to be opened.
- From autumn **2019** to the end of **2020**, the museum was in its active phase of operations. A working space opened at Bergsgatan in Malmö, and a programme of public events was launched (in 2020 also online due to the pandemic-related restrictions on social gatherings). In autumn 2020, the government and the municipality decided to stop funding for the museum project, and it was closed on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020.

If one is going to “think museums politically” (Zabalueva, 2022b), it is important to differentiate between “traditional museums” and “museums with post-colonial origin”, as Shelley Ruth Butler calls them (2015, p. 175). The latter can also be called “museums of ideas”, the product of new museology and the “museum boom” of the 1990s, or

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<sup>62</sup> It is worth mentioning that in the 2020 annual report from the museum, they give slightly different timeframes, with 2016 as the start of the feasibility study period and 2018 as the establishment of the “working room” (Rörelsernas Museum, 2020, p. 11). However, as my aim is to analyse the process of museum-making as I observed it, I prefer to define the “working room” period in line with the programming and events that started from August 2019, when it officially opened.

museums focused on stories and narratives. These two categories of museums originate from different political discourses.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first provides the framework for these discourses and museums' place in it, be it national or cosmopolitan projects, and is focused on previous research in the field. The second section shows how this theoretical framework functions in the case of the Museum of Movements at different stages of the process, and which groups and constellations were and are involved.

## **2.1. Museums as political devices**

### **2.1.1. Museums and the formation of the nation-state**

Before I begin sketching out the problem of the “political” in the museum field, it is worth noting that museum studies, following the example of cultural theory, has appropriated concepts from other disciplines and enriched them with new aspects. The study of museums has accentuated the need to distinguish between politics as the relationship between the state/governmental agencies and cultural institutions, epistemic politics, and the position of museums in the broader field of the *political*; and “politics” as “the role of exhibitions/museums in the production of social knowledge” (Lidchi, 1997, p. 185, in contrast to “poetics” as a set of exhibition practices). It has been argued many times in previous research that museums are political institutions representing power (re)distribution within societies (Bennett, 1995; Gray, 2015; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Karp et al., 1992; Karp & Lavine, 1991).<sup>63</sup> This argument can take different shapes; therefore, references to “politics” in this text are contextualised and depend on the particular angle in each case. In addition, “policies” as sets of rules or as concrete instruments of governance, can be

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<sup>63</sup> Rhiannon Mason refers to the increased focus on this issue in research as the “Foucault-Effect” in museum studies (Mason, 2007, p. 23) which confers with the idea of governmentality used by Tony Bennett in his works (Bennett, 2015; Bennett et al., 2017).

mentioned on different levels, from the cultural policies introduced by the state to, for example, the collecting guidelines of individual museums or inclusion strategies regarding staff. This lens shift is used deliberately in the text to give a broader perspective on the politics and policy aspects of museum-making. However, whether the discussion is about museums and politics, politics in the museum, or museum politics, it is necessary to address the issue of power relations.

In the contemporary museology, the idea of museums as sites for exercising power is grounded in the works of Australian museum scholar Tony Bennett (1995) and British museologist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992). Laurajane Smith, an Australian heritage and museum studies scholar, contributed to the field by introducing the concept of the Authorized Heritage Discourse or AHD (2006). AHD constructs the notion of heritage in the sense of what should be preserved and acclaimed as having cultural and/or aesthetic value, and also institutionalises the “expert’s voice” in the form of museal and curatorial practices. Both the “Foucauldian” approach to museums and AHD theory address the issues of power and the ways in which culture and heritage are constructed, preserved, communicated, narrated and represented according to the existing (hegemonic) political order.

Museums as “epistemic technologies” evolved during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and their space of representation became organised hierarchically according to the “historicized principles of display” (Bennett, 1995, p. 33). As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out (2017, p. 73), during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century a lot of museums were accommodating the academic disciplines whose research produced and required collections, including archaeology, biology and geology, but first and foremost ethnology “as knowledge formation” (whether these were museums of natural history, ethnology or *Volkskunde*). These disciplines later moved into (or rather stayed within) the structure of universities, and museums were often left to deal with their disciplinary heritage (Modest, 2018).

Tony Bennett re-theorises museums within the Foucauldian paradigm and then introduces the notion of museums as “governmental assemblages” (2015), drawing on two primary functions of museums: the “exhibitionary complex” – that of organising the gaze, space and machineries of *visiting* and *exhibiting*; and that of collecting and

classification (of natural and cultural phenomena as well as human beings themselves). Museums, according to Bennett, are embedded into networks of knowledge production and circulation, and can work as circuits in the system of power redistribution, but they also form “new aesthetic and epistemological realities” (2018, p. 13) in which we live. In this sense, the role of museums in “assembling and governing cultures” (ibid.) cannot be underestimated; it has, however, often been overlooked in the literature, as museums are traditionally perceived as non-political institutions (cf. Gray, 2015).

I consider this perception of museums as neutral, detached custodians of the objective knowledge to be a crucial feature of the museum genealogy, which defines its further development as an institution highly affected by the scientific racism and racial/ethnic hierarchies of imperial/colonial ontologies – but also veiling these hierarchies and ontologies (and the violence which lies in the foundation of them, cf. Azoulay, 2019) by the notions of “neutrality”, “objectivity” and “educational purposes”. Museums were places that defined what it meant to be *human* and to be in the world, and since their educational role is quite often emphasised in the literature, museums were (and are) also *teaching* who is defined as human in the global contemporary (and who or what is the “other” in this context).<sup>64</sup> As Karsten Schubert argues, “We have come to *believe* that the museum is a place beyond reproach: neutral, objective and rational” (2000, p. 15, italics mine), this belief is so deeply entrenched in our worldview that such sayings as “Museums are not neutral” are perceived as being politically loaded and even offensive (Brenham Heritage Museum, 2017).

An important role here belongs to museums of cultural history. They can play out as arenas for constructions of “us” (as in national [history] museums) and “uthers” (as in ethnographic museums and collections). The modes of representation and the range of exhibited

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<sup>64</sup> As Rosi Braidotti puts it, “The concept of ‘difference’ functioned as a term to index discrimination and exclusion. More specifically, ‘difference’ defined as hierarchical notion – ‘to be different from an often implicit norm’ – distributed degrees of ‘humanity’ to categories of sub and infra-humans, in a scale of negative dialectic of otherness that often made mockery of European claims to the respect of universal human rights” (2013, p. 12). On the terms of difference and diversity as conceptual frameworks, see also (Eriksen, 2006; Nieswand, 2020).

material in these institutions are as important as *what is not exhibited*. The lack of narratives belonging to national minorities or migrants in the heritage of nation-states has been highlighted by several researchers (for Swedish examples, see Edström & Hyltén-Cavallius, 2011; Johansson, 2015; Thor Tureby & Johansson, 2017).

Another important point is that the shift in theorising the construction of identities by the means of museums follows the development of the concept of “culture”. Museum studies theorist Sharon Macdonald follows Benedict Anderson’s idea of “imagined communities” and argues for the necessity of creating a system of *cultural* relations within nation-states which imposed social relations of smaller groups (Macdonald, 2003, p. 2). The idea of “having a culture” as a set of shared knowledge and practices was, therefore, a necessary basis for making a sense of the social and political worlds of modernity. When in the 20<sup>th</sup> century more relativist understandings of “culture” were produced, in the museum world classifications also became more diverse. However, relations between different peoples, identities and cultures “continue to be haunted by the racist categories they allegedly displaced” (Bennett, 2018, p. 11). The “having a culture” argument still plays a central role in nationalist discourses all over the world, and national museums enforce this argument with all the power inherent in cultural institutions.

The argument that ethnic, racial and national divisions are inscribed in the museum ontologies may seem slightly astray for this dissertation, as it opens up for the global and general perspective in the museological research today. Nevertheless, several points make it relevant: first, it is an important part of museum genealogy that needs to be addressed and acknowledged, as many researchers have recently argued (S. Anderson, 2018;<sup>65</sup> Azoulay, 2019) – which also coincides partly with the

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<sup>65</sup> The formation of different historical narrative templates is described by Canadian researcher Stephanie Anderson, who suggests a framework of national narrative templates employed in Canadian museums and historical curricula (S. Anderson, 2017). According to her, the first “master narrative” emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century and “conveys the progressive, unified, Euro-Western, colony-to-nation storyline” (ibid., p. 16). The second template follows the new epistemologies of the 1960s when previously excluded groups received recognition and representation. Its storyline is also progress-oriented but is strongly aligned with the image of Canada as a “generous, tolerant, multicultural mosaic” which includes the stories of Canadian First Nations and ethno-cultural minorities “through a storyline of appropriation, reconciliation and

framework of antagonistic memory regime (Bull & Hansen, 2016), that of “us” and “others”. Second, Sweden, despite sometimes being considered a “smaller state with a long nation-state history” (Aronsson, 2011, p. 47), unlike the “empires and conglomerate states” in the context of national museums, conceals in this “long history” the very same idea of superiority of one category of the population as the colonial empires.<sup>66</sup> This is where the idea of a “good state” with a troubled past comes together with the museum project that is meant to contribute to social cohesion and foreground the issues of both migration and nationalism. Being planned as a *national* museum from the very beginning, the Museum of Movements project ended up at the very tipping point of addressing the “difficult issues” ingrained into Swedish society.

Last but not least, although the very idea of creating strictly nation-state-focused museums seems a bit outdated, it has been employed recently by the authoritarian and nationalistic regimes (cf. Zabalueva, 2022a) to mobilise patriotic feelings among the citizens. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the critical divide between “us” and “others” that is ingrained in the institutional history of museums, can contribute to further analysis of the production of (national) heritage and the processes of museum-making.

### **2.1.2. Museums and the globalised world**

Another facet of museum development – both globally and in Sweden – is what US sociologist Peggy Levitt calls the “cosmopolitan nationalism continuum” (2017). As she argues, global and national perspectives do not exist separately but instead can make sense only in relation to each other. This approach towards museum mechanics recalls the idea of the nation-state being defined by the system of relationships that lies

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redemption” (ibid., p. 19). Furthermore, Anderson recognises a third type of narrative – a counter-narrative that is not being celebrated by the means of cultural and educational policies but “captures competing, omitted, or silenced national narratives through parallel or alternative forms of Canadian identity that contest, rebuke, or intervene in the storylines” of the previous templates (ibid., 21).

<sup>66</sup> Not to mention occasional colonial enterprises overseas (e.g. Swahn, 1985), the “banal nationalism” of everyday Swedishness (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017) and the extensive internal colonisation of the indigenous peoples in the North (Andersson et al., 2005).

outside the state's borders. In other words, the heritage disciplines echo both the political developments of the contemporary world and the advancements in other disciplinary fields in humanities and social sciences. Levitt argues that museums today are creating global citizens, just as they nurtured citizens of the nation-states in the past (2017). There are also calls for museums to consider the idea of global citizens and global values (Ünsal, 2019).

This development falls into a twofold discussion: the first concerning universal museums preserving the heritage of the whole of humankind (instead of the nation-state, though the mechanism is basically the same and built on the same premises of colonial and imperial divide)<sup>67</sup> and the second about “museums of ideas”, which are based on shared universal values. One such idea or value is human rights, which since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 has become a strong moral impetus for justifying various kinds of enterprises. Lea David (2020) calls this the “human rights agenda”, and points out the importance of “moral remembrance” practices in the Western world and globally. In the museum field, one of the most prominent examples is the growing number of Holocaust museums, as “memories of the Holocaust have evolved into a universal code that is now synonymous with an imperative to address past injustices” (Levy & Sznajder, 2010, p. 4). Kristin Wagrell, in her recent dissertation *“Chorus of the Saved”: Constructing the Holocaust survivor in Swedish public discourse, 1943-1966* (2020), investigates how the memory of the Holocaust was (and is still being) performed in Sweden, the country that has the

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<sup>67</sup> See, for example, the 2003 *Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums*, which states that “calls to repatriate objects that have belonged to museum collections for many years have become an important issue for museums. Although each case has to be judged individually, we should acknowledge that museums serve not just the citizens of one nation but the people of every nation. Museums are agents in the development of culture, whose mission is to foster knowledge by a continuous process of reinterpretation. Each object contributes to that process. To narrow the focus of museums whose collections are diverse and multifaceted would therefore be a disservice to all visitors” (cited from ICOM News No1, 2004). Written in the 2003, the Declaration very much resembles the following lines from Kenneth Hudson and Ann Nicholls’ *The Directory of Museums & Living Displays* (1985): “To have no museum in today’s circumstances is to admit that one is below the minimum level of civilisation required of a modern state”.

reputation of “human rights champion” on the international stage.<sup>68</sup> The idea of a “good state” which performs memory through “good institutions” was partly reflected in the development of a new governmental agency in the late 1990s called the Living History Forum, which, as Wagrell argues, shifted its focus “from the Holocaust to the ‘Swedish perspective’ ... which primarily focused on bystanders and heroes” (ibid., p. 88).<sup>69</sup> In her review on Peggy Levitt’s book *Artifacts and Allegiances: How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display*, Ien Ang observes that in Sweden, “cosmopolitanism and nationalism seem to complement and fortify each other” in the museum sector – but also that “no matter how cosmopolitan Sweden’s style of imagining itself as a nation, the nation’s self, or Swedishness, is still defined in homogeneous and exclusionary ways” (2017, p. 3).

My reading of Levitt, however, involves that the role of museums as civilising devices established to educate the populace (cf. Bennett, 1995) has not changed that much; furthermore, the development of supra-national bodies and agencies may have shifted this mechanics on another level, but the aim and purposes are still the same. In other words, if the national museums are “representing national values and realities” (Aronsson, 2012, p. 68), the cosmopolitan museums are displaying (allegedly) universal values and realities to the global publics. One of the important parts of this new museum agenda is “*moral remembrance* – the standardised set of norms, promoted through human rights infrastructures at the world polity level” (David, 2020, p. 4). In the next sections, I am going to analyse how this agenda played out in the case of the Museum of Movements.

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<sup>68</sup> Acknowledged both internally, such as on the webpage Sweden.se run by Swedish Institute, “a public agency that promotes interest and trust in Sweden around the world” (Sweden.se, n.d.) and externally: “Sweden is the country that has made the ‘most significant investment in encouraging its people to learn the lessons of history’” (*US Department of State report*, see Slany & Eizenstadt, 1998).

<sup>69</sup> The Living History Forum is a public agency which works “for democracy and equality between all people, using lessons learned from the Holocaust” (The Living History Forum homepage). It was opened in 2003 following the initiative of the same name in the late 1990s which ran a programme of learning activities with the purpose of launching Holocaust education in Sweden as “the natural remedy to neo-Nazi ideology and violence” (Wagrell, 2020, p. 83).

## 2.2. Museum-making and unmaking

In my earlier (2018) work on the development of the Museum of Movements as an activist museum I have suggested that four different groups were actively engaged in the process: “interlocutors”,<sup>70</sup> “referees”,<sup>71</sup> “patrons”<sup>72</sup> and “the team”. All these groups were described as overlapping and the *free movement* between them was taken for granted.

What I aim to do in this chapter, however, is to look more closely into these – and other – stakeholders’ aims and agendas, rather than to analyse *what* they were doing during the museum-making process. I will unpack the “top-down” and “bottom-up” initiatives affecting the museum, describe the community of experts surrounding it, and provide material for the further analysis of the production of Swedish national/cosmopolitan heritage and memory politics related to the Museum of Movements project, which follows in the subsequent chapters.

### 2.2.1. Top-down initiative

The initiative to create the museum was commenced by the City of Malmö’s politicians, and it is important to locate the project in the complex arrangement of the official Swedish cultural administration.

The City of Malmö is a municipality in southern Sweden that includes Malmö city and its surroundings (*Malmö kommun*). The local

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<sup>70</sup> Their ambition, voiced by many participants, was “to be heard” and “to make sure that their voices will be heard” (fieldnotes 2018-03-13; 2016-10-27); many of them were excited by the possibility of contributing to the future museum.

<sup>71</sup> Consultants from the museal world and academia, some of whom were assigned to the project by the Swedish government (for example, representatives from the Swedish Exhibition Agency, a state institution that was rearranged and dissolved in 2017), and others who joined as a result of extensive networking by the project team. The volume *Researchers’ Essays*, published as the part of feasibility study report (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017a), was a contribution from referees. Another specific division of the referees group are political journalists or opinion makers who evaluated the process in their public output.

<sup>72</sup> This group is very diverse and at some points crosses over with the others. For example, Malmö politicians can be perceived both as interlocutors aiming to bring to the project their views and agendas to the project, and patrons who were set to benefit from the future museum. Another example is Malmö youth who interviewed their family members during the summer internships at the Cultural Department in 2016 as a part of the feasibility study, and who can be seen as the future visitors of the museum.

cultural institutions and regulations on the municipal level are governed by the Culture Committee (*Kulturnämnden*) and the Cultural Department (*Kulturförvaltningen*) (*Malmö Stad Organisationschema*, 2019). The municipality is a part of Skåne County (*Region Skåne*); however, the regional cultural administration did not have much input in the development of this particular museum project. On the national level, the main actors are the Swedish Ministry of Culture (*Kulturdepartementet*) as a commissioner and – at the stage of the feasibility study (2015-2017) – three national cultural agencies (Swedish History Museums, National Museums of World Culture and the Swedish Exhibition Agency) as “supportive institutions” (*Stödmuseer*). Other institutional actors, such as Swedish ICOM, which recognised the Museum of Movements as a member in March 2019, were also involved in the process, representing the international layer.

As described by the museum project itself (Rörelsernas Museum, 2020, p. 4), it started in autumn 2015, when the City Council of Malmö wrote a letter to then Swedish minister of culture, Alice Bah Kuhnke, with a proposal to establish a national museum focused on democracy and migration and place it in Malmö. In this letter, the city’s politicians argued for the importance of “everyone’s right to their history”, and suggested that the proposed museum will have an archive and research centre enabling “modern and adequate research on democracy, popular movements and migration” (*ibid.*). The letter received a positive response, and the Malmö Cultural Department was tasked with conducting a pilot study into the prerequisites and actual need for such a museum. The pilot study (or “feasibility study”, as it is called in reports, *förstudie* in Swedish) was submitted to the Ministry of Culture in 2017 and resulted in state funding for continuing the work and starting the experimental operations (*test- or försökverksamhet*) that would lead to the museum’s establishment in the future. Each spring, the Museum of Movements would submit a report to the Ministry of Culture in order to secure the next year’s funding in the Cultural Budget, according to their institutional routine (*regleringsbrev*). These

reports would go through the City Council and the Cultural Department.<sup>73</sup>

During the “experimental operations” phase, the Museum of Movements recruited staff, opened a “working room” – a smaller space in central Malmö – and produced a diverse range of activities, including conferences, workshops and panel discussions, artistic performances, community events, etc. All this was done in collaboration with civil society organisations, cultural workers, and academic researchers. The method of museum-making was grounded from the very beginning in a process of dialogue with different groups and individuals, who later became the museum’s stakeholders.

During the feasibility study stage, the project also had two “reference groups”. The first consists of academics from a range of fields, such as ethnic and migration studies, museology, and other social sciences and humanities, both Sweden-based and international. Another reference group represented political parties from the City of Malmö, with the stated purpose was “to make sure that the feasibility study’s report was as well grounded as possible in the local context before presentation to the government in Spring 2017” (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b, p. 16). Therefore, the first stage of the museum project, despite its broad scope and the large number of external actors involved, was initiated by local and national authorities, financed and controlled by them.<sup>74</sup> As one of the museum team recalled later:

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<sup>73</sup> In 2020, the museum team submitted, as well as the report, a proposal for a permanent museum (Rörelsernas Museum, 2020) to the ministry, which had been requested by the government at the time of the previous state funding (“I villkoren för statens bidrag för budgetåret 2020 har Rörelsernas museum fått i uppdrag att till regeringen lämna ett förslag på hur en permanent verksamhet kan utformas”, *ibid.*, p. 5).

<sup>74</sup> In the words of representative of the Green Party from the Municipal Council: “I let go of the project, and said ‘I can’t control this anymore, it has to have a life of its own’. So we gave it to professionals <...> we put together a political reference group with all the parties represented in *Kommunfullmäktiga* [Municipal Council Assembly], just to see where it evolved so we could say ‘stop’ if it was going into really weird places. But it didn’t. But what we did before, we let... I let go, was make sure that Malmö University had scientists involved in the project, so we have both the normal Malmö people and the science part in this from the beginning, so it should be good” (interview 2018-04-04). Note the role of “science” and “scientists” again in this kind of argument.

There were two different processes, I think, because during the feasibility study we reported to a reference group - a political reference group. It was once a month. It was a very good way of anchoring the work and all of that, and everybody was very interested. And then we didn't have it. And... but it was not on my table, that work. Our work was to report to the Culture Director [of Malmö], so the Culture Director is the one having the dialogue with the politicians, not us.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2021.05.11)

Thus, we can see two different hierarchies unfolding: one involving the museum team and the City of Malmö, the other involving the government and the Ministry of Culture. Each of these sets of connections was vital for the museum project, and the changes in the reporting relationships in both effectively hindered the delivery of the museum's message through.

The timeline of the Museum of Movements project's development is most palpable if we consider two aspects: the name and the form of approval/budgeting.

- 2014-2015: the idea first appears in the media as **Museum of Immigrants**
- 2016-2017: a feasibility study is carried out for the **National Museum for Democracy and Migration** (commissioned by the Swedish government and conducted by the city's Cultural Department alongside with "support institutions")
- Spring 2017: the feasibility study report for the **Museum of Movements/Rörelsernas museum** is submitted to the Ministry of Culture
- Autumn 2017: the project receives approval and the first instalment of annual funding from the **Swedish government** with additional resource support from the **City of Malmö**
- Autumn 2019: a "trial" **Museum of Movements** opens its working room in Malmö (the full-scale museum is planned in five to six years)
- Autumn 2020: project funding from both **government** and **municipality** is stopped.

The very “movement” of the name reflects the fluidity and elusiveness of the project. One cannot literally equate the Swedish “*rörelse*” and the English “movement”, and the “Museum of Movements” is already a long way from the “museum of immigrants” idea as it was presented in 2014. The decisive switch to an English name came in early 2019 (Sandberg, 2019) and is most likely connected to the design of the physical space: you have to write something on the signboard. The abbreviation “MOM” first appeared in the writings of Canadian staff members and affiliated researchers and stayed as a part of the project’s communication strategy and visual identity (fieldnotes 2019-03-12), whereas the main title used on the webpage<sup>75</sup> and elsewhere is the Swedish *Rörelsernas museum*.

How did the idea of establishing the museum come about? The starting point can be traced to the ways in which the people behind the project imagined a *museum* as an institution. One of the members of the political reference group for the feasibility study gave in April 2018 the following example:

...there was a class of the students between 13 or 14 years old going on the bus, stepping in on the bus from the bus stop by the museum, and, because they were quite loud, I could not help overhearing what they said. And three of the boys were really angry that they had to go to the museum, because they didn't really understand what the purpose was, and two of them said that "why would I care about Swedish kings, or their portraits?", you know, and that stuck with me. And I thought: there are very large groups in Sweden and Malmö in particular, that have their family histories or their heritage in other geographical areas than Sweden, so Sweden's history is no longer just the history of the nation state of Sweden, because it's everywhere, and world is more... is becoming one, so you can't, and you can... And museums used to be used to like... imprint national identity into people, and that seems really old-fashioned I thought, but it stuck with me.

(Representative of Green Party, Malmö City Council, 2018-04-04)

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<sup>75</sup> <http://rorelsernasmuseum.se>, up until January 2022 when the funding stopped.

Echoing with the urge to redefine the museum of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this excerpt also tells another story: that museums are still sometimes perceived as “old-fashioned” or as not answering the needs and demands of today’s society.<sup>76</sup> Despite this view, Swedish museums were and are strongly aligned with cosmopolitan cultural policies or Anderson’s “second narrative template” (2017), which relies on diversity, inclusion and recognition of , “universal” values (cf. Johansson, 2015). The series of media publications that proposed the “Museum of Immigrants”, which began in 2014 and inspired the conception of the feasibility study, was also representing “imprinting of national identity” in a way – yet cosmopolitan, global city’s identity of progressive nation:

Malmö is probably the city which is very clearly trying to create a new identity. Let’s build a national museum of immigrants in the harbour, which will gather names and stories of how, when, and why people came here. Let’s invest in the architecture so the building will be seen from both sides of the Öresund strait, let’s invite the Crown Princess to inaugurate it, and let it be a monument for all the souls that came here searching for democracy, freedom, rule of law and a better life.

(Nilsson, 2014)

The “Ellis Island” trope<sup>77</sup> unites Sweden with the Global North: not being a settler-colonial nation in the usual sense (at least not in all its territory), it is trying to envision itself as a such – but with only the “good” sides: freedom, democracy, justice, and a better life. Such a narrative not only omits the specifically Swedish “difficult issues” of discrimination, injustice, marginalised communities and racism – it also glorifies Western modernity as the only opportunity for a “better life” in the globalised world.

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<sup>76</sup> I would argue that the same incentive is hidden in the agenda of digital transformation of the museums – where the aim is often to keep a pace with the contemporary rather than deeper epistemological transformation.

<sup>77</sup> Ellis Island in New York Harbour was the busiest immigrant inspection and processing station in the United States, processing nearly 12 million immigrants arriving between 1892 and 1954. Today it is part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument and hosts a national museum of immigration.

If the Green Party representatives in the City Council were mainly focused on migration, multiculturalism and global citizenship, their allies from the Social Democrats wanted the new museum to focus on popular (specifically labour) movements. The subject of workers and the history of work is close to Sweden's heart,<sup>78</sup> the proud home of the "Swedish model" of political consensus between trade unions and government, which historian Hans Dahlgvist calls a "grand narrative" of consensus (2020).

The resulting title of the proposal by Malmö City Council to the Swedish government to establish in Malmö a *national museum for democracy and migration* was a political compromise between the two parties, the Green Party and the Social Democrats (Representative of Social Democrats, Malmö City Council, 2020-10-09). There was also political opposition to this decision within the City Council: following the feasibility study report in 2017, the local branch of the right-wing Sweden Democrats party issued a caveat stating that they were against the museum project, as they saw "a risk of this type of museum becoming a political instrument for multiculturalism and promoting further high immigration rates to Sweden"<sup>79</sup> (Sverigedemokraterna, 2017).

The City Council wished for the national (state-funded) museum to confirm the status and importance of Malmö in the Swedish cultural landscape (as most of the national museums, with some exceptions, are located in Stockholm and the surrounding region). The same logic was pursued even on the municipality level: in late 2014, the City Council was approached by the real estate company Diligentia, who proposed a further development plan for the city's Western Harbour neighbourhood (Häggström, 2015).<sup>80</sup> According to one City Council

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<sup>78</sup> For a historiographical review see Daniel Nyström's dissertation *Before Research Became Radical: A Historiographical Study of Labour History and Women's History* (2015); for museographical practice, see the Museum of Work (*Arbetets museum*) in Norrköping.

<sup>79</sup> "Vi ser också en risk i att den här typen av museum blir ett politiskt redskap för mångkultur och främjandet av en fortsatt hög invandring till Sverige".

<sup>80</sup> Western Harbour or *Västra hamnen* is an interesting case in itself: this neighbourhood was an industrial area until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the last factory closed down. In 1966, Kockums industries constructed the world's largest dock in Västra hamnen. Today, it is the most exclusive and expensive neighbourhood in Malmö. Västra hamnen is also known for the housing expo Boo1 or "the City of Tomorrow" (2001), and

representative, Diligentia wanted to put “a museum” in the planned quarter, and was inspired by the same *Dagens Industri* article from summer 2014 (Nilsson, 2014), which influenced the City Council’s representatives.

These development plans correspond with the idea of the “experience economy” and the “Bilbao effect. As Richard Florida points out, referring to the Guggenheim Museum designed by Frank Gehry in Bilbao, Spain, “hire a starchitect to build an eye-popping museum ... and your whole city will be magically transformed into a center of creative innovation” (cited in Decker, 2018, p. 605). Referring again to Hudson and Nicholls (1985), a modern *city* needs museums to be considered as being on “the minimum level of civilisation required” – at least in the contemporary world, where the issue at hand is not “being civilised” but profits, city development and “knowledge-rich economics” (cf. G. D. Lord & Blankenberg, 2015).

However, the real estate developer disappeared from the picture after the proposal was delivered to the government – or, at least, the municipal politicians took the initiative into their hands. As one City Council representative put it:

We had a meeting with them [Diligentia], told them straight out that we cannot promise that you will be the ones building this, but it's very nice of you to think of us when you develop this area. And they have gone forward and actually got the permission to build what is in the plans for that part of the town, it's a spectacular building they have gotten permission to build. And they want to fill it with something. But now we are looking for other solutions where we could place this museum, than that, so... It could still be them winning the contract, but not at the place they suggested.  
(Representative of Green Party, Malmö City Council, 2018-04-04)<sup>81</sup>

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is the first district in Europe that claims to be carbon neutral. The most notable building constructed for Bo01 was the Turning Torso skyscraper, which became the tallest building in Scandinavia and a landmark for Malmö.

<sup>81</sup> One of the outcomes of this development plan can be seen in a company press release from April 2016, describing a joint plan with the City of Malmö to open a “cultural meeting place with the library service” in the neighbourhood where the museum was supposed to be placed according to their initial design (Skandia Fastigheter, 2016).

Therefore, even if we start the “countdown” of the museum project from the Ellis Island article, which was referred to by both the real estate company and the Malmö politicians, economic interest quite quickly gave way to the politics, on both the local and the national level.<sup>82</sup> Even the envisaged location for the full-scale museum had changed already in the 2017 feasibility study report (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b), where three possible places were suggested: one near Malmö Central Station; one in the former industrial zone between the developing Western Harbour, the university campus and the old town (near Malmö Museums and historical neighbourhoods); and one in an already gentrified neighbourhood, *Möllan/Folkets Park*, which is referred to by the City’s Tourist Bureau as the “lively and vibrant heart of the City’s multicultural society” (Malmö City, n.d.).

This interplay between the national and local levels was also reflected in comments by the museum project team:

We need to remember that our assignment is **not to launch a municipal museum**. Because if we fall into that trap, we will cease to exist, because there will be no funding, no intentions [for such a thing] ... So that is what I need to keep repeating as we go: the assignment is to set up a national full-scale museum in Malmö with various stakeholders, and with Malmö as a city and as a municipality to be one component among other... and that is sort of the mantra that I just... come into meetings and get to repeat this.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

With this intention of balancing the different political stakeholders, the museum project also encountered communication issues between the government and municipality:

There are challenges because we are very special project. Everything in the Culture Department is run through the Cultural Board and there are certain rules, and laws around that. But we have our assignment from the Municipal Board, not the Cultural Board, *Kommunstyrelsen*. And the assignment is from the government but was not very detailed in the beginning. So, this is

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<sup>82</sup> One of the first critical articles in the discussion around the museum that took place in the local newspaper *Sydsvenskan* was titled “Do not gather political points in my name” (Nikolić, 2015; see also an outline of this discussion in Zabalueva, 2019).

why it's very important that everything that is sent from us to the government is sent from *Kommunstyrelsen* and from us, because we are responding to the assignment we have from the state through the municipality. The point is that the municipality is an incubator for this as a national project. It is not planned to be a municipal museum, so naturally it does not sit well with the municipal structures where we are temporarily embedded. It is a challenge to be in-between. Now we do have a *regleringsbrev* [institutional routine instructions] from the government, which only state institutions have. So that sort of reinforces the assignment from the state. Still, we prefer to keep it a little open, because we have this close relationship with civil society organizations, it is beneficial for the project that the ministry does not tell us in detail how this has to be done, that there an interaction and an open process all the way through.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

The aspirations of the political parties and decision-makers involved were rather transparent to the museum project team; however, there was a low-key resistance to these plans, which had a lot to do with the dialogic nature and reflexivity of the museum-making process. The issues of spontaneity and elusiveness will be addressed in the Chapter 5; but to provide more context in terms of what kind of thinking was behind the museum project, I will quote this passage from one of the team member interviews:

The way to do that, I think... I would not like to bring in all the standard experts and architects while we are doing the first small thing here, we prefer not to spend the first years building a grand museum by the harbor and then moving in, then we would lose the momentum with all the stakeholders. I would like this to **just happen**. I would like us to have a bigger space for the next step and just sort of start moving from here to there and (collaborate) with stakeholders, and maybe someone else has something to contribute with next door, and suddenly you're more people working there but **you don't know how that happened**, that's what I would like. And - no grand opening, like people would not even... understand what happened because they were busy being in the middle of it, not bystanders. I'd like it to just make sense to everyone. For some people... Sometimes the funders, politicians, really want something... fancy and exclusive to show off, so I don't know. I do feel we work in trust all over and it has worked so far. And I'm a bit amazed that it has, actually.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

If we compare this quote with the *Dagens Industri*'s article, it definitely does not fit with the vision of the grand building designed by the world-famous architect and the Crown Princess inaugurating the museum (Nilsson, 2014).

This is the point where the top-down narrative collides with the other imagined futures for how the museum would *come to be* – which had a lot to do with the civil society initiatives already established in the city.

Gradèn and O'Dell argue that by inviting civil society to participate in the museum-making process and by sharing the decision-making it became difficult to explain to politicians and administration how exactly the museum would function (2022, p. 423). Nonetheless, the reports produced yearly by the museum team during its experimental operation were quite extensive and suggested a full account of both planned and performed activities (e.g. Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b; Rörelsernas Museum, 2020).

However, the “top-down” political layer is only one facet in the complex process of the museum's coming-to-be (although a vital one, as evidenced by the suddenly stopped funding and the formal decision “not to continue”). It is also worth remembering that top-down side of the story is (being) written in all the sense of “history-writing”, full of decision-making, funding, and political agendas, sometimes hidden and sometimes not. But what is the *potential history* of the Museum of Movements, the set of capabilities and opportunities which were opened up by this institution? How was it possible to create a museum without the “building that can be seen from both sides of the Öresund”, without collections, which *was* still *a museum* even though some of the decision-makers involved did not consider it to be the one? (Representative of Social Democrats, Malmö City Council, 2020-10-09: “We never thought of it as an existing museum”).

To explore this connection between the top-down initiative and the grassroots involvement, it is important to consider the specifics of the *place* where the Museum of Movements was coming to be.

### **2.2.2. City as a frame**

The City of Malmö hosts several museums and museum-like cultural establishments, some of them under the umbrella of Malmö Museums which includes the exhibitions and collections of cultural, technical and

natural history, among others. However, the demand for a brand-new museum institution was clearly there, with two important prerequisites. First, the third largest city in Sweden still did not have a *national* (state-funded) museum, and having one would underline the city's cultural importance for the government. Second, "the minimum level of civilisation required" includes not only spatial and economic factors, but the field of politics as well: since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, each new government or political force in Western modernity has striven to be remembered by some kind of cultural investment, and opening a new *museum* seems to be the best way to *preserve* the memory of a government's successes.

Of course, this kind of investment in the "Bilbao effect" of museums also fuels the process of gentrification: the boost to the economic development of an area and access to cultural institutions raises real estate prices; the city planners and real estate companies are thus eager to invest in the "soft power" institutions that provide financial profits (and increase the "cultural capital" of the city, cf. Grincheva, 2019). This was also reflected upon by participants in the process of museum-making, and came up several times in the discussions about the future museum's location:

It will have an impact on Malmö, like every other cultural institution that will gentrify the city and the specific area where it's built... so of course, and that's something that I have been thought of very much, for instance, what happens if we - let's say we put it in Möllan, because Möllan is on its way of being gentrified... And that will change the city, but I mean, there are ambitions from the municipality to become like... *kunskapsstaden* [the city of knowledge] and they're branding themselves as 'kunskapsstaden', so it will fit them perfectly in the image of Malmö of course.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

The "city of knowledge" or creative city narrative was already there on both the political and the city planning level, as we saw in the previous subchapter with the example of the real estate developer. However, it is worth mentioning that the same sentiment was more or less shared by other actors who were moving in the orbit of the museum project. Many inhabitants of Malmö are proud of their city, and even if they would probably oppose the imposed narrative of official multiculturalism and what else, the idea of Malmö being *special* among other big Swedish

cities permeated many of the conversations around the Museum of Movements.<sup>83</sup>

Concerns about how the potential museum would affect the city's cultural economy landscape were also intertwined with the intricate fabric of social movements and civil society activism that already existed in the city; not without the agency and affection of project team members:

What we've always said is that the first year we had the venue we would be very Malmö-focused, because we need to anchor the museum, we need to have the Malmö civil society with us. We have to be relevant for the place where we're rooted, and then we can move forward, to the other cities, to the rest of Sweden. But... I think that being national has also been a burden, because then we've... we had to... *förhålla oss till*... [relate ourselves] to the "national" part always, like we've been... I know that (we have) questions like "we can't just have Malmö-people, we have to go outside, we have to call this one and this one and this one"... so that has always been very heavy to carry. Especially for me, because I'm like very big... *Malmöit*, so... I've been like Malmö-focused a lot, because that's... Malmö is the place that is closest to my heart.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

This opinion – from a person who is intimately connected to Malmö's social fabric – is supported by another of my interlocutors, who compares Malmö's cultural scene with that of Stockholm:

Malmö, I think it is... Of course, there's a big difference [from Stockholm's cultural scene]... audience groups, people interested in different things, and I think there's much more curiosity here. But it's also like - "But why is it good for Malmö?" (laughs). Like, it's also very sceptical, about people coming from Stockholm, yeah, "but what about Malmö"?

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

In my previous study on museums and activism, several informants from the activist groups and movements in Malmö alluded to the need

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<sup>83</sup> There is, however, an opposing discourse of Malmö as the "criminal capital of Sweden", supported by the far-right political parties and their sympathisers, where the city's multiculturalism and high levels of immigration are to blame for the high crime rates and the city is branded as "Swedish Chicago" (Schclarek Mulinari, 2017). For more

for a kind of facilitation and (emotional) support, for a common network or platform to raise awareness and to help address organisational issues. Although this need was never voiced explicitly, when asked how it would be “if there was a platform or a space to collaborate”, the answer was “I/we would definitely use it” (Zabalueva, 2018c, p. 40).

The museum’s project team was responsive to this as well, with their own ideas of possible audiences in mind. For instance:

We have some groups that are - especially in Malmö - very important, for example youth and children. [We were t]hinking very critically about - who's coming here, who's on the receiving end, who is visible in this space, who gets to speak, who feels comfortable to speak - all of those things.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

If everything goes as planned, hopefully we will have a youth and kids who will actually have a relationship to the museum. I mean, individuals that normally won't go and visit a museum, this museum... if everything turns out as we want it to turn out, I think they will have another sort of relationship to the museum, basically.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

These reflections relate back to the political agenda of the initiative group in the City Council who suggested the idea for the museum (Representative of Green Party’s encounter with the schoolchildren who “were really angry that they had to go to the muse-um, because they didn't really understand what the purpose was”). However, there is more than this discourse that is different in the accounts of municipal politicians and museum team members. Where the “top-down” initiative clearly delineates the *problem* of “large groups in Sweden and Malmö in particular, that have their family histories or their heritage in other geographical areas than Sweden” (Representative of Green Party, Malmö City Council, 2018-04-04), the museum team members are less focused on “migration” (and on classifying people on these grounds), preferring to talk instead about curiosity, leisure, and creating safe, welcoming spaces:

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on these two discourses, see “*The Capital of Love*”: *Activists Resisting the Stigmas of*

My ambition is that the museum will become some sort of second home or second living room for mostly youth, I think, because that's where it begins. So if I would get my way, I would like to say that youth in general will visit the museum mostly, and also on their own, not like a school's (class). I would like to see kids or youths walking in the center, going to the shopping mall and "Now it's boring, let's do something else - okay, let's go to the museum!"

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

This focus on the younger generations, though maybe not unique to Malmö, reflects the city's demographics, as apart from being the third largest city in Sweden, known for its multiculturalism, activist scene and as the bridge to the continent, Malmö also has a very young population<sup>84</sup> and is constantly growing. It can also be read, however, in the sense of the educational or public role of museums – both paradigms described in the first part of this chapter.

The issue of “who's coming here, who's on the receiving end, who is visible in this space, who gets to speak, who feels comfortable to speak” reflects the specific *museum mechanics* of this particular museum project (as I will explore further in Chapter 5); nevertheless, the ground for the grassroots input was framed by the city of Malmö (and not the City as political entity) and the existing networks and groups of supporters:

Malmö as a city, there's a lot of civil society (members) and organizations. And there are... we have organizations, civil society communities and organizations that I think shou... could work with the museum, and should work with the museum, but **it's all about trust.**

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

The city and its unique socio-political landscape became, therefore, both an arena and a resource for the museum-making process, bringing civil society organisations into it.

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*Malmö through Storytelling* (C. Hansen, 2022).

<sup>84</sup> Roughly half of Malmö residents are under the age of 35 (48%). 22 per cent are under 18 years old and 19 per cent are between 25 and 34 years old according to 2022 statistics (Malmö City, 2022).

### 2.2.3. Counterpoint: a grassroots museum

- *I had this conversation with my partner last night, about the museum saying that we are a museum from... att vi bygger nerifrån [we build upwards].*

*O: Ah, like grassroots.*

- *Grassroots, yeah. And that's why we want people to join, and the organizations to join, but I think it should be the opposite.*

*O: What do you mean?*

- *I mean that we cannot say that we are a grassroots museum, come on! it's opposite, we should... say that we want to work with grassroots organizations in order to become a grassroots museum. Do you know what I mean? [O: Yeah] We **have to do the work and then say that we are something. And not opposite.***

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

Every process is situated, and every movement needs a context. The Museum of Movements project could have been created and dissolved silently, as happens with many other projects both large and small, buried in the archival folders with reports and budgets, waiting for the future researchers to study it from a respectful distance. Many museum professionals and cultural managers (not to mention academic scholars!) probably know of such projects, which may be executed on the highest professional level, but do not have much of an effect on the surrounding world. The museum could even have started collecting material, to be catalogued and processed in the future – as creating collections is a particularly time-consuming process.

Instead, the Museum of Movements became a surface that connected people, and chose to look into *how* and *why*<sup>85</sup> the future material would be collected, what the premises were for creating such an institution, and what it means to be a museum. In a way, the project was from the very beginning entrenched in the epistemic divide that is examined in this dissertation.

The actual assets of the Museum of Movements were the networks that emerged around it and the knowledge produced with the help of these networks. As one of the project managers put it, “The first step

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<sup>85</sup> Just as described in the alternative ICOM museum definition proposed in 2019.

towards inclusion must be for people to have a sense of belonging and to feel ownership” (Elg, 2019).<sup>86</sup>

Already in spring 2018, when the museum project has received support from the government for experimental operations (*försökverksamhet*) and an in-depth study (*fördjupningsstudie*) on developing the museum, civil society actors were present, and their interest was visible. One of my first observations from the dialogue meeting held in March 2018 was how many of the people in attendance seemed to know each other; they greeted one another with hugs and words like “It’s so good to see you again!” (fieldnotes 2018-03-13). This was the first dialogue meeting after starting a new phase in the museum-making process, and the first after a long pause following the final report from the feasibility study published in spring 2017 (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b); and all this time people who had been involved in the feasibility study or had heard about it continued to ask about the project’s progress, according to the museum team. Even though feedback from the team was scarce during this break period for various reasons (staff shortages, waiting for budget decisions, bureaucratic delays, and having other projects to deal with), the surge of interest never died down.

The actors that were directly affecting and enhancing the efforts of the museum project team included civil society, various organisations and associations, and a variety of stakeholders and networks around the museum. Several team members observed how open and proactive these actors were; for instance, in comparison to the cultural scene in the Swedish capital:

Also collaboration part itself is vastly different from Stockholm, hugely different. It's really easy to collaborate, and people are keen on collaborating, there's... (I feel) a very little prestige involved. It's not as political to collaborate - like in Stockholm it was.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

Here the project team member makes another comparison between Stockholm and Malmö, and suggests an inherent ability of Malmö-

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<sup>86</sup> Which, of course, raises the question: who are “the people” in this statement? Prospective visitors? Malmö inhabitants? Local activists and communities? International museum crowds?

based organisations to form networks and build momentum. Another key feature of the civil society participation in the project was the tendency to take initiative:

Sometimes [the museum] would just get the people at the door knocking and being like: is this the activist museum? We need to use the space (laughs) or whatever, we heard from so and so that this is the space that we can use - which is gr... when you know that something has worked, right? [O: Yeah] So that was fantastic, there were people who were not just the usual, there were always new people coming.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.05.20)

The turning point for making this participation happen was, of course, having an actual physical *door* to a venue that people could knock on:

Those that we worked with, since we got the venue, are like organizations that are doing practical work as well. <...> That we've been working with organizations that are doers, I mean, I'm not saying that the ones coming to the dialogue meetings are not doers, because they've also been at the venue, and doing something, but, I mean, the venue has opened up for... (almost) unexpected collaborations, I think, because the venue has also worked as the way into the MOM, like *en port* [a door] of some kind, because we also lend out the venue, right? So then we've been approached about... from people that don't give a shit about the museum, I mean they don't care about cultural institution, they just want the venue to do a certain thing at. And that has opened up for like relations and collaborations that wouldn't happen otherwise.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

This evokes the material from my previous study of civil society-based activism in Malmö and this particular museum project (Zabalueva, 2018c), where different participants I spoke to back in 2017 agreed that having a space or platform for collaboration could actually enable it on a greater scale. With its working space/experimental venue, the Museum of Movements delivered exactly the surface for these collaborations to happen. In a way, it was creating a *community* around the museum,<sup>87</sup> the as-yet-non-existent entity composed of

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<sup>87</sup> Another discussion point that I do not examine closely here is the ambiguity of the concepts of “community” and “civil society” within the Swedish social landscape. Whereas for the museum professional with international training and/or experience “community” sometimes means very specific things: source communities, indigenous communities, local communities of marginalised groups (see, for example, Karp et al.,

different actors and organisations who took part in the process of becoming – for various reasons, but mostly as a result of the engagement and affective relations with the project team:

We always try to find a way of searching for the untold, or unseen, or un... you know, the crack, right? And I feel like we always did relevant things! And I think the surrounding of us was a big support, there was a network that was willing to carry the museum.  
(Museum of Movements team member, 2021.05.11)

The support network which helped to “carry the museum” played an important role in making it real. The Museum of Movements’ working room programme included mainly activities and events suggested by the external actors; the project team worked on them as well, but the initiative was coming from civil society and different organisations. In this sense, the *surface* that the Museum of Movements was creating came to be a space of co-creation and engagement in much more diverse ways than the initial focus on “migration and democracy” had envisioned.

The civil society engagement in the project became even more visible after the decision to discontinue the museum. In November 2020, a group of activists from civil society organisations working with refugees, immigrants, human rights and anti-racism,<sup>88</sup> submitted an appeal to Malmö City asking them to support the disappearing museum at least for the following year, until the project could find other sources of funding. In a meeting with Malmö’s deputy mayor and the Social Democrats representative in the City Council, they pointed out the unique relationships that had been established between the various minority groups, civil society organisations and the Museum of Movements, and the trust that had been built on the basis of these relationships. They also emphasised that the museum project was a “sustainable, incomparable forum for advocating the freedom of

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1992), in Sweden – a socialist welfare state for the last hundred years of its history – the social “order of things” is perceived and performed somewhat differently (see, for example, Glover, 2009).

<sup>88</sup> These groups included: *Asylgruppen*; *Afrosvenskarnas Forum för Rättvisa*; *Imágenes del Sur/Bilder från Söder*; *KOD för Sverige: Kultur, Omvärld och Demokrati*; *Teater InterAkt*, etc.

expression, democracy and human rights”, and that with its cancellation, civil society and marginalised groups would lose this safe space where they could meet and discuss current issues – and the possibility of a sense of *belonging* to the community despite all the differences separating them (fieldnotes 2020-11-20).<sup>89</sup>

One of the problems with the museum project was a sort of double-gatekeeping, on the part of both the museum team and the City of Malmö, which prevented the establishment of additional contacts and points of intersection. If the team was struggling with a staff shortage and the excess of interest and attention from current and prospective stakeholders (as one of the team members confirmed, they had created “too many expectations” – interview 2020.05.20), the municipal cultural administration had a hard time adapting its routines to such a dynamic and fluid project (for example, the project’s digital presence was for a long time<sup>90</sup> confined to the City of Malmö municipal webpage – an issue with which other institutions within the Cultural Department, such as Malmö Museums, also struggle).

In short, the museum project up until its dissolution did not have a clear and transparent allegiance and structure. The investigation into the “ownership” of the museum, which was carried out in 2018 as a part of the “in-depth” phase of the museum project, still could be a way to pursue further forms of museum-making, as an NGO or civil society organisation (Gradén, 2018). However, the ownership issue had still not been resolved in the latest report, *Förslag till permanent verksamhet/Proposal for the permanent institution* (Rörelsernas Museum, 2020). And, despite the successes of the project in connecting actors and creating networks, there was still a lack – at least in the eyes of officials – of traditional museum functions. One of the team members recalled at the end of 2020, after the decision of closure was made public:

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<sup>89</sup> It is worth mentioning that even though the group of actors and organisations around the Museum of Movements project was quite diverse, there are still many other actors and organisations in Malmö’s civil society scene which were not involved, did not come into the project’s orbit, or were even slightly offended by the museum’s agenda and political stance.

<sup>90</sup> Until 2020.

I think what could have made a difference is if we for instance had a big exhibition. Because we didn't have that, in the venue.

We didn't create a big exhibition that showed what we were talking about, what the goal was, what the aim was, what we wanted to create. We didn't have the time or resources to do that, and I think if we would have something **tangible**, like a big *utställning* [exhibition] or something, if we would have something to display, I think it would be harder to say that you're not the museum, or it would be harder to close it down, because then they had to do something with all this... exhibition material and the... we would have had more credit from at least the museum world and maybe the State, because I think for several years from 2016 to 2020 we've talked about what we wanted to do, and we did lot of that of course, in the venue, but **we didn't do what many people associate with museums.**

We didn't create a big exhibition, but that's also something that goes against what we've been saying because that would need us to just pop up an exhibition without shared authority, without consulting with communities, without... It would have been a conflict. And, of course, exhibitions were to come, in the future. But I think, you know, this need of result that people would... that some politicians would like... *gå igång på* [jump on] - we didn't have that.

O: Yeah. That they could measure and kind of... (sighs)

- Exactly! Yeah, and take a picture of and write in the newspapers about, and *bli recenserad* [be reviewed]. Like, for instance, we have *Konsthallens utställning med* [Malmö Konsthall exhibition with] *Michael Rakowitz*, that was like - that was HUGE, that became huge, and he was huge, because - oh, we've done this with communities, with the *Irakiska kulturföreningen* [Iraqi cultural association] and that was amazing, that work was amazing. But I think if we would have done something similar, I think both the municipality, the region and the national museu.. the *Regeringen* [government] would have at least thought of us in a different way. But that was in the future for us. And we had that in mind, but... yeah.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

Not having something *tangible* to present – along with the numerous reports, plans and activities that were submitted annually to the cultural administration on both municipal and national level – created anxiety about not being able to communicate the *value* of the museum project in the terms which made sense to the top-down decision-makers. And, of course, this leads us again to the notion of “museum” *per se*, which would apparently be considered incomplete without

exhibitions – but also without the “collections” and “research” parts, on which I will dwell in the following section.

## 2.2.4. Preservation drive

Before moving forward in my analysis of the role of politics in the process of the museum’s un-making, I intend to describe two initiatives/side projects that are inherently connected to the Museum of Movements concept and to address the epistemological divide that was outlined in the Chapter 1 in the discussion around the museum definition; namely, the between the ideas of preservation expertise and museum activism.<sup>91</sup>

The first of these projects is *Safe Havens – The Malmö Meetings*, a series of annual network conferences held in Malmö, Sweden (existed since 2013, arranged by the team from the Malmö Cultural Department between 2015–2017 and continued with the support of various organisations<sup>92</sup> from 2018-2020 on the base of the Museum of Movements, with the 2019 conference being held in South Africa). As was stated on the event’s webpage,<sup>93</sup> it was organised

in collaboration between cultural operators and organizations and serves as a gathering place for human rights defenders within arts and academia, and as a platform for enhancing the visibility of cultural operators. The conference focuses on the connection between art, culture and human rights, and highlights the significant position of artists, culture and academia in human rights advocacy. It also promotes sharing and exchange of knowledge between artists

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<sup>91</sup> Bruno Brulon Soares, in his reflection on “reflexive museology”, describes how this discipline differs from the “information sciences”; namely, from archives and library studies, with which it is often clustered together. As he puts it, “Information centers are supposed to be transparent; museums are allowed to ‘play’ hide and seek with its objects, using lights, shadows, sounds and theater to engage their visitors in a meaningful performance” (2015, p. 54). On the other hand, museums are putting objects and stories *on display*, whereas archives and libraries *store and preserve* information – another ambiguity inherent to museum mechanics, it seems.

<sup>92</sup> The Nordic Council of Ministers, the Swedish Ministry of Culture, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, the Swedish Arts Council, Nordic Culture Point, the Region of Skåne, Amnesty, PEN-America, SafeMUSE, Artists at Risk Connection, Artistic Freedom Initiative, International Arts Rights Advisors, Seriefrämjandet hosted by the ICORN-City of Malmö, Department of Culture and the Museum of Movements.

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.themalmomeetings.org/>, now unavailable, see Zabalueva, 2018, p. 7.

and cultural operators, activists, scholars, and major human rights/cultural organizations.

(Malmö Stad: Safe Havens 2015-2018)

The Safe Havens conferences were also connected to *fristadsförfattare* programme, or the Swedish part of the International Cities of Refuge (ICORN) network, which offers shelter for writers, journalists, and artists at risk – each city provides one grant holder with a safe place to stay and economic security for two years. There are currently more than 70 Cities of Refuge around the world, mainly in Europe, but the network is expanding globally; at the time of writing, 25 cities and municipalities in Sweden are participating in the network. The City of Malmö joined the network in 2010.

The origins of ICORN date back to the 1990s,<sup>94</sup> when the International Parliament of Writers organisation created the Cities of Asylum Network in response to the persecution of writers and journalists and the attacks on the freedom of expression around the globe. The organisation dissolved in 2005, but the idea of giving refuge to cultural actors who are in danger in their country of origin or residency survived. The new ICORN network was established in 2006, and in 2014 the ICORN general assembly voted to expand the scope of support beyond literature and also offer residencies for artists and musicians.

The network consists of highly autonomous nodes (cities) and is coordinated from Stavanger, Norway. As ICORN states, “Writers and artists are especially vulnerable to censorship, harassment, imprisonment and even death, *because of what they do*” (ICORN, n.d.). Indeed, PEN International’s Writers in Prison Committee annually monitors 700-900 cases of writers and artists who are persecuted as a direct consequence of their work. To quote further from the ICORN official webpage, the “commitment by these cities is both very concrete and deeply symbolic: the agent for change (the writer/artist) escapes from imminent threat and persecution; the host city offers sanctuary; and the values of hospitality, solidarity and freedom of expression become further enshrined in the ethos of that city”. Therefore, the

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<sup>94</sup> And even before, to the Sanctuary cities in North America and the very idea of providing asylum for refugees (Róžańska-Braniecka, 2017).

defence of freedom of expression and promotion of democratic values becomes akin to accumulating the city's cultural capital; in a way, this process resembles the idea of "putting the museum" into a neighbourhood in order to increase its significance and "moral value". Unlike granting the universal right to asylum, this practice allows host societies to "choose" and "collect" distinguished "specimens" in order to "civilise" themselves – adjusting their "ethos" and increasing empathy for the disenfranchised.

It is important to remember that this framework exists independently of the practices actually carried out on the ground – hence so many quotation marks. The *Safe Havens* event itself was a joint effort of the international community, involving various non-profit and cultural actors – which did not exclude the political importance for the Malmö municipality to be known as a City of Refuge and receive international recognition in the field of artistic freedom. Although not being planned as a marketing campaign *per se*, the ICORN heritage affected many facets of the city's cultural landscape. After the Museum of Movements' closure, Safe Havens network continued to exist and develop its activities based on the same values, for example as the SH|FT<sup>95</sup> project.

The other initiative that I want to mention here is connected to both Safe Havens/City of Refuge and to the Museum of Movements project.

The vision of the future museum as a research centre (see also 2.2.5), alongside the Cultural Department's involvement with the Safe Havens and ICORN networks, gave rise to the idea of establishing an archive that would provide a "safe haven" for the documentation and heritage of popular movements and NGOs in Sweden and around the world, as well as that of artists at risk. In the feasibility study report, the importance of the archival work was described as a part of the research environment within the future museum, and the notion of a *Räddningsarkiv* (Rescue Archive) was mentioned several times as inalienable part of it (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b, p. 60), which was grounded in the previous work done in Malmö as a City of Refuge.

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<sup>95</sup> "The Safe Havens Freedom Talks (SH|FT) team envisions an exhibition based on an open-source archive and can be transformed into spatial solutions flexible to accommodate different needs and choices depending on the exhibition space and the possibility of updates and global interaction" (SH|FT, 2023).

This idea evolved into a side project and was later moved to the Malmö City Archives (an institution that is linked not only with the Cultural Department, but also with several other administrative departments of the Malmö municipality and the Swedish state archives in general) as an independent entity, closely connected to the future museum, and was called the Malmö Rescue Archive (*Malmö Räddningsarkiv*). The outcome was a new division at the city's Cultural Departments (the Division for Freedom of Expression and Human Rights, *Avdelningen för yttrandefrihet och mänskliga rättigheter*)<sup>96</sup> and the establishment of the Dawit Isaak Library or “free speech library”, named after a Swedish-Eritrean journalist imprisoned in Eritrea since 2001 for his criticism of the political regime there. The new division worked towards the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Malmö City Archives and UNESCO in March 2020 (UNESCO News, 2020), and the Dawit Isaak Library opened in September 2020 – at the same time as the news about the Museum of Movement's closure became public.<sup>97</sup>

It was not planned to be a competition between two projects: rather, the idea for the Rescue Archive was put forward in the feasibility study report and, according to one of the politicians who presented the report to the Swedish Ministry of Culture, caught the interest of then-minister Alice Bah Kunke (Representative of Social Democrats, Malmö City Council, 2020-10-09). The museum's close collaboration with Malmö City Archives, and even the physical proximity between them (the museum's working room was located in the same building) pushed this process further – on the surface. The outcome, however, was dissenting from this initial plan.

Taking off from the Museum of Movements' feasibility study, the Rescue Archive project started in mid-October 2017 and underwent various changes on the way. It was carrying all the legacy and

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<sup>96</sup> This division now includes also RIKC, the Roma Information and Knowledge Centre, which coordinates issues regarding the Roma national minority in the Malmö municipality.

<sup>97</sup> In response to a post about the opening of the library on the Cultural Department's Facebook page, a user comments: “Good library. Sad that it cannot be combined with the Museum of Movements which will close now” (*Bra bibliotek. Synd att man inte kan kombinera det med Rörelsernas museum, som ju ska stängas nu*; Kultur i Malmö, 2020).

complexities of its disciplinary origins. For example, in Malmö City's political documents it was referred to as "the archive for testimonies and documentation of refugees"<sup>98</sup>, instead of being explicitly connected with activism, which demonstrates the lack of concrete objectives and target groups for the future archive mediated (even) within the municipality. At the same time, in the Municipal Council there was also a vision that "in the Rescue Archives we have [*sic!*] all the lists of people who come here for the last 200 years. The problem is - by law we can't really exhibit the lists for the last 70 years I think, or it's 50, I don't know, but it's the *personuppgiftslagen* [the Swedish data protection legislation]. It makes it hard" (Representative of Green Party, Malmö City Council, 2018-04-04). Here the "archiving" idea of collecting documents and testimonies clearly takes the upper hand.<sup>99</sup>

The intention that informed this side project, however, was clear: to *preserve* threatened heritage/documentation/memories. It was inspired by several similar projects, such as the Endangered Archives programme of the British Library and the archiving policies of the Open Society Archives in Budapest. Moreover, the original title of the project, "Malmö Rescue Archive in Residence", implies an even closer connection to the International Cities of Refuge practices: the emphasis was made on the temporary preservation and creating an archive of copies, whereas original material should be returned to the country of origin.<sup>100</sup> A lot of research was done by the Rescue Archives team on censorship, persecution of writers and journalists, connecting it to the work of ICORN and guest writers and artists in Malmö.

The purpose of the Rescue Archive as it was presented in the initial phase of the project, was to "collect documents from journalists and cultural workers at risk as well as from other possible NGOs" and

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<sup>98</sup> "Ett arkiv för att bevara vittnesmål och material som berättar om människors flykt från krig", internal documentation, November 29th, 2017

<sup>99</sup> One can also recall Ariella Azoulay's "well-documented objects and non-documented people" (2019); here the *documents* are supposed to be extracted into the special institution for care, which leaves the humane dimension out of the equation once again, in full agreement with the museum mechanics of modernity.

<sup>100</sup> This concept of the potential archival practice reveals, in my opinion, a lot about the very idea of giving a Safe Haven to distinguished individuals, extracting their ability to promote the City of Refuge and then sending them away. The archival and museum practices of collecting and exhibiting information sources and specimens come to mind here.

“continue Malmö City Archives’ work with civil society as a ‘social movements archive”” (internal documentation, presentation Stadsarkivet, Karlstad 2017). The feasibility study report emphasised the need to “fill the gaps” and overcome “silences, absences and misconceptions of the stories from marginalised groups, non-privileged population, minorities, women, migrants, LGBTQ+ individuals and vulnerable persons” (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b, p. 57).

In a way, from the moment of starting the museum’s “experimental” phase, the concurrent archival project seemed to present the possibility to delegate the issue of collecting material to the nearby institution, which one way or another would become a part of the future museum.<sup>101</sup>

The Rescue Archive project faced an intricate dilemma of *accessibility* and safe *preservation*: the aim to produce a socially significant impact conflicts with safety and security requirements if the gathered material cannot be exposed to the public. The prevalence of the archival paradigm of *evidence* (Cook, 2013)<sup>102</sup> in this case was supported by the working documents of the Human Rights Working Group of the International Council of Archives (HRWG ICA, 2016) which emphasise, among other points, the importance of documenting human rights violations through archives.

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<sup>101</sup> However, from the very beginning it was clearly stated by the City Archives that the Rescue Archive project was their responsibility – and only theirs, as well as any future collections. In a way, the ownership question, which became so dire for the Museum of Movements, had never been an issue in this case, as there was already a whole established institution in charge.

<sup>102</sup> As Canadian researcher Terry Cook (2013) puts it, the *evidence* paradigm historically precedes those of *memory*, *identity* and *community* - though “these four accumulate across time; they do not entirely replace each other” (p. 105). The significant feature of this basic paradigm is the role of the archive as a safekeeper of the Truth, a collection of objective facts that are obtained from original contexts and kept untouched. Archival “curatorship” as a conscious selection of material came, according to Cook, only in the 1930s after the rapid growth of the collected data and followed trends in historical writing, introducing the *memory* paradigm. The next shift took place in the 1970s and acknowledged the existence of multivocal representation in archival collections (*identity*). The last paradigm, the *community* one, is still only “on the horizon”, and is supposed to bridge the previous three paradigms and bring them forward into the transition to new democratic, inclusive and holistic “total archives”. Coming from archival science, these four phases nonetheless very much resemble how museology is struggling to define the museums’ role in different social contexts; of course, it implies an inherent evolutionary/genealogic thinking even if paradigms are “accumulating”, not evolving into one another.

This direction of the archival work correlates with the new archival philosophies and functions (cf. Körmeny, 2007), which focus on positive cultural impact in postmodern societies.<sup>103</sup> However, even throughout these shifts, the role of the archivist as a mediator and interpreter/knowledge producer remains essentially unchanged. In the case of the Rescue Archive, this potential archivist should define which memories and materials are worth preserving and which will perish. According to Jacques Derrida (1995), who draws on Freudian psychoanalysis, the archive is based on two conflicting forces: a “death drive” or “archive (self-)destruction”, and an opposite drive which “preserves the record of the past and... embodies the promise of the present to the future” (as cited in Manoff, 2004, p. 11). In this formulation, the Rescue Archive turns into the gatekeeper of memories (whoever’s memories it chooses to save) which constructs historical records (preserves them from destruction) according to its own agenda. The mechanisms of this construction, however, remain unclear.

The discussion of the Rescue Archive project brings us back to the title and main message of this chapter as a whole: “Politics starts in the museum” (or the archive, for that matter). What kind of political agenda manifested itself through this side project?

From 2017 onwards, the Rescue Archive and the Museum of Movements evolved in disparate directions, each having its own target audiences and catering for the particular needs of different political discourses. The latter was discontinued, while the former now exists in the form of the Division for Freedom of Expression and Human Rights at the City Archives.

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<sup>103</sup> Lajos Körmeny (2007) defines archives’ philosophy at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century using the following notions: popularisation, transparency, openness, market approach, media culture and information-centricity. All these concepts can be applied to the Malmö City Archives’ current policy. The Rescue Archive project was conceived as following this policy as well: among its planned functions were, for example, pedagogical programmes for school students with a focus on democracy, human rights and global migration as well as other sub-projects with educational purposes (mostly within the framework of the future Museum of Movements, as the stage where the pilot activities of the museum could be tested). Nevertheless, as the Rescue Archive project went off course and fell under the responsibility of the City Archives, the museum/educational focus partly faded, while a new one was yet to emerge.

In the case of the Rescue Archive, a “preservation drive” is consonant with a politics of empathy, which implicates a whole scope of ethical considerations and controversies:

Empathy has been identified as a key emotion for facilitating and swaying public debate on social justice issues [...]. However, the idea of empathetic imagination, and the way it is often uncritically embedded in liberal discourse as a ‘feel good’ concession, has been strongly criticized as a way of reasserting existing power relations when socially privileged subjects choose to confer or withhold empathy.

(Smith & Campbell, 2015, p. 454)

Carolyne Pedwell (2014) explores the transnational effects of empathy both in literary works and in current politics, and describes several ways to understand this complicated emotion, from feeling compassion for the Other’s suffering to the ability to learn how the Other thinks and feels. She also cites US researcher Lauren Berlant’s remark that “empathy and compassion are inevitably bound up with the ongoing ethics of privilege” (in Pedwell, 2014, p. 15). Empathy in the transnational context, according to Pedwell, is always situated at the intersection of neoliberalism and postcoloniality, as feelings of empathy and compassion can become commodified and thus a source of profit for those conferring it.

The core idea behind the idea of Rescue Archive is that heritage and memory are threatened – presumably by a range of causes, but essentially by human rights violations and infringements on freedom of expression. A certain distinction is being made, then, between those who are threatened and are looking for shelter and those who can provide this shelter – which can potentially lead to estrangement and even paternalistic behaviour. It is also worth noting the temporal and spatial divide between the humanitarian effort of preservation and the things that ought to be preserved: despite the interest in local Others in the initial stages of the project (when I first came into its orbit as an intern at Malmö City Archives in autumn 2017), the main focus of the Freedom of Expression library and the institutional environment

forming around it is global, concerned with censorship and human rights violations all over the world.<sup>104</sup>

In the case of the Rescue Archive project, the aspiration to collect and preserve threatened information goes along with the neoliberal discourse of empathy as “an affective mode of perspective-taking premised on care and concern for ‘the other’” (Pedwell, 2014, p. 184), but at the same time opens up possibilities to involve communities in dialogue, first of all, on how they perceive their own memories and heritage. In this sense, the image of the archive as a place of safe-keeping can be beneficial and complementary to the museum as a public space where this kind of dialogue might be performed.

Without the established work with local communities, the Rescue Archive project risks being stuck in the binary opposition between “donors” (in this case, not of funding but of the space, a “safe haven” for threatened documentation – or, as one of the project’s draft proposals claimed, the “place in the history” which is being bestowed on those who need the aid) and “recipients”; this contradictory discourse of the “Aidland” (for more on this notion and a critique of it, cf. Harrison, 2013). To be able to start a dialogue, the reflexive position of the archivist is essential – a position that will acknowledge “experts’ emotional commitment” (Smith & Campbell, 2016, p. 448) and take an “epistemic responsibility” (Skeggs, 1997, p. 38) which comes along with interpretation act.

However, as can be seen from my conversations with Malmö politicians (Representative of Green Party, Malmö City Council, 2018-04-04; Representative of Social Democrats, Malmö City Council, 2020-10-09), the concept of the Rescue Archive for them was somewhat separated from the one of a research centre – in contrast to how it was envisioned in the feasibility study report. As we will see in the following chapters, it was also appealing because of the conventional way in

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<sup>104</sup> Another way to analyse transnational politics of empathy would be to employ Mauss’ and Derrida’s theories on the gift (e.g., as Korf et al., 2010 do in their analysis of international humanitarian aid victims of the tsunami in Sri-Lanka). Here, the impossibility of “pure” altruistic aid is entangled in local power relations; “giving” means entering a circle of exchange, where a gift turns out to be a debt and comes with an obligation to reciprocate. Empathy, therefore, not only becomes a commodity or a competence with a market value among the “donors”, but it also brings “recipients” into “a biopolitical technology of regulation” (Pedwell, 2014, p. 32).

which it suggested approaching the “difficult issues” of migration, democracy, freedom of expression and persecutions of cultural actors: to collect it, label, taxonomise, and put them away on the proverbial archival shelves, instead of interacting and discussing with them. To perform the museum mechanics and feel good afterwards – and this is the reason that both Safe Havens and the Rescue Archive bring important dynamics into the process of the making of the Museum of Movements.

### **2.2.5. Site of knowledge production**

In the “Top-down initiative” subchapter, I mentioned two reference groups: a political one, which monitored the museum project so it would not “go in the wrong direction” (Representative of Green Party, Malmö City Council, 2018-04-04), and another consisting of academics and museum professionals. The latter can help to understand the tensions and relationships related to the research function in/of the museum in this specific case.

The involvement of the research and researchers (including myself, if from the somewhat detached position of an outsider) in all stages of the museum project was crucial: it meant bringing together an international group of museum professionals, and allowed for resolving some staffing issues (for example, Armando Perla, the project manager at the Museum of Movements from 2018-2020, became engaged with the museum following the 2016 conference *Museums in Times of Migration and Mobility* at Malmö University, where he presented his work as curator at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights). However, it also provided the nascent museum with an academic perspective, from the feasibility study report that was complemented by a volume of “Researchers’ essays” (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017a), to the various investigations carried out in different academic fields that were commissioned by the Cultural Department,<sup>105</sup> to opportunities for collaboration with universities and institutions, such as the Raoul

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<sup>105</sup> E.g., the smaller study on how Swedish museums address ethical considerations (*Omvärldsanalys – Etiska riktlinjer i insamling och hantering av berättelser och*

Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law<sup>106</sup> and an oral history centre which was planned to be established at Malmö University.

The importance of establishing these research networks cannot be overstated. First of all, there is a common perception in the museum world that museums are often compelled to abandon the research activities due to the market pressure:<sup>107</sup> in the world of the “experience economy” museums are forced to focus on public departments (whereas both the current and proposed museum definitions by ICOM emphasise the importance of research departments *within* institutions, not to mention museology as an academic discipline and its imperative to bridge theory and practice). This perception to some extent is complemented by the critique of the museum as institution and its disciplinary origins – but, as I argue throughout this dissertation, this is exactly why research conducted *within the museum* is so crucial: it allows to critically assess and develop existing practices as well as map the directions for future work.

This importance of the research was also voiced in the Museum of Movements’ reports and internal documentation, and in my conversations with the project team:

We talk about inclusivity and all of that, so to have something like that [a special position like “inclusion officer”]<sup>108</sup> and then to have under there all of the connections, because we talk about research needs to be really grounded on academic research but also on community research,

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*kvalitativt material vid svenska museer* by Vladimir Okhnych, in appendix to the report Kulturförvaltningen, 2019).

<sup>106</sup> The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute and the Museum of Movements in Spring 2019.

<sup>107</sup> In Sweden, however, this tendency has followed a slightly different course of development: starting from the cultural policies of the 1970s which drew a distinction between universities as the producers of knowledge and museums as communicators, tho the focus on the democratic role of museums in the 1990s when “museum-based research has lost its political legitimacy” (Grinell & Högberg, 2020, p. 43). With the Swedish Museum Law (SFS 2017:563), however, the focus on knowledge production was renewed, and Grinell and Högberg even argue that “if the divide between participation and scholarly knowledge existed, according to the ‘museum debate’, the legislation took the side of knowledge” (ibid., p. 45; see Chapter 3 for more on the Swedish “museum debate”).

<sup>108</sup> Such a position existed during the Museum of Movements’ operations in 2019-2020 and involved exactly that – community outreach work.

because we need to be in contact with the people on the ground and I mean the "community" term is one we haven't really landed on anything, you know we don't know if we gonna call it community, civil society, or groups, or... we still don't know.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2018.12.10)

During the process of the museum's coming-to-be, a lot of work was done to establish the guidelines and structures for the future museum and its internal policies and strategies, as recalled for instance in this account:

I need to write a very strong research strategy for the museum, and within that **research strategy** I also want to speak about the need for an ethical framework, but also within that ethical framework I need to talk about the need for a body that will look at the ethics, a research ethics committee, a research ethics council. <...>

I thought that this [working on ethical guidelines] would be really a way to us for position ourselves, with the work of the museum as sort of like the ethics framework, something like a champion or pioneer, to be looking at these issues. Because we want to also collect stories, but we want to do it responsibly, so before we start collecting stories, we need to have that framework in place.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2018.12.10)

This consideration resulted in the extended research strategies as one of the "Four Wheels of Museum Practice" – the part of the 2018 MOM report (Kulturförvaltningen, 2019). The strong focus on ethics – both working ethics for the museum and ethics guidelines for research– reflects the idea of the museum as an ethical praxis (cf. Sullivan & Middleton, 2019).

A good example of such a "good research practice" is the work that was done within the Museum of Movements regarding the ethical guidelines for the institution. Among a dozen events that were organised during the autumn of 2019, after the opening of the working space, only two were produced by the museum itself (rather than proposed by collaborators and partner organisations), and both were in the line with the work on ethical guidelines (fieldnotes, September–November 2019):

- a conference on ethics regarding oral histories and personal narratives with a panel talk between Swedish, Norwegian and

Canadian academics and museum professionals and representatives from the Sámi and Afro-Swedish communities;

- a workshop on museum ethics with the participation of researchers and museum professionals from all over the world.

The work on the future museum's ethical guidelines was potentially also enhanced by the fact that project manager Armando Perla became a Board Member of a new ICOM international committee on ethical dilemmas (ICOM Ethics), created in September 2019.

The previously mentioned conference *Museums in Times of Migration and Mobility*, held at Malmö University in May 2016, resulted in an edited collection of articles titled *Museums in a time of migration: Rethinking museums' roles, representations, collections, and collaborations* (Johansson & Bevelander, 2017), which was presented at the Safe Havens conference in December 2017 and was comprised of important pieces on the issue of museums and migration.

However, the academic involvement sometimes proved to be redundant: for example, some of the reports provided by researchers were considered by the politicians to be “too academic” or “not delivered the clear suggestions”<sup>109</sup> (Representative of Social Democrats, Malmö City Council, 2020-10-09).

The future plans for the museum's development included establishing the Centre for Oral History and Participatory Research (COHPR), which would set the ground for the main method suggested in the 2020 proposal (Rörelsernas Museum, 2020) for the full-scale, permanent museum institution: oral history as the way to collect, discuss and access the shared identities of the people involved with the museum. The COHPR would include a library and a laboratory for learning about oral history as a method and as a field of research, and would work on methods and tools to be used by anyone interested to contribute with their stories about democracy, migration, and human rights. It was intended to be the heart of the future full-scale museum, a “beating heart full of people, stories and conversations” which could help to make “the Swedish history richer, deeper and more complex” (ibid., p. 7). It was also meant not only to serve as the museum's intern

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<sup>109</sup> “Det var ingen som fattade, för akademiskt”; ”utredningen blev inget... det borde vara ett paketerad förslag”.

research division, but to offer a unique opportunity for researchers from different universities to carry out projects in the humanities and social sciences, as the first research centre focused on oral history in Sweden. The ambition was to make this centre a collaboration hub for both national and international researchers, or at least those from the Nordic countries (ibid., p. 16). One of the initial steps towards establishing such a centre was the Malmö University-based project *Malmö Life Stories* (MAU, 2020), carried out in 2020 in collaboration with the Museum of Movements.

### **2.2.6. “We want to have a national museum...”**

The politics of the Museum of Movements making and un-making concerned a complex entanglement of actors and impulses. In the media debate which surrounded its conception (Karlsson, 2015; Nikolić, 2015; Thomé & Johansson, 2015) the discussion touched upon the politics of representation, especially in the sense of the initial proposal to build “museum of immigrants”. While moving from “immigrants” to “democracy and migration”, the part of the proposed museum being “national” was somehow overlooked. It is worth mentioning that the idea of a “national museum for democracy and migration” does not correspond to the “national museums” in the sense of museum paradigms addressed in the first half of this chapter, but the museum institution established, funded (at least partially), and owned by the state.<sup>110</sup> It is, however, one of the fundamental issues which draws out how the epistemic politics of museums trickles into the sphere of *realpolitik*, cultural governance, and political parties. This can be observed in the top-down initiative on the local, municipal level: the Malmö City Council made it apparent that without the involvement of the Swedish government this museum project cannot be continued. The government, on the other hand, was aiming for the cultural institution promoting the good cause (in the spirit of the cosmopolitan museum), contributing to the image of a good state – and if in the 2015 the public discourse was focused on the “migration crisis”, five years

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<sup>110</sup> It is also worth noting that the Swedish word for “national museum” is *statligt*, related to *staten*, “state”.

later this discussion withered, and the demand for other focus of attention has appeared.

Being inarguably a political project from the very beginning, the Museum of Movements was also, first and foremost, a *museum* project. Therefore, apart from the top-down impulse, coming both from the local and national level, other inherent museum functions were playing important role. According to the ICOM museum definition museums “research, collect, conserve, interpret and exhibit tangible and intangible heritage” (and since 2022 “with the participation of communities”). This chapter has been assessing how the traditional museum functions were playing out in and around the Museum of Movements, be it research and knowledge production, preservation and safe-keeping or participation of the civil society.

Two side projects examined in this chapter, the Safe Havens network and the Rescue Archive project, are both highlighting the museum mechanics in this specific case. The Rescue Archive dealt with preservation drive, the impetus to safeguard, extract and recontextualise endangered heritage, building up on the archival paradigms – but it was also absorbed by another institution in the process (which hints towards complex institutional politics). The Safe Havens though has a twofold role – apart from being inspired by the ICORN and the same drive to protect fragile cultural expressions, the very series of events held in Malmö can be read as an example of activities akin to the activist museum’s operations, something that inspired and influenced the Museum of Movements project but also could have been a legit part of it in the prospective future, even though at a first glance it is as far from traditional museum institution as possible. Both side projects in a way were working with the gap, the in-betweenness where the Museum of Movement ended up, push and pull between two paradigms. The idea of employing the oral history methodological repertoire, which came along the way and was sustained by the involvement of academic research in the process, became one of the potential ways out of this contradiction.

The process of making the Museum of Movements involved various frictions, tensions and uncertainties. There were people both joining and leaving the team at different stages) the (not always intentional) exclusion of some stakeholders, and “unclear directives from the

Ministry of Culture” (Representative of Social Democrats, Malmö City Council, 2020-10-09). The Swedish government’s rejection of the request to increase the funding for 2020 in September 2019 could have been considered alarming enough – but there was also another discourse emerging. Already by the end of 2019, there were rumours in the media of a “rivalry” with another national museum project: the Swedish Holocaust Museum, for which a feasibility study was conducted between October 2018 and March 2019 (Landelius, 2019).

The feasibility study (or “inquiry” as it was called) for this project was commissioned and approved by the Swedish government on behalf of the request from one of the Holocaust survivors (and represented part of the state’s efforts in commemoration of the Holocaust from the outset, along with a big international conference held in Malmö in October 2020, where world leaders made pledges in the areas of Holocaust education and combating anti-semitism, see press-release of the Swedish government, 2019). Starting from August 2020, there was a lively public debate about whether the future institution should be placed in Malmö or in Stockholm (Berg, 2020). Malmö City’s Social Democrats argued that Malmö was the rightful place to locate the future museum (Stjernfeldt Jammeh & Kursar, 2020), whereas the opposition parties expressed doubts due to the city’s reputation of being a breeding ground for the antisemitic sentiment (Schulman, 2020).

This debate showcases the very simple reasoning behind the political decision-making surrounding the Museum of Movements as well: for the City of Malmö, it was crucially important to get a *national* museum project connected to the contemporary agenda; and for the Swedish government, since 2015, the agenda seem to have changed. The issue of “national” in terms of relevant for the whole country was also a concern for the museum project team:

We've been questioned like "How national are you?" And not from the civil society, rather than other museum professionals and other institutions, that *are* national. And I think what's been important here is that we've always had the aim of being national, nationally relevant, and I personally think that we have, because we've been getting calls from people that have seen our programme, like, up in the North and called to say: thank you very much for this.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

The issue of the City of Malmö's relevance for the Museum of Movements – not as a municipality, but as a scene and surface for many interconnected actors and communities – was quite obvious. Beyond this local level, the museum project was more connected with the international museum stage, and with the museal developments elsewhere rather than in Sweden – for instance, with the future plans of a collaborative project in Colombia with local actors (Museum of Movements team member, 2020-05-20) or the participation in a research project on Uruguayan exiles in Sweden in collaboration with the Museum of Memory, Montevideo (fieldnotes, 2020-08-17). However, the museum's outreach team was working with the national-level issues – organising, for example, dialogue meetings in the northern Swedish city of Umeå in spring 2019 (fieldnotes, March 2019), even though the main *community* impulse was grounded in Malmö. For the political parties landscape, however, the potential of *having a national museum* was clearly overriding considerations about what kind of museum it would be.

It was emphasised several times in different statements and publications, though, that the Museum of Movements and the Swedish Holocaust Museum projects were not competing for anything, and that the situation should not be read as one being pitted against the other.

In the cultural budget of September 2020, the in-depth study for the Holocaust Museum was commissioned to the Swedish government agency the Living History Forum, located in Stockholm. The decision on the future location for the museum was made on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2020, the day of remembrance for the victims of the Holocaust: the new museum was to be established in Stockholm (TT, 2021). The City of Malmö, therefore, did not receive the desirable national museum in any form.

The patterns and priorities of cultural policies are somewhat capricious, depending not only on the current agendas and events, but also on the personalities and viewpoints of individual politicians. The Museum of Movements was lobbied by a certain group of people, including former Swedish minister of culture Alice Bah Kuhnke, former Malmö City cultural director Elisabeth Lundgren, and part of the political reference group from the City Council (including

representatives from the Social Democrats, Green Party and Left Party). Even though party-wise the political landscape did not change drastically after the Swedish general elections in 2018, the *memory politics* at work has clearly changed its focus.

But before moving towards the issue of memory (and) politics, it is necessary to address *what kind of memories*, stories and heritage are considered (or, in contrast, are being overlooked) as *difficult* in the Swedish context, and why.

## Chapter 3. “Difficult issues” in the Swedish context

Why “difficult issues”? In this chapter I plan to explore various topics that can be considered difficult or sensitive. My argument is that the Museum of Movements *addressed* “difficult issues” in its conception,<sup>111</sup> but in order to make such an argument, first I want to elaborate on the questions: what are difficult issues? Difficult for whom? What is the difference between “difficult past” and “difficult heritage”; how are these notions used in the literature and in contemporary debates, particularly in Sweden; and how do museums around the globe address them? What is the relation between museum neutrality and the experts’ knowledge in the context of these debates?

By investigating these rather broad questions, I am describing the field which the Museum of Movements was entering, with all its baggage of political agendas, the discussions going on around it, and the civil society activism at its core. In a way, addressing current issues in the cultural heritage sector, both in Sweden and worldwide, and examining their “difficulty” allows us to see how the political standpoint of a museum can turn it into a “difficult issue” itself (which is neither a bad nor a good transformation *per se*). The aim of chapter is to suggest a reading of the political rationality of the Swedish museum world which both affected and was affected by the Museum of Movements project.

The question “For whom are these issues ‘difficult’?” provides a framework that helps in explaining the “difficulty” on different levels, from the personal perceptions of mundane things that obtain a certain meaning in historical/commemorative contexts, to national and global narratives of wars and mass atrocities.

The (buzz)words such as “unsettling”, “contested”, “troubling” and, again, “difficult” are used frequently together with “heritage” across the field of museum studies (S. Anderson, 2018; Macdonald, 2009, 2016;

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<sup>111</sup> As it is stated in the feasibility study report, there was “a need for place which dares to tackle the difficult democracy-related questions”, “*behövet av en plats som vågar ta itu med svåra demokratifrågor*” (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b, p. 6).

Pabst, 2020; Sevchenko, 2010; Trofanenko, 2011, to name just a few publications). Eva Silvén, referring to objects in museum collections, describes “difficult artifacts” as “objects explicitly associated with matters like taboo, unpleasantness, sorrow, loss, and intolerance” (2010, p. 136). In the tourism management field, there is the notion of “dark heritage” and spaces that attract “dark tourism”, such as graveyards and cemeteries, places of mass atrocities, prisons and crime sites, former war zones, sites of industrial decay and slavery-heritage (Roberts & Stone, 2014). The vast majority of literature in the memory studies field in one way or another addresses the commemoration of the Holocaust and the heritage of genocides throughout human history (Macdonald, 2009, 2016; Rothberg, 2009). “Difficult issues” can be connected not only to the past but also to the future: eco-anxiety and climate change are not only subjects for specific disciplines (e.g., Weintrobe, 2012) but are also relevant topics for contemporary museums (Cameron, 2015).

In this chapter I will investigate the Swedish relationship to “difficult issues” and what is considered as such by different groups in society, specifically regarding the heritage and museum sector. However, first I will return to the idea of the museum in the “cosmopolitan continuum” and outline the spectrum of “difficulty” of the topics that museums can deal with in a global sense, including the commemoration of the Holocaust, racism, nationalism, social movements, and civil rights activism in museum contexts. One of the reasons of bringing together such diverse issues and not, for example, those of climate change, “dark tourism”, and so on, is that although every “difficult issue” connects in one way or another to the living world of modernity and its ingrained dichotomies, not all of them have the same relevance the Museum of Movements as a process reflecting the changes currently underway in institutional ontologies of museums.

This chapter will also address Swedish museum politics and museum neutrality through the analysis of the “museum debate” in the

Swedish media.<sup>112</sup> The Museum of Movements project, as I argue in this dissertation, does bring uncomfortable, contested topics into the sphere of heritage institutions, but it also – more importantly – makes already existing biases and contradictions in the field visible. This provocation leads to further contestation by all types of stakeholders and opinion-makers. The main “problem” of the museum project in Malmö was that it was not planning to celebrate migration and multiculturalism narratives as “happy objects” in Sara Ahmed’s terminology (2008)<sup>113</sup>, but rather to question and problematise how these narratives are performed in Swedish society today.

### **3.1. “Difficult heritage” globally: from Holocaust to collecting hashtags**

“Is ‘difficult heritage’ still ‘difficult’?” – asks Sharon Macdonald in her article of the same name (2016). Although she focuses mainly on collective European memory of the Second World War, Macdonald considers the turn to “difficult heritage” in officially sanctioned representations of the past (i.e., museums) as evidence of change “in how national identity is performed in relation to troubling pasts” (p. 7). She also argues, that by addressing the “difficult past”, states can sometimes promote a self-image of moral righteousness as the “difficult” turn in heritage and memory institutions becomes more and more acclaimed (p. 17). This argument is continued by Michael Rothberg who states that “the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the articulation of other histories – some of them predating the Nazi genocide, such as slavery, and others taking place later, such as the Algerian War of independence (1954–62) or the genocide in Bosnia during the 1990s” (2009, p. 6).

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<sup>112</sup> That debate, in its turn, resembles the discussion around the proposed new museum definition by ICOM, as it touches upon the “neutral museum expertise” vs “politicisation of museums”.

<sup>113</sup> According to Ahmed, “Certain objects become imbued with positive affect as good objects” (p. 34), and in a society that celebrates democracy and human rights, multiculturalism and diversity become something of positive qualities to strive for.

The salience and centrality of Holocaust remembrance for creating the global notion of “difficult heritage” is undeniable. Macdonald frames “difficult heritage” as follows:

A past that is recognized as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity. ‘Difficult heritage’ may also be troublesome because it threatens to break through into the present in disruptive ways, opening up social divisions, perhaps by playing into imagined, even nightmarish, futures.

(Macdonald, 2009, p. 1)

The meaningfulness of remembering the Nazi genocide is inscribed in the globally recognised documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; in the foundations of new nation-states, such as Israel; and in Jewish and Holocaust museums around the world. However, if the memory of the Holocaust in some cases helps to drive forward research into “other histories of extreme violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide” (Rothberg, 2009, p. 8), it can also evoke all kinds of contestations, by creating the “hierarchies of suffering” or “victims competition”, or functioning as “a ‘comfortable horrible’ memory” (Linenthal, as cited in Rothberg, 2009, p. 9) that allows the reassurance of engaging in profound events and contributing to the human rights discourse elsewhere, while ignoring the atrocities and violations that may be happening in the present and in close proximity to, say, the Holocaust museum.

One example of this might be the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). It opened in 2014 in Winnipeg and served as a kind of inspiration for the Museum of Movements project (both in the general sense, as a field trip to the CMHR was made during the feasibility study, and, also, in terms of circulation of human resources, as former CMHR curator Armando Perla was employed as a project manager at the Museum of Movements in 2018-2020).<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> When recalling the circumstances around his hiring, Perla made a comparison between the two museum cases: “You know, in Canada the museum was built around oral history and this is also because the museum in Canada was kind of very similar, they had a very similar start, or path as this one, you know, the idea of creating a museum that was going to be built around a concept - human rights. And again also doing a lot of consultations across the country, across Canada, asking Canadians or

As the first national museum in Canada built outside the capital region, the CMHR was initially proposed as a national Holocaust or genocide museum;<sup>115</sup> it was later reimagined as a “privately funded human rights museum, featuring but not limited to Holocaust remembrance” (Dean & Failler, 2019, p. 2), and eventually conceived as a both publicly and privately funded, more general museum for human rights. The ambiguities around the CMHR involved the settler-colonial nature of the Canadian state and its exploitative politics towards the indigenous lands on which the museum stands. But, more importantly, these ambiguities stray into the country’s relationship with the past, national history and the process of imagining the nation as a cohesive and reconciled entity, where the “difficult issues” are framed in the museum’s displays instead of unfolding in and around the museum (ibid., see also Antweiler, 2023). Today, the CMHR’s webpage welcomes visitors with the statement: “The Museum is located on ancestral lands, on Treaty 1 Territory. The Red River Valley is also the birthplace of the Métis. We acknowledge the water in the Museum is sourced from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation” (CMHR Homepage) – giving some space to the struggles around the museum’s colonial nature, but the question emerges: so, what?<sup>116</sup>

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people in Canada what they wanted to see in that museum or how they wanted to see and represent it - which [the Museum of Movements] also did. And then what people wanted to see, pretty much the same as here and in Canada is that people wanted to hear stories. People’s stories and a lot of the untold stories and so they had also all those commonalities, and something that worked for us in Canada is that we used oral history, and we put the oral history, the stories of people were at the heart of our collection, at the heart of the work that we did at the CMHR. So here I wanted to bring it sort of that as well and even before I moved to Sweden, I started trying to see or find people who are working with oral history in Sweden” (2018-12-10).

<sup>115</sup> In this, the CMHR example speaks to the Swedish way of starting from the topic of the Holocaust and then move to the broader scope of “difficult issues”, as happened with the Living History Forum.

<sup>116</sup> The *present* aim of the Shoal Lake 40 community is not only “to have better or more inclusive forms of representation in the CMHR” but also to effect structural change, such as increased access to clean water (which is currently distributed to the City of Winnipeg and to the CMHR from the lake where the community resides). Interestingly enough, one of the forms of protest undertaken by the Shoal Lake 40 community was establishing their own *museum*, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights Violations, which invites audience to view the “entire community as a ‘living museum” (Dean & Failler, 2019, p. 10) and seeks to shed light on the ongoing injustices and human rights violations in the closest proximity to the CMHR’s “Tower of Hope”.

Dean and Failler (2019) frame this way of assessing “difficult issues” as “memory entrepreneurship”. It “capitalizes on a particular version of Canada’s colonial history, namely, one in which settler colonialism is imagined as part of Canada’s past but not its present” (p. 2). Stephanie Anderson (2017) argues that a so-called “productive futurity” discourse, promoted by the CMHR, reflects the “second narrative template” of Canadian history. Marginalised groups receive gradual recognition and representation – but framed within the museum narrative as the “difficult past” that the nation is to overcome together. This discourse also follows the temporal dimension of Latour’s Modern Constitution, the “expansionist mindset that sees no limits to progress and capitalization” – again, a “happy” and hopeful narrative that is not supposed to be distorted by critical voices and “killjoy” perspectives (for the ambiguity of being a “killjoy” researcher, see Ahmed, 2008).

One of the possible ways out of this entanglement would be not only to acknowledge, but to be response-able for the difficult histories and memories: one can call it “potential history” (Azoulay, 2019), agonistic memory (Bull & Hansen, 2016) or counter-national narratives (S. Anderson, 2017), but the most important feature shared by all these models is that acknowledgement of the lessons of the past itself does not ensure a better future unless it is reflected and acted upon.

However, equally important is the manner in which museums – and the CMHR in particular – approach the *difficult present*, and this is one of the reasons why I use the term “difficult issues”, not “past”, “history”, or “heritage”. The example of the CMHR’s actions and reactions during the rise of the *Black Lives Matter* movement’s rise in Canada in summer 2020 is telling: after a social media campaign accusing the museum of having a toxic culture, started by current and former employees of the CMHR (#CMHRStopLying), a report by an external reviewer found that racism, sexism and homophobia were pervasive in the museum environment on the institutional and systemic levels (Pauls, 2020). Therefore, the position of the institution which represents Canadianness in a particular way – as a nation of “preservers and champions of human rights” that views “historical and contemporary Indigenous-settler relations as benign or benevolent” (Dean & Failler, 2019, pp. 4–5) – was criticised not only from outside, but also from the inside the institution. This example relates to the

bigger picture of the discussions around museums and social justice in North America in particular: Laura Raicovich gives an extensive summary of this process in her recent book *Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest* (2021).

The response of museums to ongoing political struggles and the “difficult presents”, however, is not something that emerged in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of the police in 2020.<sup>117</sup> In 2014-2015, the hashtag #MuseumsRespondtoFerguson appeared on social media in response to protest movements in the U.S. against police brutality, extrajudicial killings of black people, anti-blackness, and racial injustice (*Joint Statement from Museum Bloggers and Colleagues on Ferguson and Related Events*, 2014). The #MuseumsAreNotNeutral hashtag, created by Mike Murawski from the Portland Art Museum together with artist LaTanya Autry in August 2017 (Murawski, 2017), brought in a broader perspective than just reactions to the *Black Lives Matter* movement. It emphasised the political entanglement of museum institutions, bringing once again the *museum activism* agenda into the field and galvanising the discussion on museums’ neutrality and objectivity.<sup>118</sup>

The #MuseumsAreNotNeutral paradigm suggests acknowledging the *presence* of the difficult issues in the *present* – and acting upon them. This global course of thoughts and actions, however, somewhat contradicts the ways in which nations choose to address the “difficult issues” in their museum settings.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> It is worth mentioning, that although here I refer mainly to the highly visible responses in the age of social media, this tacit work has been carried out by small and large institutions for a long time; at least since the emergence of the “new museology” and the idea of the museum’s social relevance and responsibility, which notably coincides with the height of civil rights movements. What is specific to museums as opposed to other cultural institutions, though, is the inherent drive to *document* and *preserve* the evidences of contested contemporary events (cf. recent dissertation by Elin Nystrand von Unge on contemporary collecting in Swedish museums 2019).

<sup>118</sup> At the ICOM General Conference in Kyoto 2019, I spotted several people in “Museums Are Not Neutral” t-shirts who were participating in the discussion on the new proposed museum definition.

<sup>119</sup> In her analysis of the uses of “difficult heritage”, Sharon Macdonald suggests that “by facing up to difficult heritage, it was no longer a sullying presence in the present: it had been cleaned away from the present by the act of public acknowledgment” (2016, p. 17). Here, the museum mechanics of decontextualising plays again a vital role.

This acknowledgement plays out differently in different national contexts and memory regimes. The need for an international museum forum to explore and discuss “difficult issues” was realised in 2019 with the creation of the ICOM International Committee on Ethical Dilemmas (IC Ethics). However, it is important to point out that the initiative came from the ICOM representatives of (mainly North) European national committees, and that six out of the nine board members elected at the inaugural meeting represented Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Germany. The committee, however, is growing and organises events with museum scholars, professionals, and community representatives from all over the world,<sup>120</sup> transcending different time zones and bringing together the Global North and Global South. One could argue that this is another example of the “cosmopolitan [museum] continuum”, whereby an international body turns – slowly, partially, and, sometimes, painfully (see the museum definition debate) – towards the new questions and challenges arising in the field.

The developments in the area of acknowledging and reassessing “difficult heritage” in museums are clear. The structures, however, persist: structures of oppression, imperial violence and one-sided narratives that have been complemented but not substituted by the more recent structures of commemorating past atrocities and historical victims, championing human rights, and mitigating explicit expressions of xenophobia and racism (cf. Kansteiner, 2019). The Museum of Movements project had a transient possibility ingrained in its concept to question these structures in its specific national context.

### **3.2. “Difficult heritage” – the Swedish way**

Although Sweden, at a glance, does not have such a (well-known) complicated and debated history in relation to the Second World War as some neighbouring states, in the 1990s a trend emerged in the country for using and questioning the “difficult past” related to this

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<sup>120</sup> The first IC Ethics digital conference in December 2020 included speakers from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Canada, the U.S. and Brazil, and participants from European countries.

period, following a more general European paradigm. In 1991, Swedish journalist and activist Maria-Pia Boëthius published her book “Honour and Conscience” (*Heder och Samvete*), which was critical towards the Sweden’s politics of neutrality during the war, opening up the discussion on Swedish “difficult issues”.

During the “memory boom” of the 1990s, the Swedish state’s actions and inactions during the Second World War were scrutinised by researchers and journalists.<sup>121</sup> Sweden was one of the countries that received many Holocaust survivors after the war, particularly due to the Swedish Red Cross and the United Nations Rescue and Relief Association rescue missions in 1945. Thus, the issue of Holocaust remembrance has been entangled with the country’s neo-Nazi and far-right movements<sup>122</sup> ever since, as Sweden’s refugee policies became a contested issue in the public debate. In 1997, then prime minister Göran Persson initiated an educational campaign titled “Living History”, and in the 2000s it was institutionalised as a governmental agency, the *Living History Forum* (opened in 2003) with the aim to promote democracy, tolerance and human rights, with a grounding in the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity (FLH: About Us, n.d.). Kristin Wagrell (2020) analyses the agenda of the Living History campaign and agency, and points out, that even though the interrelation between “organized right-wing extremism and Holocaust education was... not a pre-given relationship” (p. 82), racial violence and hate crimes committed in the 1980s-90s were among the reported problems that led to the establishment of this programme. Wagrell also cites the Norwegian researcher Kyrre Kverndokk that the Living History project was “promoting Sweden as a responsible and leading nation in upholding a universal Holocaust memory and thereby also [positioning it] as a protector of human rights and democratic values” (ibid., p. 84). What is particularly interesting here is the idea of neutral Sweden taking a “leading” position in preserving the “right” universal Holocaust memory – an endeavour that, as we will see in the next chapter, is still alive and relevant today.

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<sup>121</sup> Many Swedish historical accounts of the period, however, say little about refugees, asylum policies or even the Holocaust; the focus lies instead on warfare, security policies and the complicity with Nazi Germany.

<sup>122</sup> On Nazism in Sweden see the same-titled trilogy of Helene Lööw (1998, 2004, 2015).

Does this mean that the “difficult memories” in Sweden that are “screened” by the universal cosmopolitan notion of Holocaust commemoration are those related to migration and nationalism?

Swedish gender and migration scholars Diana Mulinari and Anders Neergaard, in their paper on the Swedish racial regime, argue that “the analytical category of race at the core of European and Swedish colonial modernity is... narrowed to scientific racism and the *Shoah* (Holocaust)” (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017, p. 89), and suggest the Living History Forum as one of the examples of such erasure – or rather displacement, following Michael Rothberg’s framework (2009) – of “difficult” colonial heritage. Mulinari and Neergaard suggest that in the Nordic countries, concepts of racialisation and social construction of race are often substituted by “terms such as migrants, integration, culture and religion” (ibid.).

Wulf Kansteiner, in his critique of the cosmopolitan memory model, states that “in 2015, two countries [Germany and Sweden] tried to live up to the tenets of cosmopolitan memory. Both failed” (2019, p. 611). Simultaneously, Fredrik Svanberg, in his book chapter on “Museums, nationalism and ultra-nationalism”, renders far-right perceptions of contemporary museum exhibitions as “anti-Swedish propaganda” (Svanberg & Hyltén-Cavallius, 2016, p. 25) in the sense that museums “do not live up” to representing Swedishness and the image of the nation in the opinion of these groups.

At the same time, museums in Sweden have been considering the issues of migration and cultural diversity since the 1970s. From the end of the 1990s, which brought an emphasis on diversity (*mångfald*) in Swedish cultural policies, more “traditional museums” intensified their work on such issues (Johansson, 2015, p. 11).<sup>123</sup> However, at the time of the Museum of Movements’ inception, researchers stated that the phenomenon of migration was still only partly visible in the country’s museum collections and permanent exhibitions (Gradén, 2017, p. 28). There is indeed a thin line between the precarity of the topic left to temporary exhibitions and short-term documentation projects on one

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<sup>123</sup> For a more detailed review, see Christina Johansson’s book *Museums, Migration and Cultural Diversity: Swedish Museums in Tune with the Times?* (2015).

side, and the (presumed) excess of discourses of diversity, inclusion, and tolerance discourses in the public sphere on the other. Another specific part of the Swedish way of handling the “difficult issues” around migration is to encapsulate them in special institutions created exactly for this purpose (for an analysis of Swedish museum policies see the chapter “The Bog and the Beast” in Levitt, 2015). In 1987, the Multicultural Centre was created in the Stockholm suburb of Botkyrka. Its mission was to answer “urgent questions around immigration”, and as stated on the Centre’s webpage, “the questions which in the 1980s were relatively specific for Botkyrka are today the questions that concern Sweden as a whole” (Mångkulturellt centrum, n.d.).

Another example which Peggy Levitt takes up in her chapter on Sweden, migration, and multiculturalism (2015) is the transformation of four entities – the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities, the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm and the Museum of Ethnography in Gothenburg – into one agency titled “Museums of World Culture” in 2004. This case is specifically interesting for my research: first, it represents an attempt to create a new museum on the basis of old, traditional ones, which will promote cultural diversity, social justice, tolerance, inclusion, and other cosmopolitan values (while still framing the content of the museum as something external; “world culture” as in not-national culture, the global Other). Second, the first director of the Museums of World Culture who carried out this fundamental change was Jette Sandahl, a Danish museum scholar and professional who later became a chair of ICOM’s first standing committee for museum definition: Prospects and Potentials (MDPP). This is another way in which the issue of redefining the museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century talks back to the Swedish cultural institutions.

As Peggy Levitt points out, despite this apparent interest in the social responsibility of museums as institutions and in showcasing “Sweden’s deep connections to the world beyond its borders, one has to look harder to find the diversity within” Swedish museums (Levitt, 2017, p. 44). This correlates with Mulinari and Neergaard’s point quoted above that “racialization” is a term not often used in the Swedish context (see also Ardalan, 2015 on the case of “precarious inclusion” in Swedish cultural institutions). This lack of diversity can be

explained from different standpoints, such as institutional inertia inherent to museums, institutional racism,<sup>124</sup> but also an unwillingness to actually enter into dialogue with communities. For example, the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg “strives to avoid becoming an arena for immigrant associations and has therefore not established any deeper collaboration with them” (Johansson, 2015, p. 58); and the director of the Multicultural Centre stated in 2013 that “it can be difficult to get immigrant associations interested in participation, and it is rare that they ask to be represented” (ibid., p. 60).

Therefore, the Museum of Movements project, which encouraged civil society and local communities to organise themselves and become engaged with the museum *before* it was even created, had the potential to serve as the one and only example of a Swedish museum that was actually trying to tackle the issue of exclusion *from within* the institution *and* from the moment of its inception.

However, as usual in the museum world, the problem lies deeper. I suggest that the reason why discrimination, racialisation and migration issues are given only superficial/project-based attention in Swedish museums, despite the sustainable “cosmopolitan” model of these institutions, lies in the same old divide between public engagement and collections, at the core of the museum mechanics itself, which is aimed at formatting knowledge in a particular way before transmitting it. Malin Thor Tureby and Jesper Johansson, in their recent book *Migration and Cultural Heritage* (2020), show that there are indeed a considerable number of migration-related collections in Swedish museums. However, they never have been considered as an integral part of the Swedish (migration) history (ibid., p. 13); furthermore, quite often, just as in the case of the documentation of the Holocaust-related topics, the discourse of *immigration* (it is worth mentioning that in the most cases the focus is on only one direction of migration, whereas

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<sup>124</sup> Sara Ahmed (2012) refers to different kinds of race equality policies implemented in the institutions as *performance culture* (p. 84), implying that a good institutional performance supposes “the right kind of appearance” (p. 85). In cases where current Swedish cultural policies intersect with labour market policies, (non-)diversity within the museums’ staff can produce visible tensions, where *exhibiting diversity* does not necessarily mean *doing diversity* (even in Ahmed’s institutionalised sense).

*emigration* from Sweden to, for example, the U.S. becomes a topic for – once again – other special institutions, such as the Swedish Emigrant Institute in Vaxjö<sup>125</sup>) is being used to reinforce and solidify the performance of Swedishness and Swedish heritage. There have been documentation projects about how Swedes perceived the Other (e.g. “Children and foreigners”) in Swedish museums and archives, and in collections documenting migrants’ stories, the attention is focused on the feel-good narratives of successful integration. As Thor Tureby and Johansson point out, during the gathering of migrants’ histories, museums seldom explained in their surveys what was supposed to be understood as the “Swedish tradition” and “Swedish heritage”. Moreover, “the Swedishness is emphasised as something homogeneous”, and the collecting was clearly carried out in the context of the Swedish national narrative of Sweden as a multicultural, inclusive and non-racist country (Thor Tureby & Johansson, 2020, p. 193).

Why is it that despite all the efforts of the museum sector, migration is still being a “difficult issue” in the public discourse? In Sweden, the contentious politics of the present does not allow the past to rest in history textbooks and museum collections. The right-wing political discourse builds upon the idea of nationalism, and the centre-left cultural policies endorse multiculturalism and diversity in cultural institutions. Wulf Kansteiner argues that right-wing parties around Europe have assimilated and appropriated migration narratives for their own use and managed to “fuse the pervasive racist memory of European culture with new sites of popular racist memory” (2019, p. 612). The dysfunction of the cosmopolitan model, following this logic, lies in the inability (of cultural institutions among others) to address the deep-rooted problems that emerged alongside Western modernity and colonial empires: the differentiation of “us” and “others”, but, more importantly, of “Human” and others.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> The House of Emigrants, which was part of this institution, became a part of the *Kulturparken Småland*, an umbrella association for various museums in the region. Another Swedish House of Emigrants, also dedicated to the great emigration period from 1850 to 1930, in the city of Gothenburg, was closed in March 2021.

<sup>126</sup> See also Michael Rothberg’s discussion on Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and the emergence of the conception of “bare life” introduced by Giorgio Agamben (2009, pp. 37–65).

Diversity and multiculturalism are being represented and exhibited for the (imagined) homogeneous majority,<sup>127</sup> which raises questions about the (non-)belonging and marginalisation of certain histories, as in the example from the section 2.2.1 where the (white Swedish) politician tells the story of the teenagers with immigrant backgrounds who do not feel themselves at home in the museum.

It is important, however, to differentiate between the feelings and reflections of the immigrants, minorities, and racialised populations in Sweden, and the perception of these feelings by politicians, both left- and right-wing; not to mention the majority of the country's citizens, who might not be quite as homogeneous as the media depicts them.

One pertinent example of how cultural policies in the heritage sector are being perceived, discussed and contested, is the Swedish “museum debate” of 2017.

### **3.3. *Museidebatt* – Swedish media discourse on museum's neutrality**

The “museum debate” (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2017) took place in the Swedish media in 2016-2017 with the second wave coming in 2019. I will recount here my take on this debate from my article “It's the Right Who Belong in a Museum': Radical Popular Movements in the Museum Context” (Zabalueva, 2019) as I continue to hold the same position and want to elaborate this analysis in relation to the Museum of Movements and the entire dissertation.

The Swedish museum debate started with two rather critical articles by the journalist Ola Wong that were published in September 2016: “Government is turning museums into propaganda centres” (2016a) and “Bah Kuhnke's cultural policy is a threat to cultural heritage” (2016b). At first the arguments were on administrative changes in the Swedish Museums of World Culture, however it quickly sparked a rather heated discussion between heritage and museum professionals in Sweden. The debate expanded to the entire field and turned into the

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<sup>127</sup> Another example would be rebranding of the Jewish museum in Stockholm, which reopened in 2019 with the slogan “About a minority for the majority” (*Om en minoritet för majoriteten*).

manifestation of anxieties in the cultural policies and museum world. It opened a sore spot in the inner world of Swedish museums, namely the tension between the constantly evolving and changing political agenda, management, and exhibition trends, and the underestimated role of experts and expertise. Simultaneously it exposed the complications of relationship between the political and cultural fields in Sweden – the very connection that the debate’s initiator proclaimed non-inherent to museums.

In his articles Wong stated that the Swedish minister of culture (at that time) Alice Bah Kuhnke and her ministry instead and at the expense of pursuing objective knowledge and investing in conservation of museum objects, were focusing too much on identity politics, “norm criticism”, and diversity in museums. Wong also argued that the museums in Sweden relied too heavily on the contemporary notion of “political correctness”, and that this kind of controlling mechanism may be used to turn museums into effective apparatus of nationalistic propaganda in the event of the far-right winning the upcoming elections in 2018, despite the fact that Swedish cultural institutions are obliged to remain independent – hold arm-length distance – from politics by law<sup>128</sup>.

Wong implied that museums are somewhat neutral institutions that produce uncontested and objective knowledge while professionals in the museum studies have long agreed otherwise as the literature gives an excessive overview of this being an ingrained bias (starting from Bennett, 1995; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, etc.). Another presumption from Wong’s articles was the potential of museums being used as an instrument of propaganda. Yet one can use the example of the U.S. museums after the 2016 election of Donald Trump, when museums not only did not immediately adopt an anti-immigration rhetoric but rather turned into hubs of activism and resistance (Raicovich, 2021; on protest art and museum neutrality see, for example, Williams, 2017, p. 74).

The discussion on museums as political actors is not by any means unique to the Swedish context: similar disputes have been going on in

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<sup>128</sup> The first national piece of museum legislation – *Museilagen* (SFS 2017:563) – was introduced in Sweden in 2017, but the preparatory work had been done already in 2015 in the form of a report titled *Museiutredningen* (“Museum investigation”, SOU 2015:89).

different parts of the world. The other facet of museums being political is the documenting and exhibiting the popular movements and civil society activism.<sup>129</sup> But is it possible to transcend radical political divisions and speak neutrally in a museological sense about, for example, far-right movements?

Some of the contemporary far-right populist movements in Sweden are rooted and influenced by the national socialist movements that have existed in the country since the 1930s. They are legal, can run for parliament elections, and are allowed to march and demonstrate under the protection of freedom of expression and speech in several Nordic countries, including Sweden (although the Finnish wing of neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) was banned in Finland). However, there is an active resistance movement that includes several iconic images, for example one taken in 2016 David Lagerlöf of Tess Asplund, a Swedish activist that defied a march of far-rights (Crouch, 2016), or *A Woman Hitting a Neo-Nazi With Her Handbag* by Hans Runesson (1985) which became a symbol of anti-fascist movement. The confrontation does not end on marches.

A prominent illustration of both far-right and left-wing activism being involved in the arguments on cultural heritage is the example of the exhibition *100% Fight: The History of Sweden*<sup>130</sup>. The exhibition that showcased various fights for civil rights throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>- the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in Sweden, such as suffrage, the right to asylum, LGBTQ rights, right to one's own body, as well as hostile movements in society. The exhibition is also an example of how civil rights movements are represented in the museums in Sweden. That is as the answer to the - Swedish - ideas of progressiveness as a moral quality (J. Andersson, 2009), cosmopolitanism, a narrative in which Sweden is presented as a "left-wing utopia" (ibid., p. 233), one of the most progressive places, a country at the forefront of civil rights activism (cf. Jezierska & Towns, 2018). The exhibition was first shown

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<sup>129</sup> Representing radical popular movements in a museum means appealing directly to current conflicts and polarisations in society. If the issue of "migration" can play out as connected to heritage, diversity and multiple identities, the case of exhibiting political protest can question the moral standpoint of cultural institutions.

<sup>130</sup> The exhibition was produced by the project Heterogeneous Heritage, in collaboration with Regionmuseet Kristianstad, Västmanlands läns museum, Sundsvalls museum, Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek, and the Swedish History Museum, and displayed in several museums nationwide.

in Kristianstad and then moved on tour until in 2018 it reached Stockholm and the Swedish History Museum where it sparked the second wave of the “museum debate” initiated by the same author Ola Wong (2018). In his new article Wong argued that the Swedish History Museum by hosting the touring exhibition has provoked the right-wing activists. The reason for that was the very nature of *100% Fight: The History of Sweden* as it was focused on minorities, identity politics, had a didactical tone, was multivocal and complex.

The Swedish History Museum has been the subject of media and political struggle for many times. Thus, for example, Fredrik Svanberg mentions the museum while discussing the “uses of history” by different Swedish web-based ultra-nationalist communities. He argues that there are several common trends there, starting from Swedish Wikipedia being the most knowledgeable authority that is cited by the members of these communities, and how the majority uses historical narratives to categorise “us” and “others”, while heritage and history are being considered as a homogeneous continuity from “our ancestors” to “us”; to the frequent use of conspiracy theories, and all different views being referred as “revisionist” (Svanberg & Hyltén-Cavallius, 2016, pp. 65–66).

Historical or heritage-based debates often reflect the fears and trends: some authors blame the lack of historical continuity in Swedish heritage discourse for provoking nationalists (Bernsand & Narvselius, 2018, p. 74), meanwhile archaeologist Björn Magnusson Staaf argues instead that the far-right use cultural heritage as a powerful instrument (2010). Another example of polemics on the matter is the claim that the “politically correct” reading of Swedish history as a multicultural narrative is the outcome of the recent “Islamisation” of the country (Svanberg & Hyltén-Cavallius, 2016, p. 50).

The discussion on using (and abusing) of cultural heritage by different entities and institutions in Sweden, same as the debate on “politicising” the museums is still going very actively in every part of the political spectrum.

According to Swedish ethnologist Barbro Klein, it was in the 1990s when the term “cultural heritage” has started to be frequently used in Swedish political discourse, and it was “readily appropriated by members of the government and the parliament to describe some of the

most positive and morally praiseworthy forms of social action in a democratic society” (Klein, 2008, p. 153). In the 2000s the term “heritage” is still taken for granted and used in political claims as something rather uncontroversial. However, in absence of critique to the term as such, it turns into a tool for both the nationalists and civil-rights movements. The phenomenon is described by museum researcher Laurajane Smith as the *Authorised Heritage Discourse* (AHD) as it “focuses attention on... material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes that current generations ‘must’ care for, protect and revere so that they may be passed to nebulous future generations for their ‘education’, and to forge a sense of common identity based on the past” (Smith, 2006, p. 29).

Though civil-rights struggles have reached museum exhibitions and lay in the core of the museum-centered media debate, they still have some way to go before moving further and settling at the very core of museums: management and the collections departments. Indeed, “heritage practitioners are required to adopt an overt political agenda in defining which groups and interests they seek to support and those they challenge” (Schadla-Hall, 2004; cited in Smith, 2006, p. 38); yet it is important to acknowledge one’s own moral standpoint as well as these agendas.

I want to conclude this section with a quote from one of the Museum of Movements team members, during a discussion of the neutrality and political standpoint of museums:

I don't believe in the concept of "neutrality" [sic!], because I don't think there is something that can be called neutral, because, I mean, especially in today's climate, when everything you do is left[-wing], if you're like for LGBTQ rights, then you're left, if you want everybody to have food on their table then you're left, if you want gender equality then you are lefty, so basic human rights-thoughts are considered leftist-thoughts, so it's... the word "neutral" doesn't work, because in that sense, do you get what I mean? For instance, let's see the elections, we had... library had a pride flag, rainbow flag up, and certain party said that that's left propaganda.

Because some people will not consider you neutral if you're just claiming human rights. It's a difficult time to be "for" human rights without getting a "leftist" stamp on your forehead.

Because they are just for human rights, they are not... even the human rights, it's considered political, but the right to childcare, the right to vote, the right to erm... it's, I think, that will be a big challenge - how to

get just Swedish social movements shown in the museum without getting a stamp, "leftist" stamp.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

This narrative relates to the media debate about establishing the museum for democracy and migration back in 2015 (see Chapter 2); when the representative of the Green Party was asked about the debate and specifically about the opinion piece “Do not raise political points in my name” (Nikolić, 2015), he defined it as a “second-hand information” and stated that the author “obviously had not read any of our background material or talk to any of us except for his party friends” (2018-04-04). The political positions of the discussants are in the same way seeping in the “museum debate” opinion pieces, which contradicts the very stance of being neutral, detached and depoliticised experts in the field.

### **3.4. Rethinking “difficult issues” in global contemporary**

As we can see, the “difficult issues” in museums are quite a complex and multi-layered matter. In this chapter, I have not touched upon the history of racial biology, the heritage of Swedish national minorities, or the complex issue of the (colonial) Swedish state’s relationship to the indigenous population, though all of these certainly fall into the “difficult” category. The same goes for historical policies concerning LGBTQI+ communities, people with disabilities, and even the history of the universal suffrage (the *100% Fight!* Exhibition, in fact, highlights many “difficult issues” relevant to the contemporary Swedish society). The other layer examined in this chapter is the gap between the policies (Cultural Heritage agenda and focus on diversity and multiculturalism in Swedish museums) and their perceptions by actors with different political programmes.

The global museum landscape provides enough examples of how museums are dealing with the “difficult issues” and politically loaded topics of the contemporary world, both in the sense of museum *practice* and in navigating diverse reactions as in the case of hashtags. These examples are also speaking for the choice of terminology, since the issues which museums often deal with today are, indeed, *difficult* for all

the involved parties: for general public to approach and process, for museum institutions to start addressing, for decision and policy-makers to be brave enough to embark on this journey (cf. Raicovich, 2021).

The “cosmopolitan continuum” which Peggy Levitt suggests for describing the global museum world (2015) is by no means homogeneous, even though the universality of “moral remembrance” (David, 2020) is somewhat prescribed in a way how the museums in different parts of the world operate. The “difficult issues” are, still, deeply connected to the historical contestations, injustices, and sensitive topics, depending on the specific national context; they are very much about how specific history plays out in contemporary socio-political landscape.<sup>131</sup> The Swedish cosmopolitanism, and the focus on the scientific, scholarly, objective knowledge, brings out the debate on museums’ neutrality and politisation. This debate expands both into the sphere of recent past, for instance into the politics of representation of social movements and political struggles (the “100% Fight” exhibition), and into the historical issues which are contested today, such as how museums should address the colonial heritage of ethnographic museums.

In this complex and entangled landscape, the Museum of Movements project, which belonged unquestionably to the cosmopolitan model,<sup>132</sup> had the potential to serve as a platform for discussing these contestations, and as a “window of opportunity” that opened by bringing together top-down and bottom-up agency (cf. Bull et al., 2019). The embeddedness of the project in the public debate on immigration and civil society movements was clear: from the concern expressed by the right-wing Swedish Democrats party that such a museum would become “a political instrument for multiculturalism and... promote further high immigration rates to Sweden” (Sverigedemokraterna, 2017, mentioned in Chapter 2), to the other end of the political spectrum, with the writer Staffan Jacobson stating on

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<sup>131</sup> That’s why, I would argue, the paradigm of museums playing important role in the formation of nation-states (see 2.1.1.) cannot be discarded or overlooked as something outdated and belonging to the past, it is still very present even in the cosmopolitan museum world.

<sup>132</sup> Which was confirmed by the museum managers at one of our meetings where I presented three memory models developed by Bull and Hansen (fieldnotes 2019-02-11, Malmö KF).

his blog that “it’s not the left but the right that belongs in a museum” (Jacobson, 2017), implying scepticism that the local activist movements would actually be welcomed (and feel welcome) to take part in the project.

The actual practice of the Museum of Movements since then reveals that both concerns originated from imagining *what museums are*; and this new experimental institution, despite all its shortcomings and the clear political agenda behind it, was still able to become a forum engaging many different kinds of actors (see Chapters 2 and 5). I argue that the condition which made these discussions possible was that the museum’s mission and concept concerned the “difficult”, politically loaded issues that are highly relevant for today’s Swedish society. The subject of “migration” in the museum was not just one for collection or exhibition, it was ingrained in the lived experience of many of the actors involved in the museum-making process, including those who made it possible in the first place; the artificial distance between “museum matter” and public debate was dissolving due to the “clean slate” and “non-traditional museum” conditions, but at the same time was used to elaborate a new institutional concept to address this topic.

Here we encounter, however, another divide: the one between the past and the present, and the question of how the recentness or contemporariness of “difficult issues” affects cultural institutions which focus on them.

Michael Rothberg (2009) writes about the “displacement” of difficult histories (such as, for example, the genocide of Native Americans against the commemoration of the Holocaust in the U.S.). I want to take this argument further by suggesting that museums by their nature are the “legitimate” places for such displacement, as they have a capacity and a toolkit to put “difficult” and “contested” heritage into the safe boxes of repositories or into the glass display cases, creating an artificial distance to the traumatic, contested, and disturbing pasts. However, the blurring of this boundary which happens in the new types of the museums – and, supposedly, in the Museum of Movements project as well – prompts questioning of these institutional structures.

## **Chapter 4. Memory (and) politics: unlearning, reconstituting, and co-creating the present**

One of the main focuses of my investigation is gaps. In general, there are the gaps that exist inside museums between objects and interpretations (B. Lord, 2006), between collection and public engagement, implied by the museum mechanics. But there are also gaps which are more central for this dissertation: the distance that is created in order to produce “neutral”, “objective” knowledge, to separate “us” from “others”. The rupture between the “present” and the “past” which tends to be inhabited by “difficult issues”. The contested space between “preservation drive” and “museum activism”. All of these gaps are permeated by the unseen field of politics that is always present in museums as institutions but not always recognised as such.

In this chapter, I will apply frameworks from memory studies to explore such gaps. The chapter will also argue for the importance of applying memory studies to the museological field in order to understand the hidden tensions and conflicts inherent to museum mechanics. The overall purpose of the chapter is to theorise memory and weave together different approaches in memory studies in relation to Swedish museum projects – most of all the Museum of Movements but also the Swedish Holocaust Museum.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, “difficult issues” and the “contested contemporary” make museums extremely uncomfortable by undermining the expertise and neutrality of cultural institutions. Memory as it is theorised in the different strands of memory studies is a more fluid and flexible tool, speaking to communities and collectives rather than nations and international bodies, but it is also *not objective*. In a way, memory work is happening against the grain of the rendering “everything a disconnected, discrete, classifiable image” (Azoulay, 2019, p. 136) and the core of the *museum mechanics* of decontextualisation. Memory as a practice can help to bridge the gaps, and bring pasts, presents, and futures – always detached in the traditional museum practice by the power of musealisation and production of heritage –

together. A lot of museums are already employing memory studies approaches, consciously or not.<sup>133</sup>

In this chapter, I explore three connected issues: first, I provide an analysis of theoretical frameworks concerning memory regimes, such as *cultural* and *communicative* memory (J. Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995) and the three modes of memory suggested by the Unsettling Remembering and Social Cohesion in Transnational Europe (UNREST) research project: *antagonistic*, *cosmopolitan* and *agonistic* memory (Bull & Hansen, 2016). Then, with the help of these frameworks – particularly cosmopolitan memory as it relates to the commemoration of the Holocaust globally (through museums, among other practices) – I address the Swedish Holocaust Museum project and compare it with the Museum of Movements, as these two processes happened to overlap. In doing so, I intend to discuss what kind of memories are prioritised by Swedish cultural policies and heritage institutions and how this selection is made.

Lastly, I investigate the relationship between *agonistic memory*, *identity politics* and the *memory-activism nexus* (Rigney, 2018) and how it played out in the process of assembling (and disassembling) the Museum of Movements.

In a way, the threefold aim of this chapter is focused on how politics mobilises collective memory – but, at the same time, is being mobilised by it. By analysing official discourses in the form of reports and investigations related to the two museum projects, the Museum of Movements and the Holocaust Museum, as well as the media reactions to these projects, I aim to discuss the modes or regimes of memory employed in both cases. I will also bring in other examples of “contested memories”, to sketch out the background and conditions in the field. The Museum of Movements – with its strong connection to current political agendas and embeddedness in Swedish cosmopolitanism on one side, and the engagement from civil society and grassroots organisations on the other – appears to provide an ideal study for exploring how all these concepts work together.

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<sup>133</sup> One of the examples would be the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, which aims to connect “past struggles to today’s movements for human rights” and to “turn memory into action” (cf. Sevchenko, 2010); as well as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Museums and Memorials Working Group.

The Swedish Holocaust Museum, as a supplementary case, allows me to deepen the discussion of how (cosmopolitan) memory discourses are being used in cultural policies, and what kind of memory is perceived as *safe* to institutionalise.

### 4.1.1. Cultural memory

The “difficult issues” of history, as we saw in the previous chapter, have no expiration date. However, some of them *stick* (to use Sara Ahmed’s terminology, cf. Ahmed, 2008) to the present more than others. To illuminate and explain these differences, the field of memory studies can be instrumental, especially with regards to museums as public memory institutions. In this subchapter, I will briefly summarise the main strands of memory studies scholarship that I draw upon.

The work of German memory scholars Jan and Aleida Assmann explores the concept of collective or social memory, which finds its origins in the interwar period and the theories of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and art historian Aby Warburg. Both argued for shifting “the discourse concerning collective knowledge out of a biological framework into a cultural one” (J. Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 125). The Assmanns take this argument further and break down Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory into *cultural memory* and *communicative memory*. The division between the two is expressed in temporality (with communicative memory covering only a few generations and constantly shifting along the time) and organisational form (with cultural memory requiring institutions, professionalisation of “memory bearers” and certain rituals for communication). However, the most important feature of cultural memory that connects it directly to the field of museology is its focus on “objectivized culture” and “organized or ceremonial communication” which falls into the concept of the “concretion of identity” (ibid., p. 128). Jan Assmann calls this process the “crystallization of living communication”, and names examples such as texts, images, rites, buildings, monuments, cities or even landscapes. All these crystallised forms are also known to us as (both tangible and intangible) heritage.

Why “memory” and not “history” or “heritage” in this case?<sup>134</sup> For the Assmanns, the “objectivized culture” has the *structure of memory* as long as it contributes to the shaping of collective identities; it is cultural memory that shapes the sense of belonging to a certain group and awareness of that group’s unity and values. In a way, cultural memory defines “us” against “others”, but it also has the potential to reconstruct past identities according to contemporary agendas (ibid., p. 130). Cultural memory is maintained by signs and media, whereas communicative memory depends upon interpersonal communication; therefore, in the case of cultural memory, there are certain rules and a “canon” which organises it (A. Assmann, 2008). The identities of different groups can also be understood as “cultures of memory”, which are “constituted in the tension between the official (politics) of memory and the private ones” (Stanković, 2014, p. 89).

In her book “Cultural Memory and Western Civilization” (2011a) Aleida Assmann describes how memory, writing, image, and monument are immersed in continually translated and relayed forms which constitute a meaning-creating cultural past. Another recent issue in memory studies, which is also explored in her work is the relationship between memory and emotions or affect. In her keynote lecture *Impact and Resonance: Towards a theory of emotions in Cultural Memory* (2011b), Assmann proposes two additional analytical concepts, *impact* and *resonance*, where the latter refers to the forms of relatable narratives (or “cultural patterns”) that can be incorporated into the collective memory, while the former points to drastic changes and dramatic collisions that leave evident traces and engender contested narratives. “While patterns of resonance are part and parcel of the general framework of cultural perception and meaning production,” argues Assmann, “impact events deform these patterns by creating *hot kernels* that claim a high priority in the cultural consciousness and the collective imaginaire” (ibid., p.56, italics mine). Resonance, according to her, strengthens and stimulates the affective

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<sup>134</sup> As Roger I. Simon puts it in his conceptualisation of the “terrible gift”, we have to “rethink what has stood as the museological notion of ‘heritage’, moving through and beyond the presentation of social histories of particular ethno-cultural groups and/or shared geopolitical locations that serve as the basis of cultural identity” (2006, p. 189). I argue that frameworks from memory studies can facilitate this job of rethinking.

side of memory, whereas impact relates to the “traumatic overdose of affect that destroys the finer patterns of resonance” (p. 18).

This framework is instrumental in my case as it relates to the “difficult issues” that were planned to be represented among other things in the Museum of Movements project (and related projects, be it the parallel process of building the Rescue Archive, preceding institutions such as the Living History Forum, or future projects such as the new Holocaust Museum). The Swedish narrative of neutrality during the Second World War and the idea of the “good state” that champions universal human rights does not allow for the traumatic impacts to be inscribed in the cultural memory, but at the same time, the issues of racism, discrimination and social injustices persist in contemporary Swedish society and create the “hot kernels” of political discussions (see, for example, Manga et al., 2022). However, these issues are often perceived as “imported” from outside: the memory of the Holocaust “came” to Sweden with thousands of survivors from the concentration camps during the White Busses rescue operation of 1945; the Black Lives Matter movement is something that is happening overseas (and Sweden stands firmly in solidarity with the movement<sup>135</sup>); and the refugees fleeing war, climate change and human rights violations are those who bring their traumas with them. In a country where an Institute for Racial Biology was founded in 1921, and forced sterilisations on the basis of eugenics were practised in some cases up until very recently,<sup>136</sup> the category of “race” never comes up in the contemporary official discourse, usually being defined instead as “ethnicity” or “culture”.<sup>137</sup>

Swedish cultural institutions address the impacts that affect Others and often draw parallels between world history and Swedish context in order to enforce resonance – or empathy, but at the same time many of

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<sup>135</sup> Black Lives Matter Sweden organised protests against police violence (Ekström & Kulneff, 2020; Grönvik, 2020) during summer 2020, and the global BLM movement won Sweden’s Olof Palme human rights prize for 2020 (“Black Lives Matter Foundation Wins Swedish Human Rights Prize,” 2021).

<sup>136</sup> In 2012, the last law on forced sterilisation of transgender people was overturned (RFSL, 2018; Center for Reproductive Rights, 2012).

<sup>137</sup> At the same time, there are diverse activist movements in the country, some more visible than others, that resist the different forms of oppression towards minorities, cf. Chapter 3 on the *100% Fight* exhibition.

the “difficult issues” that are discussed by activists, academics and civil society organisations are rarely put on display in the museums (even if they are still being discussed in the staff kitchens and coffee rooms). In cases where these pressing political issues do end up in the museum hall, it is most likely to be in the form of a temporary exhibition or side project, while the main exhibition halls are reserved for the “neutral” and “objective” narratives.<sup>138</sup>

The Museum of Movements project, due to its flexible composition and deep connections with grassroots organisations based in Malmö and elsewhere, had the potential to become a place to foster a dialogue about “hot politicised topics” in Swedish memory culture. However, its initial framing as a cosmopolitan museum project and relation to the mode of “cosmopolitan memory” could also have ended up undermining a productive discussion, leading it away from traumatic and sensitive issues towards a safer framework of “resonance” not based on the actual historical experiences of “the nation”.

The idea of cultural memory is connected to those of material culture, tradition, archive, and canon. What is worth noting here is that the realm of cultural memory studies, starting from the earlier works of Halbwachs, and then Pierre Nora and the Assmanns, is at times strikingly Eurocentric. Vietnamese-American historian Hue-Tam Ho Tai, in his review of the English edition of the collection *Realms of Memory* by Pierre Nora, emphasises that Nora does not take “the experience of empire into his consideration of how the French nation and national identity were constructed, or assesses its role in French collective memory” (Tai, 2001, p. 910).

The Assmanns, for their part, focus on “cultural memory” created and canonised by scholars and/or powerful elites, which leads to the unequal distribution of cultural (memory) capital (Harth, 2008, p. 94). In her keynote speech at the Memory Studies Association annual conference in Madrid in 2019,<sup>139</sup> Aleida Assmann pointed out that in studies of cosmopolitan memory, “we have forgotten the nation”, and emphasised that cultural memory can not only “brutalise” but also “civilise” the nation’s past if it is performed in a dialogic way:

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<sup>138</sup> And even so, are still criticised for not being sufficiently neutral and objective, cf. Chapter 3 on the Swedish “Museidebatt”.

Civilization or civilizing is not a process but a project and only humans themselves can drive this process according to their cultural values, programs and continual education.

(A. Assmann, 2019)

She “brings back” not only the nation and nation-state, but also the traditional striving towards educating the uncivilised here. This highlights the connection between memory and museums as epistemic devices that organise reality through the means of decontextualisation and serve the purposes of “education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM, 2017, p. 3; see also Bennett, 1995 on the conception of the modern museum as a tool to civilise the population).

In her speech, Assmann not only touches upon the role of nation-states in the memory work, but also emphasises: “For the successful integration of immigrants the nation-state container should not be an empty signifier” (2019). Therefore, cultural memory does not only contribute to the formation of identity; it can also (re)form the identity of the Other into “us” (allegedly).<sup>140</sup> Whatever supports the identity of the group is remembered, and the other way around, meaning that the political use of memory intensifies where it intersects and collides with the narrative of nation, citizenship, and identity.

The division between “monologic” authoritative cultural memory and dialogic/polyphonic memory bears some resemblance to the two modes of collective memory suggested by Bull and Hansen (2016): antagonistic memory and cosmopolitan memory. Even more, these modes resemble Aleida Assmann’s argument on the role of the nation-state. In line with the Chapter 2, these two modes of memory work with national/local and transnational/global identities, respectively (both being infused by politics). Bull and Hansen explain these concepts as follows:

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<sup>139</sup> For a video recording of this speech, see <https://youtu.be/wMo4W12CFw4>

<sup>140</sup> The affects that Assmann brings into this discourse of “reinventing the nation” are those of dignity and pride. Dignity, according to her, depends on recognition by others, whereas national pride depends on auto-assertion (A. Assmann, 2019).

Whereas *antagonistic* memory (nationalistic, religious, political) tends to apply these moral terms [categories of “good” and “evil”] to specific roles and characters in the form of heroes and villains (both active agents, but with opposing sets of values), *cosmopolitan* narratives tend to deconstruct this opposition in favour of a focus on the suffering of the passive and innocent victim. This narrative template, developed as a transnational offspin of Holocaust memory discourse, depoliticises the conflicts of the past in order to create compassion for individual suffering and call attention to the violation of human rights. While the moral categories of good and evil are reproduced, they are primarily attached to the ideological systems underlying the conflict: totalitarian rule vs democracy.

(Bull et al., 2019, p. 614, italics mine)

As I mentioned in this chapter’s introduction, contemporary Swedish museum projects (as well as the national historical narrative) fall into the cosmopolitan memory framework (see also S. Anderson, 2017).

#### **4.1.2. Memory with and without the Holocaust**

*“There are two kinds of studies of collective memory – those that examine the Holocaust, and all others”*

(Michael Schudson, cited by Tai, 2001, p. 916)

In his essay “The Problem with Jewish Museums” (2016), American critic Edward Rothstein bemoans the era of “identity museums” that celebrate different “hyphenated” groups in American society, and states that Jewish museums and particularly Holocaust museums are exceptions to this trend. According to Rothstein, “In other identity museums, the surrounding society is portrayed as forbidding, and any success obtained has less to do with opportunities offered than with opportunities seized in the face of hard resistance. <...> Jewish American exhibitions suggest the opposite. Jews do not succeed despite America; they succeed *because of* America – an assertion that would be near-heresy at the typical identity museum” (Rothstein, 2016, italics in original). The “problem” is not, therefore, “with Jewish museums”, but with “identity museums”, according to this critique.

As the “structure of memory” employed by the Assmanns to characterise the distinction between cultural memory, history, and heritage is closely connected to group or collective identity (finding roots in Halbwachs and in Durkheim’s social theories), the long-overused term “identity politics” inevitably arises in the cases similar to the Museum of Movements project. What are the groups whose identity these museums are supposed to celebrate? Will there be a scandalous for the prominent museum critic Rothstein idea of “allowing” “individual tribes to decide how they [are to be] portrayed”, which results in “an unmitigated disaster” (2016)?

A somewhat similar debate took place in Germany in connection with the German edition of Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009). The German critique considers the Holocaust as unique and incomparable with any other past or future atrocity, and sees any parallels between imperialism and Nazism as irrelevant (see Stone, 2021).<sup>141</sup> However, the argument that “the memory of the Holocaust cannot be globalised” seems unconvincing, as this is exactly what has happened with the commemoration of the Nazi genocide victims during recent decades (see, for example, Levi, 2007) with the rise of what Bull and Hansen are calling “cosmopolitan memory”. The recent publications in memory studies field confirm the cosmopolitan nature of the Holocaust memory as well as its tendency to depoliticise the subject (Antweiler, 2023; David, 2020).

Bull and Hansen suggest the third mode of memory as a possible way out from this dichotomy, which they formulate as following:

*Agonistic* memory discourse acknowledges the existence of social and political conflicts within a democratic society, but it refutes the use of moral categories. Instead, it *contextualises the conflict* and redefines the roles of the different characters <...> Furthermore, the social and political conditions that create and legitimate mass perpetration are

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<sup>141</sup> In Sweden, however, it takes another angle: the Living History Forum, which was initiated as the Holocaust education initiative, has been addressing the atrocities and human rights violations globally, and the Jewish Museum in Stockholm is very keen on not focusing specifically on the Holocaust but regard it as a part of history of the Jewish community in Sweden. In a way, these two examples highlight the ingrained cosmopolitan model which is permeating the Swedish memory landscape.

revealed: social and economic inequality, the marginalisation of recognisable groups of people and the reduction of their civil rights, the establishment of certain ethnical, religious and/or ideological standards for being recognised as citizens. Evil acts are not excused or legitimised, but neither are they conceived of as the acts of evil individuals. Hence, agonistic memory discourse re-politicises the binary categories of good and evil, and by doing so *re-politicises the relation of present society to the past*.

(Bull et al., 2019, p. 614, italics mine)

In their reply to the criticism of the agonistic memory theory by the memory studies scholar and the proponent of “cosmopolitan memory” Nathan Sznajder (Sznajder, 2019), Bull and Hansen point out that “in the political sphere... [memory] often works to construct strong collective identities pitting US against THEM and fueling social and political grievances” (Bull & Hansen, 2019). They also argue that cosmopolitan memory depoliticises the past by not taking into account “the historical context and political struggles, in which it became possible to carry out human rights abuses” and not focusing on “negative affects”, such as hatred, shame, humiliation and resentment. In a way, if we follow their argument, cosmopolitan memory decontextualises (depoliticises) past traumas similarly to how museums deal with contested heritage: by putting it into the glass case (framed by the remembrance of the Holocaust and the notion of universal human rights, in the case of Holocaust museums) – hence, taking away the political history of the conflict (perhaps even by putting it into another glass case next to the first one).<sup>142</sup>

One again can recall Aleida Assmann’s ideas of impact as a traumatic event bringing drastic changes, and resonance as a more relatable and calmer mode of memory (A. Assmann, 2011b). In my opinion, however, the strongest argument in Bull and Hansen’s reply is that societies are “imbued with asymmetrical power relations” and structural

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<sup>142</sup> Here, again, the “difficult issues” of colonialism are being framed in a similar way; as Achille Mbembe puts it in the article “The society of enmity”: “In order to exercise a durable project on the native people they had subjugated, and from whom they wanted to differentiate themselves at all costs, the colonists had to somehow constitute them into various kinds of *physical objects*. In this sense, the whole game of representation

inequalities, which makes it difficult to talk about “our common norms”<sup>143</sup> – because who are “we” who establish these norms? The majority population? Academic scholars? Ruling elites? Transnational corporations and organisations? Don’t the very notions of “common” and “universal” serve to perpetuate division, fragmentation and marginalisation of certain groups? Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell address the same problem in their text on heritage, emotions and affect:

Empathy has been identified as a key emotion for facilitating and swaying public debate on social justice issues [...]. However, the idea of empathetic imagination, and the way it is often uncritically embedded in liberal discourse as a “feel good” concession, has been strongly criticized as a way of reasserting existing power relations when socially privileged subjects choose to confer or withhold empathy.

(Smith & Campbell, 2015, p. 454)<sup>144</sup>

Of course, “cosmopolitanism” itself is a very broad term with many possible interpretations. Nevertheless, I suggest reading it in relation to memory studies, museums and my particular research as an *identity* and new *master-narrative* (cf. S. Anderson, 2018). Here, we come again to the inevitable buzzword of the present, especially when concerning the new “cosmopolitan” museum projects: *identity politics*.

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under colonialism consisted in turning the natives into a variety of typical or type-images” (2016, p. 25).

<sup>143</sup> It worth citing Sznajder’s argument *in extenso* as well: “Cosmopolitans recognize, of course, that the key to squaring the circle is to realize that the soul of politics is conflict, but that at the same time the soul of social life is the production of common norms. Thus, what we need is an explanation of how public conflict can be the key to integration—how the clash of conflicting norms can deepen our common norms and makes them stronger” (Sznajder, 2019).

<sup>144</sup> One can recall the idea of “happy objects” (Ahmed, 2008) here as well. Another example is described by Katrin Antweiler in her study on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, where visitors to the exhibition “Examining the Holocaust” were asked afterwards to describe how they felt. There were only predetermined options for answer: “moved”, “thoughtful”, “inspired” and “surprised” – all “positive” emotions, thus framing therefore the mass atrocity as something that educates about the past and sparks future action (and ultimately progress towards a “stronger human rights culture”), while leaving no space for any negative affects (2023, p. 127).

The definitions of identity politics are many, and range from understanding it as a political practice to sociological analyses of the relationship between identity and politics, not to mention the somewhat derogatory uses of the term concerning leftists and social justice movements around the world (for an overview of research on identity politics, see Bernstein, 2005). Bernstein argues that “to act politically, all social movements need identity for empowerment or an oppositional consciousness to create and mobilize a constituency” (ibid., p. 59). The critics assert that “identity politics” is a relatively new global phenomenon where “groups *have come to believe* that their identities – whether national, religious, ethnic, sexual, gender or otherwise – are not receiving adequate recognition” (Fukuyama, 2018, italics mine). In an opinion piece for *Foreign Affairs*, Francis Fukuyama paints a picture of multiculturalism and identity politics as divisive narratives that focus on “an ever-widening circle of marginalized minorities” which, in turn, “stimulate the rise of identity politics on the right” by “alienating mainstream voters” (ibid.).

This argument, based on the U.S. context, is rather relevant in the case of Sweden, as the two countries share similar narratives of exceptionalism (Jansson, 2018), and following the Swedish elections of 2018 and 2022, there has been a growing discourse of “division”, “alienation” and the general responsibility of the left-wing parties for the growth in popularity of the right (cf. Lee Tomson, 2020). However, Fukuyama’s argument also draws upon the *essentialist* understanding of status identities (Bernstein, 2005) and, therefore, identity politics – framing “marginalised minorities” and “groups” as something unperceivable by an “outsider”.<sup>145</sup> One might ask, then, *who* this outsider is. Isn’t he (and it is of course a “he”, at least in Fukuyama’s writings) a universal citizen of the nation-state with its liberal democratic regime, and the whole grievance over “identity politics” is again about defining “us” against “others”?

Aleida Assmann, in her keynote speech in Madrid in 2019, cites Fukuyama’s conclusion about the need for a shared national identity

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<sup>145</sup> One of the Fukuyama’s examples is the #MeToo movement, where he states: “[o]utsiders often fail to perceive the harm they are doing by their actions, as many men realized in the wake of the #MeToo movement’s revelations regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault” (2018).

and for “not forgetting the nation” (A. Assmann, 2019). However, the idea of “a need for creed” (Fukuyama, 2018) built around “core values and beliefs” of the nation is in a way a crystallisation of the antagonistic memory regime stemming from the notion of cosmopolitan memory: “deliberately assimilate the newcomers” and foster a “normative change that would permit... Swedes of African heritage to speak of themselves as Swedish” (ibid.),<sup>146</sup> i.e., the formation of a “multicultural” national identity consisting of many other identities. The important part of this debate is “reaching consensus” and presenting multiculturalism as something that has eroded the unity of the nation, without acknowledging that this imagined unity is also socially constructed and formed in favour of one, very specific identity (cf. B. Anderson, 2006). This conflation of multiple identities does not allow for *agonistic memory* to play out, because it focuses on unity, consensus, and the lack of political struggle.

In *Multidirectional Memory* (2009), Michael Rothberg argues against the “categorization of victims” and the idea of the memory field as a “zero-sum game” where one type of commemoration – and suffering – will always be worth more (or less) than the others. His suggestion is to find a way through the entanglements of interlaced memories without prioritising one certain narrative – an idea he advances even further in *The Implicated Subject* (2019). However, it is worth mentioning that this understanding does not imply the merging of multidirectional memory into one general master-narrative; its *complexity* is the key feature that allows for avoiding the loophole of a new authorised discourse, where liberal democracy and the “right” way of commemoration are seen as the only ways to “civilise nations”.

To sum up this theoretical discussion, if we understand cultural memory as an institutionalised practice, and see museal institutions as a paragon of such practice, then the antagonistic mode of depicting “us” and “others” will stem from traditional ethnographic museums and museums of cultural history, with its obvious culmination in national

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<sup>146</sup> It worth to notice that Fukuyama takes Sweden (alongside with Germany) as an example, which signifies that the national debates on immigration, Swedishness, and whiteness are pertinent on the global scale or at least are seeping into the international discourse.

museums (see for example Peressut et al., 2013), whereas the cosmopolitan mode finds its most established form in the Holocaust museums, museums of human rights, and, especially recently, in museums dedicated to migration.

### **4.1.3. “The world is my country; all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion” – the Swedish Holocaust museum**

What does this long introduction to memory theories have to do with the museum landscape I am studying?

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the Swedish government issued a decision to start an investigation on a museum to preserve and communicate the memory of the Holocaust (Dir. 2019:36). The aim of this museum was, among other things, to “critically discuss how the Holocaust memory risks to be abused and distorted both in Sweden and internationally” (SOU 2020:21, p.9).<sup>147</sup>

The new museum was neither perceived nor framed to be “overlapping with the fields of other institutions”, as the Museum of Movements project did, according to the Swedish Ministry of Culture (Gillberg, 2020b). However, a similar (though non-museal) institution had existed in Sweden since the late 1990s. The Living History Forum<sup>148</sup> was one of the examples of institutions “overlapping” with the Museum of Movements – and it was also considered as a possible base for the Holocaust Museum (Dir 2019:36).

The inquiry report for the new Swedish Holocaust Museum states: “We as a society must promote education, remembrance and research on the Holocaust so that future generations may learn about what happened. Sweden as a country has a commitment to never forget these

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<sup>147</sup> It is important to emphasise once again, that I was never a part of the Holocaust Museum inquiry, hence all the readings that I suggest in this subchapter are based on official reports, documentation and media coverage, unlike the sections related to the Museum of Movements, where I also have at my disposal ethnographic material, hours of conversations and the lived experience of participation.

<sup>148</sup> See Chapter 3 for an account of this institution.

crimes” (SOU 2020:21, p. 188).<sup>149</sup> The overlapping of activities with the Living History Forum is highlighted many times in the text. However, the report’s main point is that there is no museum institution in Sweden dedicated to preserving and communicating the memories of the specific historical event of the Holocaust. The future museum would tell the stories of the “Swedish survivors”<sup>150</sup> and also will represent the role of Sweden in the Second World War, both its “light” and “dark” sides – which points to the roles of victims, perpetrators and (quite vaguely) implicated subjects from the Swedish side.<sup>151</sup> Even though the testimonies and memories of survivors are placed at the centre of this future museum enterprise, the report still refers to the Holocaust as “an integral part of Swedish history” and states that “testimonies from Holocaust survivors with a connection to Sweden belong to Sweden’s cultural heritage even though the genocide was not carried out on Swedish ground” (p. 13). This discourse continued in the assignment to the Swedish History Museums to include the future museum into their organisation (Ku 2021/00875): “To establish the Swedish Holocaust Museum within Swedish History Museums indicates that the Holocaust in different ways is a part of Swedish history” (p.2).

There is no mention of the Museum of Movements’ existence in the 311 pages of the Holocaust Museum report (in fact, the word “movement”, *rörelse*, comes up more often in reference to far-right or

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<sup>149</sup> “Vi som samhälle måste främja utbildning, hågkomst och forskning om Förintelsen för att nya generationer ska kunna lära av vad som skedde. Sverige som land har ett åtagande att aldrig glömma dessa brott”.

<sup>150</sup> There is a contradiction between the report’s English summary and the Swedish text. In the English version it says, “Holocaust survivors with a connection to Sweden” (p. 13) whereas in the Swedish version the wording is “Swedish survivors” (*svenska överlevande*, p. 189; and in other parts of the text “[those] with a connection to Sweden”, *med anknytning till Sverige*, e.g. p. 104). This leaves a lot of questions about inclusion and exclusion, as well as about the principle for the choice of material for future collection.

<sup>151</sup> At the information and dialogue meeting about the Swedish Holocaust Museum (2021-05-31 on Zoom) organised by the Swedish History Museums, four perspectives were discussed: victim, perpetrator, helper and indifferent (*offret, förövaren, hjälparen, likgiltigheten*). Presentations given by the Living History Forum (for example, on 18 November 2021) on the future museum’s collections also mentioned the category of “helper”, which is quite peculiar for the Swedish discourse on humanitarian efforts during the Second World War.

neo-Nazi movements).<sup>152</sup> If we compare this report against the Museum of Movements feasibility study report (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b), we find both similarities and differences in the organisational processes they describe.<sup>153</sup>

First, both studies made reference to research conferences (*Museums in Times of Migration and Mobility*, May 2016, Malmö, and *Holocaust Remembrance and Representation*, February 2020, Stockholm) and aspired for the respective institutions to be based on an academic perspective. In the case of the Museum of Movements, the post-conference anthology (Johansson & Bevelander, 2017) was published by Malmö University (as main organiser); the feasibility study report names it as one of the museum's key sources for inspiration, references and networking (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b, p. 19). Despite being something of a kick-starter for the whole feasibility study process, the conference was nonetheless not centred around this particular museum project, and had its own deliverables. It is worth noting that the conference in Malmö was open to a broader public and attended by academic researchers from very diverse fields, as well as by museum practitioners, civil society representatives and, of course, university students (myself, for instance). A separate volume of the feasibility study report consisted of researchers' essays (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017a), which were more specifically focused on the issues of democracy and migration in Swedish museums and the

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<sup>152</sup> Moreover, awareness of the Museum of Movements project in the Swedish museum world seems to have been rather fractional: even though the project team participated in the national museum Spring Meeting in April 2019, and the project was recognised as a museum by the Swedish national ICOM committee, in 2021, for instance, when the project was mentioned in some national museal contexts (such as a webinar on 16.04.2021 organised by the Swedish Naval Museum on democracy, social sustainability and museums), it was met with surprise and a certain amount of scepticism.

<sup>153</sup> It is important to acknowledge that the two reports were created with different intentions: from the very beginning of the Holocaust Museum report, it was made clear that the work was being done by a team of experts who would not be the ones to actually carry out their proposals in reality, whereas in the Museum of Movements case, the team behind the feasibility study became the team that also drove the actual museum project. However, this was not preordained in the feasibility study report in 2017, so both proposals can be analysed from the point of view of what was planned to be done (moreover, at the time of writing, the Holocaust Museum project is still taking form and exists in a kind of structural limbo).

opportunities created with the start of the Museum of Movements project. In contrast, the *Holocaust Remembrance and Representation* conference was arranged solely by the Holocaust Museum Inquiry group (Ku 2019:01). The conference “was characterized by a wish to discuss, reflect and to start the conversation on what a Holocaust Museum in Sweden could be and what it should do”; it was also “an important input for the inquiry ... and it proved to be a valuable arena for discussions between Holocaust scholars, experts from international Holocaust museums and representatives from universities, institutions and authorities in Sweden” (*Holocaust Remembrance and Representation: Documentation from a Research Conference, 2020*, pp. 2, 5). The research field for the conference was therefore limited to the Holocaust studies, and its purpose (as well as its organisation) was dictated by the Holocaust Museum Inquiry.

Both museum projects were keen on including the academic perspective in their inquiries, but they each did it somewhat differently. In a sense, the *Museums in Times of Migration* conference offered a probe into the field, an open question, whereas the *Holocaust Remembrance and Representation* was more results oriented.

Another similarity between the two feasibility studies was the investigation of existing institutions in Sweden and abroad dealing with the topics to be addressed (democracy and migration and Holocaust remembrance, respectively). In the case of the Museum of Movements, during the course of the feasibility study several museums were visited by members of the team and eight international examples were described<sup>154</sup> in one of the report’s volumes (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017c), not to mention “supporting institutions” in Sweden<sup>155</sup> and several

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<sup>154</sup> The Canadian Museum for Human Rights; the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21; Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration (US); Humanity House in The Hague (Netherlands)\*; MuCEM – Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (France); the Nobel Peace Centre (Norway); Open Society Archivum (Hungary); Newseum in Washington, DC (US). The People’s History Museum in Manchester, which was part of the pre-feasibility study inquiries is, however, already missing from the narrative in the reports, even though several Malmö City politicians went on a study visits there in 2014 (Representative of the Labour Movement’s Archive, 2022-08-19).

<sup>155</sup> The Swedish History Museum, the Museum of World Culture and the Swedish Exhibition Agency.

consultations with museum professionals in Sweden and worldwide.<sup>156</sup> The Holocaust Museum inquiry report presents more of a roadmap of all possible institutions in Sweden that could be relevant for the study,<sup>157</sup> and also draws on field trips made to relevant international institutions<sup>158</sup> as well as consultations with experts.<sup>159</sup> Both studies emphasise that the aim is not only to take these other institutions as examples, but also to collaborate with them in the future (however, among the possible collaborators for the Swedish Holocaust Museum there is no sign of the Museum of Movements, which at the time of writing the inquiry report was still functioning in Malmö). The Holocaust Museum report also names “other important museums”, such as Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

One feature that is specific to the establishing of a new Holocaust Museum elsewhere is the existence of a network and an international organisation (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, IHRA) that allowed the Swedish project to land into a peculiar and well-developed field – which contributes again to more focused study.

Another point of comparison is the methods used for the reports. Both studies gathered information from museums, researchers, and stakeholders. The Museum of Movements feasibility study uses mainly the language of “discussion” and dialogue (cf. dialogue meetings as a method) whereas the Holocaust Museum report indicates that the

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<sup>156</sup> To mention just a few: the Nordic Museum in Stockholm, the Multicultural Centre in Botkyrka, Malmö Museums, the Museum of Women’s History in Umeå, the People’s History Museum in Manchester (UK), the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool (UK), the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg (South Africa), the Memory and Tolerance Museum in Mexico City, the International Museum for Democracy (Argentina) and the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Chile).

<sup>157</sup> Among the 22 organisations listed in the report are museums and museal institutions such as the Living History Forum, Swedish History Museums, Swedish Museums of Military History, the Nordic Museum, the Jewish Museum in Stockholm, Kulturen in Lund, Malmö Museums, Malmö City Archive and the council of regional museums.

<sup>158</sup> Ravensbrück Museum in Fürstenberg (Germany), the Jewish Museum in Berlin, the Norwegian Centre for Holocaust and Minority Studies (HL-Senteret) in Oslo, the Danish Jewish Museum in Copenhagen, and Yad Vashem, the Ghetto Fighters Museum and Massuah Museum in Israel.

<sup>159</sup> USC Shoah Foundation and the National Holocaust Museum in Amsterdam, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the Imperial War Museum in London.

opinions included in the text were “obtained” (SOU 2020:21, p. 18) from the relevant parties. “Collaboration with civil society organisations” is desirable but not specified in the Holocaust Museum report (p. 114), nor is it mentioned in the description of the museum’s potential structure. The Museum of Movements reports, on the other hand, are specifically focused on the issues of inclusive design, openness, transparency and formation of advisory boards (such as a Content Advisory Board made up of civil society representatives, see Kulturförvaltningen, 2019). The format of dialogue meetings, implemented broadly in the feasibility study process, was planned to continue as one of the core operations of the future museum.<sup>160</sup>

In a way, the Holocaust Museum Inquiry was *already* acting as a museum that collects and organises information – which is, as Deidre Stam points out, a foundation base for the “new museology” (1993, p. 271). One more typical suggestion for the (meta-)museal institution is featured in both reports: an inventory of existing collections in Sweden (Kulturförvaltningen, 2017b, p. 7, SOU 2020:21, p. 162) that concern the topics to be covered by the museums. However, compared to the Museum of Movements’ operations, the Holocaust Museum project started collecting in the early stages, through open calls to the public facilitated by the Living History Forum (*Insamling Av Minnen Från Förintelsen*, n.d.).

As the Holocaust Museum is operating as a part of the umbrella organisation Swedish History Museums, the History Museum in Stockholm displayed a mini-exhibition between June 17 and September 30 2022 including several objects that had already been collected through this open call. These objects belonged to Holocaust survivors and were accompanied by detailed multimedia narratives on the museum’s website (*Berättelser Från Överlevande*, 2022). The focus in these narratives is on the individual stories of the five people to whom the objects belong – which is in line with the most recent developments in museum practice and the “oral history turn” (cf. Bull & Reynolds, 2021).

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<sup>160</sup> ”Through MOM’s method the civil society organisations can interact with research, and the shared learning processes would happen in the holistic understanding of the core values of the museum: democracy, migration and the role of popular movements in the democratic society” (Rörelsernas Museum, 2020, p. 14).

However, in the whole Swedish Holocaust Museum inquiry report (SOU 2020:21) there is no part dedicated to explaining what a museum as an institution is, or what the need was for this institution to be “a museum” in the first place, in contrast to the Museum of Movements reports. Nor are there any references to ICOM – only to Swedish museum law and cultural policies. The report includes mainly Swedish references, which can of course be explained by the specific and narrow focus of the future institution and the input from actual museum practitioners who are focused on their respective research fields more than on the museum’s mission/vision. At one point, the investigation states that “[m]ore general questions about racism or intolerance risk moving focus from the Holocaust” (p. 100) – an approach that recalls the German discussion of Rothberg’s multidirectional memory framework (Riggs, 2023) and essentialises the uniqueness and specificity of the memory of the Holocaust. However, further on in the report (SOU 2020:21, pp. 112-113), it is stated that there is a possibility for discussion around “contemporary-related issues”, but preferably as temporary operations, without losing the main focus on the Holocaust and Sweden’s connections to it, as there is always a risk that the museum could become “instrumentalised” and “politicised” (p. 86).

The importance of the Holocaust survivors, their life stories, and evidence of what they witnessed is emphasised several times in the report (pp. 85, 93, 100, 189, etc.). The lack of a special museum institution that “has a mission of (through, e.g., collecting objects) preserving and communicating such a memory of historic events” (p. 188) is also mentioned as a reason for the whole inquiry. At the same time, the report lists “other institutions which have relevant collections” – but this does not seem to translate into “overlap with the fields of other institutions” (Gillberg, 2020b), as in the case of the Museum of Movements. Moreover, according to one of my interlocutors, it was precisely the focus on oral history<sup>161</sup> that pushed the decision to stop the

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<sup>161</sup> There were plans to establish a research centre of Oral History and Participatory Research as a collaboration between the museum and the university; already during autumn 2020, the Museum of Movements and Malmö University organised a series of workshops titled *Att planera, genomföra och skapa kunskap med muntlig historia* (“Planning, conducting and producing knowledge with Oral History”) which was aimed at helping both museum staff and civil society representatives to start working with oral

Museum of Movements' funding from the state: "The step towards oral history both provoked [the negative evaluation] and was in the wrong direction" (Representative of Social Democrats, Malmö City Council, 2020-10-09).<sup>162</sup> At the same time, the focus on stories and testimonies in the case of the Swedish Holocaust Museum was considered to be a positive example and laid the ground for the whole future institution.

The attitude towards oral history as a method and repertoire seems quite ambiguous among cultural bureaucracy. As another project participant described:

What I do hear is how a lot of politicians and also like *tjänstepersoner på Kulturförvaltningen* [employees of the Cultural Department] are starting to talk in the same way, or at least take the aesthetics of, like, stories, *personliga berättelser* [personal stories]. It's like they think that... like if you go into Open Malmö, for instance, I think they specifically write something about personal stories or whatever. So it's interesting that they do not tell us, they have never told the MOM: 'Shit, this is a great idea, we see a lot of potential in Oral History' but they've like taken some of the ways that we were speaking about the Museum of Movements, for instance, personal stories, personal narratives, [and] they're throwing in these words a bit... everywhere.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020-12-20)

Was it actually that use of personal stories was considered to be going in the "wrong direction", or was there rather mistrust regarding how these stories would be curated and presented by the museum? There is no clear answer; however, the role and importance of the testimonies and oral histories of survivors in the Holocaust studies has been emphasised many times by scholars (Greenspan, 1998; Langer, 1991) and implemented by practitioners in diverse forms.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, the question of the *curation* of memories and oral histories that could be considered "difficult" in any sense still remains challenging in the museum and archival world – as demonstrated, for example, by Malin

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history methods, not only within the museum's framework but also with community members and other participants (fieldnotes, 2020-08-13).

<sup>162</sup> "Steget mot muntlig historia både provocerat och blev åt fel håll".

<sup>163</sup> One example is the exhibition "Speaking Memories" which was displayed at the Swedish History Museum in 2019 and then toured around Sweden, before eventually

Thor Tureby and Jesper Johansson's recent book on migration and cultural heritage in Sweden (Thor Tureby & Johansson, 2020). Which memories are chosen for preservation and display? Who makes these choices? These questions inhabit the fields of both memory studies and museum studies, and if in the Museum of Movements project the attempt to address them was made perpetually,<sup>164</sup> the Holocaust Museum project seems to have already had the "knowledge" of how to approach them effectively – from the cultural institution's vantage point.<sup>165</sup>

Survivors, according to the Holocaust Museum inquiry, should not be objects but subjects, and their participation is needed (SOU 2020:21, p. 100); but at the same time, "so few survivors are still alive"<sup>166</sup> that it is judged difficult to obtain authentic accounts. This discrepancy creates a gap for musealisation of the subject and turning it into a *subject matter*<sup>167</sup> – a safe space for the museum to occupy. The museum's collection of testimonies becomes an attempt to reconstruct the intergenerational connection of communicative memory and transform it into transgenerational cultural memory (cf. A. Assmann, 2006). Indeed, this can be read as cosmopolitan memory work, when the pedagogical aspect of past atrocities plays the central role, as it is stated in the Holocaust Museum report: "so that future generations may learn about what happened. Sweden as a country has a commitment to never forget these crimes" (SOU 2020:21, p. 188); the essential "never again"

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becoming a part of the Swedish Holocaust Museum (*Speaking Memories – The Last Witnesses of the Holocaust*, 2022).

<sup>164</sup> "Establishing the Museum of Movements is an inclusive process which embodies contemporary perceptions of what a museum has been historically, what it means to be a museum in the contemporary, and what challenges they face, as well as what a museum can be or should be in the future" (Rörelsernas museum, 2020, p. 3).

<sup>165</sup> This specific mechanism belongs, without doubt, to the coloniality of knowledge paradigm with its experts and objectivist approach, determining "not only which histories are told but also which lives are grievable and worth honouring" (Antweiler, 2023, p. 119).

<sup>166</sup> "The inquiry proposes that the collection of stories, artefacts and other material from survivors with a connection to Sweden should start as soon as possible considering the age of the few remaining survivors" (SOU 2020:21, p. 15).

<sup>167</sup> Or a "commodity" and "public good", even, if we return to the framing of the colonial "other" by the hegemonic culture (Antweiler, 2023, p. 197; Mbembe, 2016).

perspective which is somehow perceived as being neutral and not “politicised”.<sup>168</sup>

Katrin Antweiler, in her book on the memorialisation of the Holocaust in human rights museums, describes this strategy as *exhibitionary atonement* (Antweiler, 2023, p. 131), pointing out that the human rights narrative has the redemptive power and supposes the possibility of making up “for past wrongs by simply putting them on public display” (ibid.).

This perspective plays very well into the idea of the “good state” and non-contested history, and with the introduction of the (important for Sweden) position of “helpers”<sup>169</sup> into the memory framework of the future Holocaust Museum sustains the concept of exceptionalism of “moral power” (Jansson, 2018). Of course, the “good museum” today is supposed to be based on participatory premises and to “give a voice” to the victims (a rhetorical question here is: to what extent and to whom exactly, as well as: how does the range of victims and survivors follow contemporary perceptions of diversity and multivocality, when perhaps 30 or 40 years ago they were a more homogeneous category of individuals that illustrated the Holocaust narrative). The remembrance of the Holocaust becomes “safer” for museum institutions as time passes and the gap between the communicative part of its memory and the cultural part deepens. However, museum institutions *per se* are also amplifying this gap, functioning as a sort of containing mechanisms for “difficult issues”.

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<sup>168</sup> “Several researchers pointed out that the Holocaust [memory today] risks being instrumentalised, relativised, abused, distorted, denied and politicised” (SOU 2020:21, p. 86) – without any remark about whether it is already politicised.

<sup>169</sup> It is worth noting that the Holocaust Museum report several times mentions the role of, for example, Swedish racial biology studies in the Nazi crimes against humanity, and other forms of complicity – not only in terms of the roles of bystander and “saviour”, but also “enabler” of the Holocaust (SOU 2020:21, pp. 84, 110-112). The report also emphasises the importance of critical discussion.

## 4.2. Agonistic museum practice

“Screw consensus! Dare to discuss without losing respect”<sup>170</sup>  
(Fieldnotes, 2018-03-13)

The above quote from one of the participants in a dialogue meeting that I use to open this subchapter can be read as an epitome of “agonism”.<sup>171</sup>

Agonistic memory, according to Bull and Hansen (2016):

- introduces individual agency into the practices of remembrance and initiates a dialogue that is not focused on consensus but takes passions and emotions into account;
- does not “shy away from addressing politicized representations of past conflicts” (p. 400);
- acknowledges the context-related nature of the past crimes and considers the socio-political struggles of the time.

In his article “On agonistic narratives of migration” (2020), Hansen applies the same approach to the “cultural products that are able to unsettle the existing identity positions of the hegemonic discourse” (p.1). He proposes two modes of migration narratives that prevail in such “cultural products”: the antagonistic/neo-nationalist, which perceives the figure of the migrant as a threat, and the humanitarian/cosmopolitan, which sees the migrant as a victim. Agonistic narratives about migration, in his opinion, can help (and are helping in cases where they are used) to build new solidarities and alliances across this divide. The “specific theoretical value that agonistic theory brings to the field has to do with the *recognition of conflict as an ontological condition*” (p. 6, italics mine) and the conversion of the “other” from the image of an enemy (as in the antagonistic narrative) to that of an adversary – “dare to discuss without losing respect”. Most

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<sup>170</sup> “Skit i konsensus – våga diskutera utan att förlora respekten”.

<sup>171</sup> It is worth mentioning here the difficulties around the use of the terms “agonism” and “agonistics”: they are quite often confused with “antagonism”, some authors refer to them as “agonality” (see Sznajder’s reply to Bull and Hansen), and it is somewhat difficult to trace these terms outside the fields of political science and philosophy. However, courtesy of the UNREST project, the concept has settled down in the memory

importantly, agonistic approach “should require acknowledgement of the migrant as a subject with a legitimate agency” (p. 8), which reflects and continues more general discussions in the museum studies field about inclusion and community participation in museums – institutions which are designed to strip their subject matters of agency due to decontextualising museum mechanics.

Anna Cento Bull and Chris Reynolds suggest that applying agonistic memory theory to museums can create a *radical multiperspectivity* (2021) whereas the tools of oral history, according to them, are crucial in contributing to multivocality of the museal narrative. Here once more the importance of personal narratives for museum practice is emphasised with a focus on the “personal turn” which is “signalled by the shift in oral history practice from focusing on empirical detail to the valuing of personal memory” (Graham et al., 2013 as cited in Bull & Reynolds, 2021, p. 284). Oral history as a museum practice, as Bull and Reynolds argue, allows for challenging the hegemonic narrative. However, what is important for my research specifically, it also endorses a more “personal”,<sup>172</sup> humane view on history – and memory. In their study of two museum cases, Bull and Reynolds examine how the use of multivocality can potentially unsettle visitors and under what conditions it does not achieve the desired effect (for example, strong curatorial overarching voice, restricted range of historical characters, etc.). Furthermore, they also discuss the ways in which the exhibitions affected visitors, and one can identify similarities with Aleida Assmann’s concept of resonance (2011b) here – but also with general move towards studying emotions, affect and empathy in the museum field (Paver, 2016; Smith & Campbell, 2015; Trofanenko, 2011).

Chantal Mouffe, on whose theory of agonism Bull, Hansen and Reynolds are building their memory framework, underlines the importance of passion and partisanship as the central elements of political dialogue (Mouffe, 2005 as cited in Lynch, 2020, p. 6). She argues for re-introducing *the political* into the museums (Mouffe, 2010), though her focus is more on art museums and artistic practices.

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studies field, and I am convinced that there is no need for inventing new terminology that will multiply the same existing theoretical perspectives.

<sup>172</sup> Not in the sense of “personal memory” vs “collective memory”, but as a way to see the individuals behind the grand narratives – and also personally address the audience.

Clelia Pozzi (2013) takes this argument further and examines how counter-hegemonic narratives can effectively *contaminate* national museums and challenge established views, which brings us again to the question of identities and the divide.

To allow agonism into the museum space, significant preparatory work needs to be done, and, in fact, this work is being performed by cosmopolitanism. Mouffe is adamant that the left/right opposition is vital for the political, which is why she does not agree with Beck and Giddens on the concept of “cosmopolitan second modernity” (2013, pp. 139–141). However, accounts of diversity, migration, and cosmopolitanism can be helpful to problematise settled notions of “the nation” and its “others” and move towards “cosmopolitan museology” (cf. Mason, 2013) – or any other of the “museologies” that were discussed in the first few chapters. Therefore, the first step in making space for agonism in museums is to question the established hegemonies and acknowledge other kinds of knowledge, to problematise museum institutions as “ideological state apparatuses” (Pozzi, 2013) and governmental assemblages (Bennett, 2015), to commence dialogues (i.e., about repatriation), and only then realise that in some cases consensus is impossible and accept “the possibility of a paradoxical configuration where a relation of inclusion-exclusion among dissenting voices is continuously posited and challenged to produce ever-changing images of contemporary social life” (Mouffe, 2000, as cited in Pozzi, 2013, p. 12).

Bernardette Lynch, in her introduction to the anthology *Museums and Social Change: Challenging the Unhelpful Museum*, explains what the problem is with this preparatory work: “The so-called ‘shared space’ of the museum remains deeply political, and yet ignores this fact, claiming for itself an illusion of neutrality and benign tolerance of all” (2020, p. 6). These issues bring us back to the political struggles in the field of museology itself, as in the case of the museum definition debate: before applying the agonistic memory framework can be applied to museums’ public and exhibitionary operations, museums need to acknowledge their political role in forming the narratives of “us” and “others”; or, as Mouffe puts it, “Once we understand that every identity is relational and that the affirmation of a difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity <...> we can understand why politics,

which always deals with the collective identities, is about the constitution of a 'we' which requires as its very condition of possibility the demarcation of a 'they'" (Mouffe, 2013, p. 5).

The pitfall of the cosmopolitan mode of memory, however, lies in the deflation of this underlying conflict and in the fact that celebrating diversity could easily be turned into another hegemonic narrative. As Kerstin Smeds puts it in her work on exhibitionary epistèmes, the "reflexive" exhibitions of contemporary museums, which focus on multimodality, pluralism and participation, are reflecting trends in science and philosophy to the same degree as did those of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but instead of taxonomies and positivism we now have "phenomenology, (post)structuralism and information technologies" (2012, p. 68). This inclination towards linear narratives is highlighted by Bull and Reynolds in one of their museum case studies, where "the variety of voices revisit the past through personal testimonies, and their stories incorporate gender, age, social and ethno-religious differences <...> However, testimonies by perpetrators, bystanders, collaborators and other 'less desirable' agents are deliberately eschewed from the project, preventing counter-hegemonic voices being heard" (2021, p. 290).

These questions – regarding how to incorporate radical multiperspectivity into the museum setting – will pose a challenge for the Swedish Holocaust Museum in the future, as there is always a risk of leaning towards a hopeful, "happy" or self-contented narrative, where the "difficult heritage" that erodes "positive, self-affirming contemporary identity" (Macdonald, 2009, p. 1) is placed into a distant past, into the container of the cultural memory; something that the nation of "us" is obliged to remember but that has nothing to do with the political struggles of today (cf. Antweiler, 2023).

### **4.2.1. Exhibiting the movements or letting them in?**

As it follows from its name, the Museum of Movements was planned to deal with migration and popular movements as well as political activism as its subject matter.

The notion of activism itself can be considered something of a “difficult issue” in Swedish history.<sup>173</sup> However, this is not the case for today’s diverse political and social movements that call for action – political activism, eco-activism, human rights activism and all the possible other forms became used across the spectrum without discrimination or focusing on one stance.

One recent example of exhibiting the activism in Sweden is the touring exhibition *100% Fight: The History of Sweden* (mentioned in Chapter 3), which traces the history of popular movements and even includes (though segregated in a separate alcove) far-right activism as a social practice. Designed to provoke the reactions and engage pedagogically with the visitors (see the exhibition review in Zabalueva, 2018a), the exhibition nonetheless employs classical museum mechanics of distancing the subject matter from the public and turning it into a historical narrative.

During the discussions around the Museum of Movements’ development, some of the topics that were addressed by the *100% Fight* exhibition came up repeatedly, and some were abandoned or rethought. However, the participants in the dialogue meetings kept coming up with new ideas and topics for the future museum, some of which would fit into existing networks and structures (as, for example, Safe Havens conference and related events), and some of which would not.

Let’s take one example of the topics suggested at a dialogue meeting:

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<sup>173</sup> The etymology of the word dates back to the WWI period: in *Nordisk familjebok* dictionary from 1922 “activists” are defined as “politically engaged groups, mostly right-oriented bourgeoisie but even some socialists who demanded active (‘brave’) Swedish participation in the world war on the side of Central Powers”, who had voiced their concerns in the anonymous publication *Sveriges utrikespolitik i världskrigets belysning* (“Swedish foreign politics in the light of the world war”, 1915; see also Long, 1915).

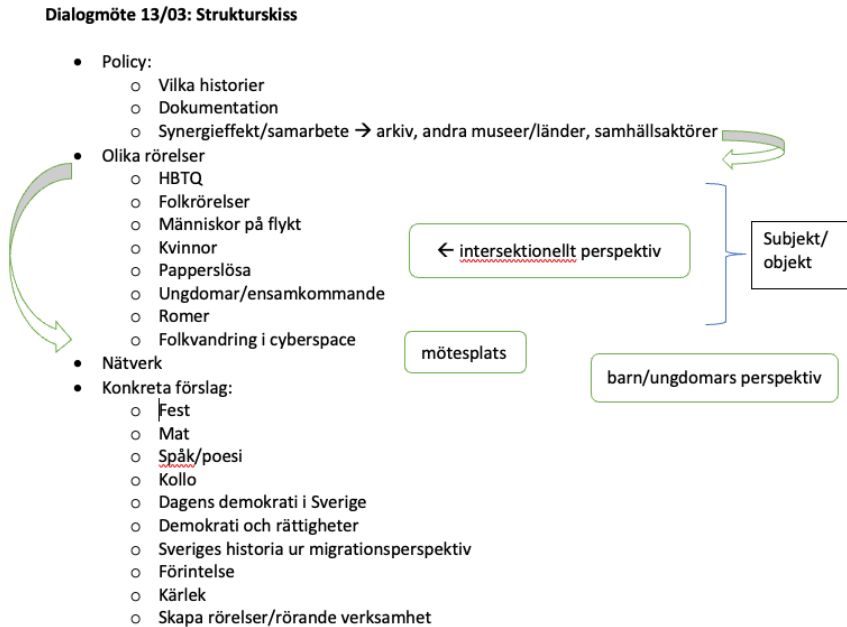


Fig. 1. Structure of the proposals for the MOM from a dialogue meeting on 13 March 2018 (created by author for the Museum of Movements internal meeting).

The figure is based on the notes from the discussion tables at the dialogue meeting (fieldnotes, 2018-03-13) which were initially divided into suggested topics and included activities. The first chunk of the suggestions included all that has to do with “policy”: “Which stories? (Are supposed to be told); Documentation; Synergy/collaboration -> archive, other museums, civil society actors”. It (especially the last part) connects to the next block, which is “movements” or actors, and includes the interplay of the subject-object role as well as the intersectional perspective. This part reads as follows:

“Diverse movements: LGBTQ+; Popular movements; Refugees; Women; Stateless people; Youth/unaccompanied youth; Roma; Migration in cyberspace”

The “Network” included recurring appearance of the need for a “meeting place” (*mötesplats*) and the children’s/youth’s perspective was also mentioned a lot in the discussions, hence it is having a block of its own.

The last list is “Concrete proposals”: “Celebration; Food; Language/poetry; Summer camp; Democracy in Sweden today; Democracy and rights; Swedish history from the migration perspective; Holocaust; Love; Create movements/organisation on the move”.

As the list shows, there was a certain amount of overlap among the possible popular movements that the museum could display the history of and/or interact with as stakeholders. The suggestions for topics, of course, depended on the groups attending the dialogue meetings; for example, if in November 2016 a large proportion of the participants were local activists working with refugees, in March 2018 some groups were very keen on including the remembrance of the Holocaust survivors and women’s rights into the range of topics. The selection was also dependent on the period: in 2015-2016, the “refugee crisis” was at the top of the headlines and public debate was more or less focused on this issue, whereas in 2018 Sweden was preparing to celebrate the centennial of universal suffrage the following year, and so there was a focus on the issue of women’s rights.<sup>174</sup>

This list of specific proposals can be compared against the actual activities that were later carried out within the Museum of Movements later, with the opening of venue.<sup>175</sup>

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## 2019

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- Conference on ethics for oral histories and personal narratives
  - District mobilisation then and now (in Santiago de Chile and Malmö): Discussion on the right to the city
  - Theatrical performances about refugees’ reception “*Jag låtsas att jag förstår*” (theatre InterAct)
  - Workshops on inclusion for the municipality’s staff with Roma Information and Knowledge Centre
- 

<sup>174</sup> I am not suggesting that media discourses were the only thing affecting the proposals being put forward; however, to cite Mouffe once again, “Identities are never already given, but always produced through the discursive construction; this process of construction is a process of representation. It is through representation that collective political subjects are created” (2013, pp. 125–126). In other words, social movements are both forming and being formed by the discourse through representation, and the focal point of the active part of society can change depending on the chronological and/or geographical context.

<sup>175</sup> The examples listed here are taken in 2021 from the museum’s website (when it was still operating) and are presenting the scope of issues that the MOM was addressing.

- The heritage of the Slave Trade – the event of the Pan-African Movement for Justice
  - Panel talk with *Fristadsförfattare* (guest writers of Malmö City of Refuge) Mukhtar Wafaye & Wali Arian
  - The Swedish Federation for LGBTQ Rights anniversary
  - Seminar on Freedom of speech by City Archives and PEN Eritrea “What news articles didn’t see the light today?”;
  - Panel “Black Panther Party” and “Revolutionary inter-communalism” (Institute for Studies in Malmö’s History and Pan-African Movement for Justice);
  - “Romani in focus” – a seminar on Romani chib language
  - “Where we stand” - exhibition and gathering of Women Making HERStory project (In collaboration with Nordic Labour Film Festival)
  - An international workshop on ethics of Oral History
  - Fashioning Black Identity – Migration Memory Encounters event
  - Malmö Community Biennale (communities and performing arts)
- 

**2020**

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- OUR QUESTIONS – Learning by Asking, project on collecting oral histories in communities (digital)
  - Rapid Response series of talks on pressing contemporary issues, moved to the digital format with the start of pandemics
  - Release of the latest issue of the anti-racist journal MANA
  - Dialogue meeting to work out the full-scale museum project
  - Vernissage of #MALMÖFRITIDSGÅRDAR – photo exhibition designed by Malmö’s school kids
  - Exhibition Daria Bogdanska - Människor och idéer i rörelse (People and ideas on the move)
  - SAFE HAVENS - FREEDOM TALKS series of digital talks with the actors in the field of the freedom of expression, followed by three-day digital Safe Havens conference
  - In.MEM III presentation - Rörelsernas Museum – MOM (artistic performance)
  - Youth Pride Malmö
  - Social justice and arts: artistic workshop (in place for 8 participants)
  - Afro-Swedish week
  - Panel talk on the threats to democracy
  - Women Making HERStory event “Violence against women: Femicide, Feminicide, and Transcide in Sweden from the past until Covid19”
- 

Table 1. The examples of MOM activities during the 1,5 years of “working room” operations

For instance, from the list of proposed topics for the museum from 2018 maybe the “migration in cyberspace” appears to have got lost along the way, and the initial focus on refugee-related issues later became less strong. At the same time, many of the activities included social participation and engagement, turning the museum’s working space not only into a lecture hall, but also into a shared kitchen/living room for the local civil society. There were activities performed with the side-projects, as for instance the meeting with guest writers of Malmö City of Refuge was part of ICORN/Safe Havens assemblage, and the seminar on the freedom of press was organised by the Rescue Archive project. There is also visible contribution from local movements, communities, and civil society organisations, from the Pan-African Movement for Justice to Roma Information and Knowledge Centre, from participatory theatre with the refugees to the Youth Pride and the Swedish Federation for LGBTQ Rights. It is worth to notice that the audiences of all these events sometimes were overlapping and sometimes were not – which also reflected fluid, porose nature of the museum project and all the actors in its orbit. However, as “agonistic narratives aim to forge alliances through protest and activities against inequality and discrimination” (H. L. Hansen, 2020, p. 1), the very possibility to forge such alliances was present in the museum space due to the constant mixing of the crowd – and in Chapter 5 I will dwell more on the examples of it.

This list is a snapshot of the potential which the Museum of Movements have had for Malmö, and what kind of surface (or frame) it was to bring the topics of migration, democracy, social movements and, occasionally, museological dilemmas together. It also showcases how it was not exhibiting the movements, but letting them in, *into* the museum as full-fledged participants. And by doing that, the museum project was aligning to the memory-activism nexus.

#### **4.2.2. Memory activism and memory in activism**

In her article “Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism Beyond the Traumatic” (2018), Ann Rigney proposes the “memory-activism nexus” where she places the concepts of memory and activism in three different kinds of relationships:

- “memory activism” refers to the change of established narratives and how people work together to shape memory culture as a contribution to present-day politics.
- “the memory of activism” involves commemorating practices of the acts of civil resistance and popular movements.
- “memory in activism” refers to how mobilised memories of the past activism inform civil resistance in the present.

All three are employed in the present-day politics, and all three were intended to be enacted in the Museum of Movements project. And they partly were, as can be seen from the Table 1 in previous subchapter. For instance, events that were organised with the Pan-African Movement for Justice, such as the commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade in Sweden and its heritage, fall under “memory activism”, as they address the injustices of the past that diversify the political issues of the present (such as Afrophobia and discrimination in contemporary Swedish society) and also aim to change the hegemonic narrative of Sweden as a state that was not “involved” in the transatlantic slave trade. These activities also partly relate to “memory in activism”, as they help to inform civil resistance in the present – and even more so do other events in which the Museum of Movements took part, such as the release of anti-racist publications.

Events connected to freedom of speech and threats to democracy (such as PEN and City Archives talks, as well as the work of the Rescue Archive project) are more inclined towards the “memory of activism”, as they were focused on preservation and passing on memories (even of a very recent past, so communicative memory is being mobilised in this case); the Safe Havens events fall into this category as well, but also inform “memory in activism” due to the element of networking and forming alliances and solidarities (which can then be engaged again in the future as “memory of activism”).

Theatrical performances about the reception of refugees in 2015 are also part of that more natural field for museums and cultural institutions, “memory of activism”, whereas events involving the Women Making HERstory project lean towards “memory in activism” as they were very much focused on solidarity and community building.

Another example of “memory activism”, although it exists somewhat separately from the Museum of Movements, is the Gathered Voices of Malmö initiative, which started from the museum’s working space. The project is focused on finding “a way to enhance the right to the city in Malmö by engaging in sustained conversations around life stories from the large part of the city’s population that is working-class and exposed to structural as well as subjective racism” (Nilsson Mohammadi & Wolgast, 2021). However, as this project is not only working on changing the narrative but also trying to “enhance the right to the city”, “memory in activism” as a tool for civil resistance in the present again comes into the picture. The same can be said about the initiative to create an Anti-Racist Monument in Malmö since 2019 (see Nilsson Mohammadi, 2023). Both projects would be in one or another way connected to the Museum of Movements if it continued to exist.

A lot of the Museum of Movements-based activities fall into this third category of the memory-activism nexus, as most of them were addressing movements and civil society groups operating in the present with specific agendas. This resonates with the results of my previous study on civil society-based activism in Malmö and Southern Sweden, before the museum’s working space opened: several participants mentioned that for a movement to continue moving on the momentum, a sustainable institutional platform was needed (Zabalueva, 2018c). It also relates to the Chantal Mouffe’s reflection on the mechanics of radical democracy and why the paradigm of “engaging with institutions” is more productive than that of “withdrawing from institutions”: “Without any institutional relays, they [social movements] will not be able to bring about any significant changes in the structures of power” (2013, p. 77).

However, the aim of my analysis is to include the *museum itself* into the work of memory activism; to perceive and describe it not as an empty container, a signifier for the cultural institution, but as an assemblage of actors, which creates the shared agency of the museum, the *power of association* that moves the living memory forward rather than crystallising it into a static narrative (cf. Latour, 1984). As stated in the *Museum Activism* reader, “Museums, as social institutions, have the opportunity and the obligation to question the way in which society is manipulated and governed. Activism also means resistance – the

critical questioning and re-imagining of the status quo” (Janes & Sandell, 2019, p. 6). Therefore, the reflexive position that the Museum of Movements was trying to achieve (see their reports, e.g. Rörelsernas Museum, 2020),<sup>176</sup> can also be described as memory activism: by changing the established narrative of what museums are and how they should operate.

In the process of its coming-to-be, the Museum of Movements was grounded in the dialogic, or rather conversational form. Dialogue became a method in itself, a method of the museum-making: from asking for the opinions on “whether we need such a museum” at the initial dialogue meetings, to the choice of oral history as the format and research field that most suited the museum’s profile. In a way, behind the focus on oral histories as the possible material for the future museum (see, for example, appendix 3 for *Strategic Report on Establishing an Oral History Research Centre*, Rörelsernas Museum, 2020), oral history was the method that was used to create connections, invite participants and establish networks, both through conversations and discussions and through “footwork”. The conversation as a format enabled the team to “collect personal experiences, academic research, institutional practices from the museum sector, and historical knowledge” (Rörelsernas Museum, 2020, p. 3) – to create the momentum for the museum to move forward (and also established it as a democratic institution from the beginning). One of the most important functions for the museum was to serve as a “vivid environment for democratic discussion” and to “contribute to shared learning about issues related to democracy, migration and human rights, thus motivating the people to engage in active co-creation of a democratic society” (ibid., p. 4). The word “democracy” from the “Museum for democracy and migration”, as it was originally envisaged, is thus understood not only as related to popular movements and their history (memory of activism), but also to both memory activism –

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<sup>176</sup> To quote the mission and the vision of the museum once more: “The Museum intends to place a human rights-based approach at the core of its practice and to develop its organization with strong roots in the representation of historically marginalized voices. The focus on participation implies ensuring that stakeholders have genuine ownership and control over all processes in all phases of a project” (Kulturförvaltningen, 2019).

shared learning and re-creating the history of particular groups in society – and memory *in* activism – using memory (and oral history) in continued dialogue and action on contemporary and future “difficult issues”.

With the decision to close the project, the Museum of Movements became a memory itself, and it also fits into all three parts of the memory-activism nexus described by Rigney. Thus, the chapter 5 of this dissertation can be considered as a piece of “memory of activism” writing, where we are recollecting together with the project team (or rather I am recollecting with the help of their inputs) how the process of museum-making and unmaking unfolded and what issues came up along the way.

However, “memory activism” is also applicable in relation to the overall scope of the dissertation: if we assume that the tradition of museum-making in the global contemporary follows in certain cases the framework of cosmopolitan memory (as in the case of human rights museums and other “museums of ideas”, for instance), by bringing in the agonistic memory perspective into museological research, one can strive to change the established narrative and unsettle it.

As for the “memory in activism” part, we need look no further than the devotion of the civil society movements who appealed to Malmö City Council to keep the museum project running and funded, even on a small scale (fieldnotes 2020-11-20). Practices and traditions, established while the Museum of Movements was operational survived beyond its closure – sometimes in different forms, but nevertheless, the very memories of the people involved were affected by the project. Even after the closure of the actual museum and venue, the agencies of those who had been the part of the project continued, in a way, to move this token of democracy and migration issues further, as in the following example:

At least some people involved in the MOM... have been in this project called Malmö Life Stories, or Gathered Voices of Malmö, and what they've said is that of course it won't be a new MOM, but it will take some... methods and ways of working, and some themes with it, of course, and try to work in the same spirit in a sense, with shared authority, with ethics, with oral history, civil society perspectives... but it will be, at the beginning at least, Malmö-focused, as the name tells, Gathered Voices of Malmö [*Malmö*s

*samlade röster*]. <...> I also want to emphasize that this is like... this is initiative that was created before we got to know that the Museum will no longer exist, so this is something that would have done, regardless of the museum... even though if the museum weren't to be closed it would still continue with this... we've been working with this for a year!

The MOM would be a very strong partner in this. Our mission was to create the oral history research and a centre for Oral History and Participatory Research, that was the platform that we would have own in Malmö... together with the MOM and university that would... that was the plan in the beginning. So Malmö would... the MOM would be a very strong partner in this.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020-12-20, for detailed account on the Gathered Voices of Malmö see Nilsson Mohammadi & Wolgast, 2021).

By continuing the “methods and ways of working” from the Museum of Movements, this initiative (and several more can be named), although being specifically Malmö-focused, contributes to the uses of memory (of the museum project) in activist practice; and here it is important to emphasise that the museum project itself turned out to be a point of connection for different actors, a hub of knowledge about cultural work with memories, oral histories and “difficult issues” (of museum-making, among others).

### 4.3. Instead of closure

In my discussions with various people about the Museum of Movements' discontinuance, one of the most frequently asked questions, including among the project team, was “why?”. Why did the Ministry of Culture ultimately deem this project to be of low priority? Why was it so vaguely formulated and reluctantly communicated, both to the public through the media and to the museum's employees through the internal administrative channels?<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> In response to my written inquiry to the Ministry of Culture (Ku2020/02256) I received an email, stating that “The state funding of the Museum of Movements with 5 million krona is stopped from 2021 after a period of running an experimental organisation. The Ministry refers to the decisions from the budget for 2018 and 2021 on matters concerning the state's support for the museum”. The aforementioned documents (Prop. 2017/18:1 and Prop. 2020/21:1 Utgiftsområde 17), however, merely indicate the decision to fund and defund the museum, without any explanation; nor was any indication of the reasons for defunding communicated to the project team, according to my interlocutors.

The need for “prioritising” and redistribution of resources in the cultural sphere, which had been hit by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, was voiced by several decision makers, but the decision itself was extremely anonymous; moreover, the decision was also communicated in something of a detached manner. One of the museum staff recalls:

I think it was on Friday... Thursday or Friday that we got an invitation on Outlook... it was like a *blixtmöte*, you know, sort of a meeting on short notice. And invited were the staff of the museum, the Culture Director [of Malmö], and [acting operations manager], and us, the museum staff. I think the invitation was for Monday or Tuesday, I cannot remember. And it only said that: "meeting". Nothing else. And [the culture director] has never been to any meeting or has asked for any meeting with us before at the Culture Department. So, that was like... I mean we knew that it was close to when they announced the budget, so I think... it was like a signal of something is happening, but I wouldn't imagine that we'd be totally closed. I thought they would say: sorry, you didn't get 30 millions, you get the same amount as before. But we understood something is up. And then we met. And [our bosses] were on a pre-meeting, inside of the venue, like in the workshop room, and then they came out, and then [one of them] started to talk about a project that we have with a museum in Latin America that was going to happen in 2021, so she was still talking about that, so I was like - shit, okay, they're not closing us! So... but then she got quiet and... [the culture director] didn't show up, by the way. She was sick, so they sent the HR-chief instead. And then [the manager] just started by saying: you've done amazing work, but I'm sad to tell you that we are closing. So that was it, and then she asked if we want to say something, but we were all in shock, so we couldn't say anything. And then I think it was one hour, within one hour there was an article out, about it. So that's how we [got to know about the decision].

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020-12-20)

In a recent book chapter examining the Museum of Movements case from a cultural economy perspective, Lizette Gradén and Tom O'Dell discuss the economic and political rationale behind the decision, but

also point out the detachment and anonymity in the way it was delivered (2022).<sup>178</sup>

Yet, it was never voiced directly by any decision-maker or political stakeholder what made the Museum of Movements project an impossible museum in the first place and what kind of “difficult issues” impeded the (according to both employees and civil society) successively functioning and developing organisation. The answer to the question “why” remains obscured from the majority of interested parties, leaving space for uncertainties and assumptions. In a way, the Museum of Movements project never received proper closure – becoming a “difficult issue” itself, an unsettling and contested memory of the Swedish cultural bureaucracy and the ever-open possibility of change which was never fully realised.

Here, again, it is important to differentiate between museums’ *subject matter* and the *matter of museums*: each of these can be difficult, unsettling, and contested, and this dissertation deals with both. While the topics that the Museum of Movements set out to address were by no means depoliticised and detached from the pressing societal issues, the very composition of the project also provided the Swedish museal landscape with some unorthodox thinking. The features and specific points of entry of this thinking will be discussed in the following chapter.

### **4.3.1. What do we do with memory?**

The memory studies frameworks help to highlight the effects and influences of memory politics in museum institutions. It can consider the nation state’s creed, the cosmopolitan idea of global reconciliation, or the emerging paradigms of activism and political protest staged, performed, and addressed by museums.

Though these frameworks can be accessed and approached separately, studying them through the lens of the Museum of Movements project provides a way to understand the junctions and overlaps within them.

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<sup>178</sup> “The shutdown was silent and anonymous” – Fredrik Elg, one of the museum’s project managers from the beginning, quoted in Gradén and O’Dell (2022, p. 424).

	Cultural memory	Communicative memory	
Antagonistic mode	Imposed narrative of “us” and “others” (national history museums)	Non-resolved past conflicts continue in the present	Agonistic mode
Cosmopolitan mode	Universal values (e.g., Holocaust remembrance)	Contemporary cosmopolitanism (e.g., migration museums)	

Table 2. Analytical model of memory studies frameworks

The suggested analytical model (Table 2) is by no means all-encompassing, but it helps to understand how the gaps in antagonistic and cosmopolitan modes of memory (Bull & Hansen, 2016) refer to the temporality and resilience of cultural memory and communicative memory suggested by the Assmanns (A. Assmann, 2011a; J. Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995), with the possible way out (but not restricted to) in the form of antagonistic memory mode which does not shy away from conflicts and discussions. In this model, the antagonistic cultural memory today is often being seen as somewhat “outdated” and belonging to the conservative, traditional understanding of heritage institutions. The communicative memory realm is an arena where museums are eager to be included – but the museum mechanics ingrained in their institutional nature gravitates nonetheless towards the field of cultural memory (due to its decontextualisation feature). The problem with the communicative memory and present issues is that they both are obviously more political than the supposedly “safe” sphere of the past. And an agonistic mode is the most “difficult issue” of all, as it is both political by nature (which, considering the museum definition debate, is somewhat *mauvais ton* in the global museum world) and also aims to take into account the contexts and problematics of political struggles, both of the past and of the present. In a way, it contradicts the museum mechanics itself – and exactly by that it can break out of the dichotomies of already established paradigms. Last but

not least, the cosmopolitan cultural memory seems to be a “safest” choice in addressing the complex and sensitive topics – as it happened in Sweden with the establishment of the Holocaust Museum.

The Museum of Movements started with politics but ended with memory (politics). In a way, this dissertation is also a form of commemorative practice – as well as an inquiry into the conditions of museum making and unmaking. As the official reports and mentions of the project disappear into the archival shelves, the issues that prevented the Museum of Movements from coming-to-be as a permanent institution are, probably, still out there, even if they have not been named directly.

The Museum of Movements project was an attempt by the Swedish cultural institutions landscape to think outside the box – but it failed in the eyes of decision-makers for diverse reasons. The Swedish Holocaust Museum – which does not deal with activism and civil society organisations as *subjects* and is not eager to discuss critically the very nature of the museum as institution – seems to have been a safer choice. The *resonance* of the cosmopolitan memory regime overpowered the (potential) *impact* of agonistic practices, even if none of these concepts was voiced specifically in the process: implicit, but not accounted for.

To investigate these possibilities, however, we need to take a closer look at the Museum of Movements’ internal structure and what makes it such a unique (and yet also rather typical) case of museum-making.

## Chapter 5. Precarious heritage: (fr)agility, uncertainty and the time to act

Regardless of whether the Museum of Movements project was an attempt to think outside the box of the museum world, or an epitome of this same box in its most recent form, the very conditions of its inception, coming-to-be, and discontinuation indicate a set of conditions which have become more and more pronounced in the museological discourse of recent decades.

If we return again to the overarching question “*What does it mean to be a museum?*”, the Museum of Movements can help to outline some of the directions in which this question develops.

These directions do not imply that there is a single solution or a universal stencil for museum-making; rather, they underline the importance of multiple solutions and multiple museum ontologies, which can play out differently in different contexts. However, the multivocality of museums, which was highlighted in ICOM’s alternative museum definition of 2019 (museums as “polyphonic spaces”), includes not only the *content* of these institutions but the organisational form itself.<sup>179</sup> As Hilde Hein points out, the performance of the museum consists of individual agencies and multiple behaviours, but cannot be reduced to the simple sum of them (Hein, 2011, p. 115).

The central question for this chapter is: what can constitute socially relevant museum practices, and how can individual agencies shape and form museums as (fr)agile processes? Using the accounts of the museum team members I will outline some of these constitutive features. I deem ethnographic material as specifically important for this

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<sup>179</sup> However, “polyphony” and “multivocality” can easily fall into the problematic paradigm of giving voices to marginalised groups without addressing the power relations, hierarchies and authoritative/paternalistic stance of cultural institutions. Anna Cento Bull and Chris Reynolds criticise the concept of multivocality and suggest “radical multiperspectivity” as an alternative (2021). As they put it, “When multivocality incorporates (radical) multiperspectivity, the narrators incorporate a wide range of historical actors/characters and their stories are told from different, even contrasting perspectives on the (difficult) past which have the potential to unsettle visitors” (p. 294). Now, this is probably not the case with the narrative of this dissertation, but it was definitely a feature of the Museum of Movements making.

chapter, as it brings to light again the intrinsic connection between (being) museums and (being) humans, as “fluid beings, with flexible, porous boundaries; they are necessarily embedded in relation, <...> and their essence is best rendered as something constantly in the making” (Ingold & Pallson, 2013, cited by Tlostanova & Fry, 2021, p. 74). It is the conversations that took place in the interview format, that ultimately helped me to grasp the fluidity, porosity, and “in-the-making” feeling of my study and the nature of the museum project.

Even if it does not provide strictly contrasting and contradicting perspectives, space in this chapter is given to individual agencies and actors to build an argument for the possibility of this kind of museum – not a “democratising” one or a “museum for democracy”, but an empowering, responsive, and responsible one. How can such an institution change our views on heritage and museum practices? How can it contribute to museology?

What kind of museum would the Museum of Movements, eventually, have been?

In investigating the Museum of Movements as a *process*, I want to see what made it fragile and precarious – and what, on the other hand, sustained it and allowed it to persist for the certain time as an institution and continue its afterlife as an experience.

To do so, I will focus on several features of this specific museum project that have the potential to broaden the discussion on reshaping and reforming the realm of museums more broadly.

### An impossible museum

The... *Frihetsparaden* [Freedom Parade] in 2019, it was like after the 9th of October when we had the conference together with the Pan-African Movement for Justice, about *Sveriges involvering i den transatlantiska slavhandeln* [Sweden’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade].

After that, there’s always a *Frihetsparad*, like it was a demonstration *tåg* [march], that goes around Malmö, and then it ends up in Möllevången – starts at Möllevången, goes around the city, and ends at the Möllevången again.

And in 2019 it actually ended inside the Museum of Movements.

And it was amazing to watch how... you know, we have big windows. It was... I had to go and open, and *liksom larma av* [like to turn off the alarm] and such, so when the march was at

Triangeln, I ran to the museum, and opened up the doors. So, I would be standing inside and counting the amount of people coming in, because we couldn't pass like 120, and I would see the demonstration *tåg komma från* [march coming from] *Früsgatan, upp to Bergsgatan*, pass our windows these posters and everything and then come into the museum. And then in the very first of the line were the drummers, Kuru Mapu, they were like drumming inside to the museum and behind them it was the whole Frihetsparad walking in, and people were standing there with big plakat [posters] and banderols and... it was like actually a movement coming into the museum, and that was so cool! And I still have it in my... like, I can see it in front of me. And how the women that entered stood up against the wall and opened up the banderols with... slogans and this shit. And then... it was a programme, politicians were invited to talk about afrophobia, there was an artist performing, there were speeches being held and it was really, really cool. That's one of the things I'm so proud of because... I'm not sure, because I'm not so familiar with the museum world, but I think that's something unique.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

I begin with an excerpt from one of the interviews about what the Museum of Movements actually *was* and *did*, and with a question: does this description fit with a museum? It certainly aligns with the 2019 proposal for a new museum definition – in the sense of a “democratising, inclusive and polyphonic space for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures” (ICOM, 2019). It also embodies the movement, *rörelse* as such: the popular movement, the demonstration, the discussion focused on social justice, on belonging to Sweden in different senses. It answers the museum's mission in that it addresses both democracy and migration and has a “difficult issue” at its core – namely, racism and afrophobia. It also provides a footing for the museum in the local social justice associations, demonstrating the level of trust from the civil society. But alongside all these important features, this account is also filled with emotion and affect, with the engagement from the project team, and, as we will see in other accounts referenced in this chapter, it is not an isolated case in this sense.

If in the previous chapters, the construction of the Museum of Movements has mainly been presented from the outside – through the lens of power and politics, memory and “difficult issues” – here I want

to focus more on the inside-out narratives. I intend to do this with the help of the voices that made this impossible museum possible, if only for a short period of time. By conveying the words of the museum's staff, I will reconstruct the momentum of coming together, the expectations, ambitions and affects that surrounded the project. I also am adding my own analysis and perspective to their words – with the ambition to work out an *agonistic* (hi)story of the museum project in focus by providing as much context to museum-making and unmaking as possible.

Museums, as it was argued in Chapter 2, start with politics, and the politics is impossible without power relations in all its aspects: there are always issues to be dealt with around decision-making, funding, hierarchies among the staff, cultural bureaucracy, and so on. In order to look into these power-related processes, I will employ Bruno Latour's analytical concept of *power of association*.

Latour suggests treating the exercise of power as an effect rather than a cause (1984, p. 266). In a way, the analysis in the previous chapters is built on the Latourian *diffusion model*: society is seen as a *medium* offering various degrees of resistance through which a token (which can be an order, a claim, an artefact as well as fashion, ideas, goods, and lifestyles – or, in our case, an institution) is being spread by an inner force similar to that of inertia in physics. Therefore, there is an initial force – momentum – that triggers the movement, the inertia that conserves this energy, and the medium through which the token circulates. In the Museum of Movements' case, the momentum is provided by the decision-makers and shaped by all the other involved agencies.

This chapter draws instead on the *translation model*: “The spread in time and space of anything... is in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it” (p. 267). The token in this model initially has no impetus; the energy for movement is contributed by everyone in the chain. “Each of the people in the chain is not simply resisting a force or transmitting it in the way they would in the diffusion model; rather, they are doing something essential for the existence and maintenance of the token... everyone shapes it according to their different projects”

(p. 268). Instead of *transmission* there is *transformation*, and the museum (the “token”) itself becomes not a consumable product (however much the decision-makers and cultural authorities would have preferred it to be calculable and produce stable “results” that could be demonstrated or proven economically), but a process. One can also refer to the notion of “circulating reference” in the Latourian sense (Latour, 1999),<sup>180</sup> which can serve as “our way of keeping something constant through a series of transformations” (p. 58) – keeping the museum project in focus but investigating relevant references on the way. In this chapter, the shaping, existence and maintenance of the token is studied from several perspectives, such as positionality and structure of the institution, the diverse relationships around it, and the way these were perceived by the project team.

So, if the Museum of Movements is the token in question, how can we analyse it using the translation model? In the proposal for the future permanent institution, the museum project team answers the question “What does this museum do?” as follows:

People in motion are not just statistically countable bodies that migrate across borders; it is also a hybrid flow of ideas, knowledge, ambitions, and experiences; People and Ideas in Motion. <...> We are used to defining a museum through its archive and collections, which constitute the museum’s heart. In the case of the Museum of Movements, this institution’s heart includes the networks of the stakeholders, that the museum actively gathers around itself.

(Rörelsernas Museum, 2020, p. 14)

I consider myself as having been part of these networks that constituted the museum’s core – coming and going, entering the field to touch the “token”, checking in with the museum team for updates, sharing ideas or just observing from a distance. Nevertheless, in the interviews I conducted, my role was more that of a listener, and to add my own voice to the narrative, I organise the interview excerpts into several

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<sup>180</sup> What is important in this text by Latour is the process of abstraction, the movement from “nature” to “language” considered not as a single moment of rupture, but rather a series of transformations where the next step is always referring to a previous one, hence the “circulating reference”. This abstraction or decontextualisation, resembles the museum mechanics addressed in the first chapters.

topics that I deem relevant for this chapter's central argument. I will also highlight the concepts that are recurring and/or speaking directly to the museum features which I am laying out as the grounds for reimagining the museum form through the Museum of Movements' lens.

The material analysed in this chapter is by no means full and deep enough to highlight every angle of the museum-making process, or unbiased in any case. Moreover, this is not the main point here; what I want to do is to trace certain aspects of the museum-making and unmaking in order to understand how this constellation of "people and ideas in motion" became a productive form of museum institution. Without doubt, some parts of the bigger picture have been overlooked, and some have been deliberately left out. For example, I do not focus specifically on the internal relations within the team, even though this could form the basis for a separate study in itself. What I aim to do instead is to connect aspirations, visions and emotions to the "token" of the museum, as it moves from hand to hand, from one person to another, gathering and losing power along the way. In doing so, I aim to focus on the museum as a process (not only its making and unmaking, but also the whole practice of operations, making choices and building support networks) and how this process is both agile and sensitive to changes, but also fragile if not sustained.

#### Fluidity and uncertainty

The employment of the translation model and the power of association involves the idea of blurred boundaries, processual nature and fluidity *per se* – qualities that are also reflected in the *project* nature of the Museum of Movements (in the sense that the museum had confirmation of its existing for one year at a time). Starting from the feasibility study, without even a definite answer on whether the project would come to be, and throughout the annual funding decisions and operation of the "working space", the museum had a distinctly transient form, which will be addressed later in this chapter. This state of being *non-permanent* or not defined applies not only to the organisational form, but also to the very idea, mission, and core values of the Museum of Movements.

For the actors involved in the project, the museum's fluid nature was a key feature:

The difficult part - and the part that's quite easy when you're just like two or three people thinking a museum together - is to be somewhat **elusive**, I'd like this museum to be slightly elusive at this point, not to have that very strong shape or form yet; that we always negotiate the museum with the people who come in - and we listen. But as soon as you start hiring staff... and, there are funders to consider - you already need to define and we already must start using some traditional terms and follow traditional systems to define what is it, what is it now, what will it be, and what is my role, what is my title and all these things that are already happening now. It is important that these things happen in the right order.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

Here, the elusiveness, constant (re)negotiation with involved parties, and non-definite form of organisation are seen as assets – and, importantly, as an asset from within the team's point rather than the political decision-makers.

At the same time, this fluidity and elusiveness could lead to uncertainty and confusion, as told in accounts from 2018 to early 2019, from both within and outside the project:

It seems like we're **still trying to figure out** what the ownership of the museum is, like it's still... I still don't quite understand if this project is 100% sure that it is going to happen to be honest... So I think we're still working towards that.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2018.12.10)

There's a lot of **confusion**, especially around us at the local administrative level, since we're in a **temporary** administrative structure near people who have a different assignment and who are working in a more traditional way, so people are sometimes trying to correct us and help us and tell us - no, this is not how you're supposed to do this. But our assignment is defined by our feasibility study and by each of the steps in the process that we take with stakeholders outside this administrative system – with the civil society organizations. And then I have to go back to all the papers that we [have] produced and show: there is an assignment, and each report is sent by *Kommunstyrelsen* [the City Council] to the government, signed and approved. Our funding is from the ministry, and we must continue from the result of each step we take and report back, and it leads to continued funding – so each

step is transparent. It is only a matter of following and participating in the process for everyone involved, also for those in the surrounding structures. The purpose of this very thorough process is to practice democracy in each step and not have random decisions.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

Part of this confusion stems from the tension between the local and national cultural administration, from the gap between top-down and bottom-up initiatives, described in Chapter 2. In a way, the movement of the “token” here and the relational networks around it represent several levels of involvement: from the cultural bureaucracy to the local civil society, from the national government level to the municipal politicians – and the temporary administration in the City Departments. The above excerpt also touches on the responsibilities and accountability of the new-born institution as spring 2019 was a period of intense planning when the working space was being prepared.

There was also uncertainty and a somewhat intuitive approach on the organisational level within the team, with unclear and shifting responsibilities, as the following two accounts show:

It's a bit... **not unclear, but** one of my assignments is officially to write <...> on behalf of the museum, like for the web. And also I'm in charge of developing structures for dialogue meetings, and structure for how to organize civil society organizations... The work that I really need to do is always falling behind because of... emergencies. <...> the job that I need to do is on hold at the moment.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

It was a little... **unclear in the beginning**, like okay what's the difference between the ambitions and the goals, what do we actually have? And then I think I saw the budget in November, and I was like - OH (laughs), oh, this is like a **DIY**-thing, okay, yeah, that's fine, I mean that's great, I get this now. For me, I've been always working with a low budget, very do-it-yourself <...> I'm so used to have my bits being completely underbudgeted, so for me it was kind of like - oh, but then the pressure is gone. I don't have to think this (shows wide range), I have to think like this (shows small range). Which for me is more doable.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

Even if the second interlocutor refers to budgeting issues, they also bring up an important point about the DIY nature of the project, not

only in the sense of a trial-and-error, agile approach, but also the very hands-on practice that was crafted by the project participants themselves, placing the museum into the living worlds of the city of Malmö, physically opening its doors to, for instance, the participants in the *Frihetsparaden* demonstration. “Doing it themselves” here also means taking action, organising the space, figuring out how to be in this completely new and unprecedented environment. In a way, evading the traditional organisational setting for cultural institutions became a predicament for the museum to operate the way it was operating. Both of the above accounts – again, from spring 2019, the active planning phase before the opening of the working space – indicate the lack of internal policies or separation of duties, of “professionalisation” of expertise so characteristic of larger, established museum institutions. Doing everything themselves also implied that every member of the small team was a jack-of-all-trades in the project, responsible for diverse and often unpredictable odd jobs during the process.

However, the lack of funding and resources – doing everything on a small scale, having to wait for feedback from the government before moving forward – was also one of the risk factors that affected the project:

Challenges, and the main one I think is <..> the lack of resources, which was quite shocking to me when I first arrived here. I know that people here love the CMHR [Canadian Museum for Human Rights], and everywhere I go I'm keeping hearing: oh, we have gone to CMHR to see how you did things - and I'm like - yeah, that is great, BUT. There's two very different realities. The CMHR had millions of dollars as budget, we [the Museum of Movements] are never going to have in our wildest dreams budget like that. But we need to start looking at museums - particularly from Latin America<sup>181</sup> or the Global South... I know that their budgets are much more limited, and they do amazing work, so we need to start looking at these museums and see how they work, with the resources that they have, because I think that's much more realistic for us, but yes, that's one of the biggest challenges that I see. Because if we keep talking and trying to promise a CMHR-like museum here - that is not going to happen. Everyone is going to be very disappointed of what we come up with, because we just don't have the money or the resources or the budget to do this.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2018.12.10)

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<sup>181</sup> One can refer here to the *sociomuseology* and the Cordoba declaration of the 2017.

Given this opinion from a museum professional with an international career, one can see that the ambition on the *political* level (“Let’s build an Ellis Island in Malmö!”) was quite unrealistic from the beginning, where the stakeholders from the city and state administration were somehow imagining the effect of big institutions from overseas (for further analysis of political interference in cultural economy, see Gradén & O’Dell, 2022) – not least because of the involvement of former CMHR staff in the Museum of Movements’ development.<sup>182</sup>

The project’s elusiveness and fluidity also underline the importance of making an effort, being experimental, and “trying everything” on a small scale, in the trial-and-error mode:

It's important that we kinda **try everything out ourselves** and become very close to the everyday operations. So we don't just all of a sudden become this big museum where everybody is doing the things separately and not understanding what the other departments are doing.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

I think the museum should in some way show that **we are museum in process**, and everything that's in it - mostly in it - it's a process. We have to show that it's not the beginning and then an end, it's an ongoing process, relationship, thought, and the same thing with exhibitions, or showcasing a movement, for instance.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

We can already see how the contradiction between the imaginary grand scale for the future institution (the CMHR and Ellis Island being two examples) and the small experimental space (the lack of funding and resources in a broader sense, such as time). There is also an acknowledgement of the museum’s processual nature and of the everyday routines and operations which rarely make it into the self-congratulatory political narratives. The quotes express an understanding that museum work, indeed, consists of small steps that

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<sup>182</sup> The Canadian example was set as a benchmark, which relates back both to the set of “difficult issues” particular to the democracies of the Global North, and also to Stephanie Anderson’s national narrative templates (2017, 2018) – the idea of the “good state” and the championing of human rights.

are tried out before being implemented in the form of set policies and regulations.

The Museum of Movements was not shying away from being agile and experimental, and it shows not only in my personal communication with the staff, but also in the proposal for the permanent institution submitted to the Ministry of Culture:

In this proposal we account for a medium-sized full-scale museum, which is supposed to be as agile and accessible as possible, with flattened thresholds and wide opportunities for collaboration with civil society, academia and with other actors around the country.

(Rörelsernas Museum, 2020, p. 6)<sup>183</sup>

Thus, by putting this mode of work into the written proposal, the museum project made the suggestion to institutionalise agility in the future, but, at the same time, displace uncertainty (and, possibly, the resulting anxiety) with the concept of opportunities.

However, before I return to the issues of (fr)agility, uncertainty, and precarious organisation, it is necessary to outline some of the supporting networks that were formed by, around and within the moving token – the Museum of Movements project.

Forming relationships, building trust

Agility and responsiveness do not, however, imply unpreparedness. Moreover, to be able to (re)act in a prompt and relevant manner to the changes taking place in the surrounding social and political landscape, the Museum of Movements focused a lot of effort on building up a safety network which could “carry on the museum” (Museum of Movements team member, 2021.05.11).

Something that came up often in my conversations with the team was the importance of building up sustainable and long-term relationships and trust:

You have to account for **long-long term**. So, if you’re starting something today, you know, that it does not have to be something ready

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<sup>183</sup> “I detta förslag beräknas ett medelstort museum i en fullskalig form, som är tänkt att vara så snabbfotat och tillgängligt som möjligt, med låga trösklar och rika möjligheter till samarbeten med såväl civila rörelser som akademien och med andra aktörer runt om i landet”.

in August. It will fall into place. But you need to have people that are receptive! ... because we've said we always want to have like - what do you call it - the community perspective or the civil society perspective, NGO-perspective, academic perspective and always an international perspective to put the local and the national into context.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

When you're working with communities you are trying to build up a relationship of trust. If you break all those promises, then they're not gonna trust you, neither they are gonna come back to you when they realise that you're basically a liar, and that's the problem.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.05.20)

For the Museum of Movements, keeping this process of building relationships slow could, in fact, sustain it. Some of the interview excerpts in this chapter also point to the seemingly casual nature of this kind of relationship-building, the way of finding the solutions through discussions and informal meetings rather than policies and detailed regulations:

You can formalize a lot of things, but not the **attitude**, or the *approach* if you will. We have coffee with someone over a long time, and you really don't know how... You like each other's work, you find each other interesting, but you don't know what the relation you're building will lead to – if it will become an exhibition project, an oral history project, or just a small event. If you work **too fast** you will miss so much, from the institution you possess so much power – you have the institutional background, the professional skills, the university exam or whatever, and you move freely in the world of institutions and culture and can verbalize it, and then you wanna work with someone who's got nothing of that. But you want to work with them because they have something that you do not have as an institution – a deeper knowledge, experiences, a whole different network. And... you need to understand that even though you are benign, that you are really nice fellow, you're still very intimidating to these people. So, it takes time to **bridge** that, and start to understand why these people that you want to collaborate with - why are they interesting and why you would be interesting to them. And that doesn't happen in one project in a couple of months.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

From this particular account, several things stand out which are relevant to the whole body of my dissertation. First, the equal value given to lived experience and expert knowledge; second, the acknowledgement of the museum not only as a process but also as a *slow* process (hence, the need to sustain it in the long term). There is

also the reference to the holistic nature of the project as a whole, where you do not know what a new connection will bring into the picture and how it will affect the project's future development, but each separate connection is treated as if it can bring opportunities – and, subsequently, new actors who can in turn become involved with the token.

There is a tension within the museum-making process, between responsiveness and sustainability, fast reaction and slow burn, which can be seen, of course, as another internal contradiction inherent to the impossible institution – but it also demonstrates that processual contradictions *per se* do not often hinder development. It can also be seen as a feature of agonistic museum-building, where the tensions – not between actors but between concepts and features in this case – fuel the momentum, and move the token further.

In terms of making this relationship-building happen, many of the people surrounding the museum pointed to the importance of the venue, the working room at Bergsgatan in Malmö, including my conversational partners, especially in retrospective accounts:

Some of the things that I think went very well was the opening of the temporary space, the venue. Every time I talked about it, every time that I share that experience with people in different parts of the world, they are all very interested in trying to figure out how that was working, they're saying: you know we're very interested in this model, just creating **a venue for people to be able to use** and for us to **foster** those **relationship of trust**. So that was really, really good and I think it went well in Sweden.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.05.20)

I think the things we did... and it's strange, because we got the keys - I think it was in August 2019, so we had the venue for a year and a couple of months, five months I think it is, but, I mean the pandemic started in March, so we had the venue and then like physically didn't have any activities for like - seven months, eight months. So it wasn't like such a long time, but we could... that, we've built like a lot of relationships and trust in that space.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

However, the Museum of Movements opening the venue for its stakeholders created the opportunity for further impetus. The space would not have worked as it worked if it was not “filled” by the

collaborative efforts of the museum team, stakeholders, and, occasionally, visitors. The venue, in a sense, became something of a physical manifestation of the project, the surface for performing the museum and the space where the intersections between different agencies played out.

What has changed from 2019 is that **we actually got to practice the things we were saying** and... gaining trust as well, because we've been working with groups and movements that usually are like super critical to both state and municipality. And then we had - I mean, it sounds maybe *banalt* [banal] but for instance just having some groups on Facebook reposting our posts is like huge, because usually they don't... they repost activists' groups posts so having them repost the museum's posts it's like - wow, shit, you really trust us! And I think it's because we've done things that they didn't expect from us... Of course, those things that we have done are because we thought it was important, but also because they had demands on us. The different organizations, in a way they... what I've noticed from when we've got the venue is also how the organizations have become a bit cocky, like *kaxiga*, they feel like they're entitled here, "this is our right", so they even like - they talk back to us (laughs) in the venue, so - that is so cool! And I'm like - shit, okay! And that's been really cool, that **they feel such an ownership** that they also like question us sometimes.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

This last comment is telling because on the official level, the question of ownership was still somewhat unclear, despite the special investigation ordered by the museum and Municipal Board in 2018 (Gradén, 2018). So, while the hierarchies within the Malmö Cultural Department, the Ministry of Culture and other administrations were not established or formalised, the museum and the venue became a democratic platform for shared efforts, where civil society organisations and the project team were working together on different collaborations – and also connecting to each other. The hesitancy from the cultural administration to own up the museum space created the window of opportunity for the stakeholders to form networks and build up trust – but it also demanded effort from the museum team's side and certain conditions to be fulfilled. This process (and the expectations and ambitions behind it) is better described in the words of one of my interlocutors:

I think the key for success in building an institution that is coherent with the surrounding is that the work was done **slowly, in a broad dialogue** and with **humbleness**. As we were talking before, you have to be humble in every step you take when you build a new institution such as the Museum of Movements. Our approach was that we are not sitting with the expertise, rather our surrounding is sitting with a huge **knowledge, know-how, and experience**. When you understand that and work in a humble way then you will be able to build something **authentic** and with a strong connection to your surrounding.

And I think the very key of this, that I see why it worked so well is that we always got back - it was a way of work that was born from the feasibility study. After we call for a dialogue meeting we worked on the notes and took care of what have been said at the tables. After a couple of months, we got back and presented the results from several dialogue meetings and asked if our conclusions were responding to what representatives from several sectors has said on the topics asked.

We started asking, and then we went back to see if the results were accurate, if they were correct, if what the groups have said was understood correctly, are we understanding it right?

So, **we always went back to the people**, it was always back and back and I mean, people sat on the very first dialogue meeting, the 3rd of March 2016, and when we open up the museum we could see people engaged from the dialogue meetings now suggesting themes and doing conferences in the space, inviting their networks, so it was like always new air, new ideas. We were driven by...what else can we do? So I mean, this was the only very-very beginning... we were just starting. I was thinking of having this vision, what can we do, what else can we do and... invite broadly, what themes can we work on together, what history hasn't been heard, and then work it together.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2021.05.11)

One of the key points here – besides the acknowledgement of the work being done in creating, building, and nourishing connections, given that the interview took place after the museum's closure – is the statement “it worked so well”. There is this gaping fissure, which I am sure can be seen from many of the quoted accounts: it went so well, it was ambitious, hopeful, evolving – and then it ceased and discontinued, despite the protests from the involved community. The still-unanswered question “why?” is one of the *unsettling* matters of concern which brought this dissertation, among other things, to be.

I am not suggesting, however, that the team members were unilaterally optimistic and self-congratulatory; on the contrary, here another important idea, that of “humbleness”, comes into play. Relationships and trust were manifested not only as external

connections between “the museum” and “the outside world”: some of the team members recalled discussions they had had with their friends and social groups, or even with their own inner voices:

We didn't have the venue on Bergsgatan [yet] and I was still very worried to be honest, and I remember having this... inner battle that I still have of course, but it was more like, when I would talk to my... friends, or people that I knew, - ah, what do you do? - and I was like, ah, I work at the museum, and I would notice that the people that I usually surround myself (with) then, they are very critical thinkers, and they're activists, and they didn't swallow the whole idea of the museum, they would... they called it neoliberal and all, and that we have immigrants museum, so I was still very worried, I mean... I was worried personally because I was afraid of being part of something that sounds good but isn't good in itself, and also I was worried for... not my reputation, but also like my credibility, because I had some credibility but I was afraid of the museum taking that away from me but also like I was afraid of the museum not doing like what it said it would do.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

Here one can recall Staffan Jacobson's comment, “It's not the left but the right that belongs in a museum” (2017), which problematises the idea of something as spirited and vibrant as social movements and activism being reduced to an object on display by the museum mechanics. In the case of the Museum of Movements, however, as the *Frihetsparaden* event recounted in the beginning of this chapter shows, it was not about social movements being exhibited in the museum space but the demonstration march entering the museum, local activism moving in and owning the space – as, again, in several interviews team members emphasise that this was a sign of trust from the communities and organisations surrounding the museum.

And of course, as in any living practice – as opposed to the project on the paper – internal tensions and doubts arose within the group and their own personal relationships, discussed many times in informal conversations, and the question of *who* were the people included into the project team was raised recurrently.

**It always comes down to the people.** It's not about these ideas, it's not about this framework, it's not about... it's about the people who going to make that happen. And I think this was a wonderful idea, this was a wonderful project, that had so much potential - and that had

amazing people in it a well, but suddenly the leadership that we needed to take this to the next level - wasn't there.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.05.20)

However, even the critical voices from within the project<sup>184</sup> pointed out that the problems were more on a structural level and not inherent to the museum idea as such – which, indeed, could account for a certain amount of home blindness or excessive optimism. Nevertheless, the formation of trust played a significant role not only between the project and the processes in its orbit, but also within the team and between the team and the museum token as such: its mission, vision, and prospective futures.

Collaboration and power to associate

Sustaining this network with its associated actors and processes also involved an element of being, again, agile and responsive as an institution, which returns us to the idea of being fluid and without a fixed structure. One of the team members recalls how these collaborations depended heavily on the outreach:

I was contacted again: you know, we have this idea for this project, we trust you, so we want to work... and those are communities and groups that were not there from the beginning, - and again, this bootwork (*sic!*), of **going out** and you know **reaching out and branch**, and expanding - which like I said, I think that space provided us such an opportunity to do that and to expand and to have something to offer to these groups as well.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.05.20)

The patterns and practices of collaboration described by the museum staff continue the important strands of museum-in-making that were indicated already in the feasibility study: trying things out on the small scale, constantly seeking feedback and reacting accordingly, as well as building sustainable networks and relationships. These ideas were supposed to continue on either a bigger or smaller scale in the future

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<sup>184</sup> Here I am not referring to criticism from outside the project, even if they were also affecting the token, although in different ways; what I am interested in is how the gathered effort of the team was giving it impetus.

permanent museum, as illustrated for example by one of the team member's reflections on the future possibilities:

I would like to work in an idea of a small laboratory, sort of somewhere we can have a think-tank, develop ideas, and be a bit more experimental... like a small entity as part of a big place, like somewhere where you could do faster program formats, that's, for example, a bit more flexible in programming.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

After giving some examples of recent studies concerning "difficult issues" in Sweden (one about mental health within Sámi communities, another about discrimination against Afro-Swedish individuals in the labour market), they continue:

We really need to talk about this, not only in the level of media and academia, like in debates in newspapers, but also on a personal level. I mean, this was really **sensitive and really emotional**... So how can we address that? How **can we be very quick** to organize something and say - "Okay, let's talk about this". The traditional museum exhibition making doesn't really allow for this sort of more spontaneous sharing of conversations. I think in order to be able to facilitate that, we need a separate entity within a museum, that is much quicker, that could be much more (subtle) than this sort of big, big exhibition-making, with all that research that needs to be produced, that takes years to make. Somewhere we can test things, and also invite the different stakeholders to try ideas so, kind of a **laboratory within the museum**.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

This way of imagining the quick and reactive museum found a place within the museum's structure later in 2020 as the "Rapid Response" series of talks, which evolved from this initial mindset (planned to continue in digital form twice a month, fieldnotes 2020-08-17).

As several of my interlocutors point out, the importance of the physical place for relationship-building could not be underestimated:

It was one person at the Culture Department, who once told me... after we got the notice of being closed, they said: oh, I think one bad thing you guys did was to open the venue, because it took a lot of money and energy from you, you should have focused on like... put things in place, and not putting energy and effort to the venue, and then I said I have to stop you and then say that I disagree, because we wouldn't be where we are today if it wasn't for the venue, because it was the **venue** that

**allowed us to deepen and develop our relationships with civil society.** It wouldn't be the same thing without it.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

There were, of course, conflicting visions of what the venue could be used for – and what it actually was used for, depending on circumstances. The frequently mentioned agility allowed the museum to adapt quickly, but it also made it elusive, and not only in the way it was intended by some of the team members (uncertainty as a positive trait); but, for instance, it was difficult to provide the political stakeholders with “firm” results. However, these visions of the future were, in a way, more grounded in the spatial features of the venue as a space where people could gather. We can follow these accounts from the time of the museum’s coming-to-be to the time of its closure:

I think we need to start already now, and <...> this is what we need this **in-between space** for, this is what we need Bergsgatan for - just to be extremely open and offer a **safe place**, and let people come and drink coffee, and then we talk with this person, and that person and then we're like - oh, but we've talked with this person another day, and - oh, but this you have **in common!** And from there to start building a project with diverse entry points. And it's not about nationality, or background - it's your interest in movements and you see patterns and possible combinations instead of trying to make top-down definitions...

O: Yeah, I see the point - if you could like place all this network-making in one physical something...

- Yeah, and people hang out and it is a safe place, and people do small things together, it does not have to be very grand at the start - and it's like - we're already facing that discussion now, that we - that way we should not ever say "no". We can say: yeah, let's do something! - Right! You have a lot of money? - No, not much but we have a venue, we have coffee, some staff, you know, and let's see what we can do, let's see what comes out of it...". This way we can build **step by step** with all the many stakeholders without leaving the weaker ones – in institutional terms weaker ones – behind. This way we can share on more equal terms and not be so intimidating.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

It just **embraced** many different kinds of expressions... So it was a place, it was a culture place for a diverse kind of expressions where migration meets democracy concepts, right? We had art performance program. And then we had a conference on the ethical guidelines and principles for an oral narrative in a museum...round tables - sitting, talking about ethics, okay? So, I mean, the space could hold a variety of

themes, cultural expressions and you had different groups that was using the space but at the same time also producing content, okay? So it was not a passive place, it was **an active place**. It was very vibrant... Of course (before) corona.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2021.05.11)

The COVID-19 pandemic obviously affected the makeup of the space and the people using it: even though the project's inherent agility and adaptiveness allowed for moving a lot of activities online, the sense of community was somewhat fading without regular gatherings of diverse stakeholders.<sup>185</sup> However, having a place – and “a safe place”, embracing, welcoming, and open to everyone – was a crucial moment for the Museum of Movements of becoming “the token”, providing a surface where the power of association could be distributed and driven further.

In a way, the venue and museum space became a physical manifestation of the convergencies and concurrencies where different actors could meet and exercise agencies. And in this case it was also crucial for this manifestation to be a museum: as Steven Conn puts it, “in an age when we no longer think in public terms or see ourselves as part of a commonweal, museums have become places where we can spend town in public” (2010, p. 231). And if museums are among the “last places where the public can come and behave as a public” (ibid.), then when generic “public” becomes social movements and civil society

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<sup>185</sup> Though even during the pandemic-related restrictions on the number of visitors, the Museum of Movements venue was still welcoming its public, as in this description of one of the events in Autumn 2020: “We did, we started with 50, when it was restrictions, and had all the measures, we had a great Youth Pride festival. And it was you know, fully packed, 50 persons, totally, and we were counting people, in and out, I was working in the reception... counting the people and you had the organisation working inside with the youths, doing workshops. And the parents - they came and left their kids at the place, because the Youth Pride festival was from 13 up to 19... if I remember it right. It was very beautiful, it was understood as a safe space, it was beautiful to see the kids being followed by their parents in this process of - you know, searching for their identity, and you know, having all the support from their parents... there was a big support in the surrounding, right, so you had a public space, you had a public space that was safe and it was a museum, right? We were giving a space for youths withing the Malmö Pride [holding] a very secure space within the Malmö Pride a space that is for youth, Youth Pride, so it was connected to this bigger event” (Museum of Movements team member, 2021.05.11).

organisations, the nature of this behaviour also changes. Museums are also becoming the sites for contentious politics.<sup>186</sup>

### The Helpful Museum

Before the introduction of pandemics-related restrictions, the space, however, was not uninhabited – and again, it was people that were making it “active” and lively. The themes of hospitality, open arms, and humbleness occur repeatedly in the interviews:

It's quite interesting, when it comes to co-creation, how we communicate the space because it is the attitude, or let's call it the *approach*, how we relate to both subject matters and people – how we greet and respond – that is important, it cannot be written down, so it must be in our daily praxis to be built into (museum's) DNA.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

To “greet and respond” is something that is closely connected to inclusive museum practice, and when the team members reflected on the future possibilities, it seems that the idea of open arms and a welcoming approach was already “in their DNA”:

My biggest interest is **lowering thresholds** or removing them completely. So I would like to... I dunno, I don't think it's possible to remove them completely but it's an ambition. But I would definitely like to see myself doing some kind of **inclusive work** in a broad sense, without specifying exactly what, but -ish, if it's something that runs across the whole institution - that would be great, but if it's also something more specific, maybe... how to engage youth, or different parts of Malmö.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

I really want to work more with the audiences and being close to the sort of everyday *verksamhet*, everyday operations, and I want to work with content of programs, and think out to develop programs in a way that we can sometimes **nuance the exhibitions**... and also create interest for new and different audiences (that don't necessarily **feel included** in a museum). This is kind of where I can be more personal.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

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<sup>186</sup> Social movements are part of contentious politics, which “involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors' interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

The personal interests and lived experiences of the project team members had a significant influence on what they were trying to achieve and encourage:

When I was a kid, I would hang out a lot with my friends and I would stay out most of the day and night, especially during breaks, school breaks, right? So, I would like to see the **museum to be a natural place** where you go when you have free time.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

We had a really good dialogue meeting in Folkets Hus, in Rosengård, and we were talking about how should this space - the **temporary space, workshop space** - how should it feel, how should it look like. And then there were a group of young boys and they said one thing, and I just think that quote just says like - just like shows how public institutions and museums as public and cultural places have totally failed a large group of people. And they said – “We don't want to feel like we're controlled, we don't want to feel checked upon, we want to feel like we are **welcomed** and like we are **partaking on equal level**. We don't want to feel watched”. With my background, working with audiences in museums, of course it's obvious that this is a huge failure if somebody feels this way. I mean, it's just a massive failure from the museum sector.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

What is particularly of interest here is how this idea of museums as public spaces, as “natural” *places to be* – which is often taken up in the literature (cf. Conn, 2010) – plays out differently when voiced by the museum team members and by the politicians. Where the political decision-makers imagined the museum as a safe space for educating the populace about their pasts (as in the Green Party representative's account of the schoolboys with immigrant backgrounds who were uninterested to learn about “Swedish kings, or their portraits”, 2018-04-04), the museum team who encountered the visitors and stakeholders were more keen to provide a space for comfortable dialogue. It relates to the idea of (the history of) social movements exhibited in museums vs the social movements actually entering the museum and taking part in its activity – instead of political decision-makers determining *what museums are for*, it suggests co-creation and thinking together with all the possible actors surrounding the museum.

Now, when we had dialogue meetings, what I hear a lot is that people want **safe spaces**, where we want to talk about certain subject without

being **afraid** of talking about them, and we would like to **feel respected** in the museum, and we would like to feel welcome, and **at home**. the cultural institutions should definitely try to be safe spaces.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

When we say that we wanna reach out that way, and it's important - it's not just the fashion thing, it's not just for show, we mean it. And if we mean it then we have to be **humble** and we have to step back - all of us.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

Here, the account of a genuine humbleness interacts with the power relations that are established in the traditional cultural institutions. The accounts above also indicate an awareness within the museum team of *what* museum institutions are doing and *how*. The team's specific knowledge of the Swedish cultural landscape here interacts with the international perspective and the latest developments in the field of inclusive design:

I want to make sure that we can also look at the museum from an **inclusive perspective** from the beginning, so it's not only thought as an afterthought but it is from the beginning, so we already engaged with people from [different institutions working on inclusive environments] ...also the content of the exhibit, like it's from all different angles, yes, yes, yes, not just the physical but also erm... intellectually and all, that is inclusive for everyone, from all different walks of life... from all, you know, levels of society. So, from the type of language that you use - inclusive being not just a physical space but everywhere. And that's why we are not talking about universal design, but about inclusive design, because universal design it's more... it's narrower than inclusive design, inclusive design can be like used as an umbrella term.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2018.12.10)

I've been doing this for quite some time - when you have this sort of open... arena, when you have open arms and would just invite anyone to come - there're the structures. So, the first ones that will come are the ones that already have power. It will not be the erm... subaltern that will come and say: oh, finally, that's the space for me. No, it will be people that already possess a culture institution and other means of power. What you need is someone to be there because of their skills as a researcher, or to provide a network, or, I think, best is to actually have broad collaborations, with the civil society organizations, with researchers, with other museums, that you do things together. To provide for this, the first staff we hired was an outreach manager, to always be accessible.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

These accounts somewhat struggle with grasping the audiences of the potential museum – “different walks of life”, but also “subaltern” and “all levels of society”, distinguishing between those “who already have power” and those who “don’t want to feel controlled”. This inner disparity could have been condescending if not put against the recurring idea of being humble and taking a step back each time, reflecting over and over on “What does it mean to be a museum?” question.

The ability to take a step back and provide an open, participatory, and inclusive platform for all the stakeholders correlates with the idea of being experimental and trying out things:

We want to start small, and that was also something that resonated with me. That this is **not a prestige project**. It is a prestige project for some, of course, like for Malmö city and politicians, in some way, but not really for the people who are working with it... because that's gonna be I think very crucial to making sure that... what we are trying to do will be achieved, because it's very important to sort of have these beginnings as well. ...a **humble** beginning.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

This aspirational thinking in the beginning of 2019, when there was still no venue in which to run the planned activities, developed into practice in the period from late 2019 to early 2020. The recollection below is just one example:

Another thing was with kids at Lindängen I think it was, and Nydala and Rosengård, like it was *fritidsgårdar* [community youth centers]. We were approached by some leaders at *fritidsgård*, that said - oh, we've been to your programs, we've seen your programs, (some of them) been at one or two dialogue meetings - can we do something together? So, they've knocked on our door basically. And then we had a first meeting - and when they came, they came with, like, five kids. And it was after working hours of course, after five, because the kids go to school and then *fritidsgården* opens up, I think three to eight, so it's different hours, so we rescheduled our working hours of course, and we knew that the kids would come from school, so they probably hungry, so we ordered a pizza, and then spoke to them: so, you're here, what do you want to do with us? And then they started to talk about... *en konståvling* [the arts contest], that they want to do something about *konst* or *fotografi* [art or photography], or an exhibition of some kind, and they had great ideas that we like crystal... *utkristalliserade*

[developed] to something, but they had a plan of what they wanted. And they wanted to talk (filmings), and the environment, and it was kids from like different places of Malmö. And that day then we started to plan together this exhibition and the contest together. And they totally owned that shit, it was their project, we were just assistants. And they visited different *fritidsgårdar* around Malmö, like seven or six on their free time, to talk about this project that we have together and having workshops and pushing people to participate. Then corona came, sadly, so the exhibition we had was smaller than we wanted it to be, but it was so cool to see how the kids like... they owned the museum, it was their place, they had an exhibition, they took care of guests, they went outside to get people to come in, offered drinks - it was so cool to see. And after that they said that they wanted to do more with us, so after that we continued our collaborations, we had *social rättvisa* [social justice] and *konst* [art] together with them.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2010.12.22)

The Museum of Movements was not only existing on the impetus of the top-down initiative and on the engagement and affect of the museum team members, whose agencies were driving it forward as a Latourian token, even though the team itself was more than important part of the process.<sup>187</sup> The inquiries, demands and mere curiosity coming from the outside of the museum added another layer, the second opening for the classical situation of museum as a contact zone in which it is an institution who reaches out to communities and not vice versa (cf. Boast, 2011; Lynch, 2014; Message, 2015). This, of course, talks back to the process of building up trust and long-term relationship.

O: Yeah, I also think this is unique... it's not the museum who is looking for... you know, gatekeepers to involve people, so it's other way around.  
- Exactly! And that is - I think, that is also because if you change the people that work in museums as well, because, I mean, it's not a coincidence that they've showed up, because they've been through dialogue meetings, but they also know people working at the museum. I mean, half of - not half, but four people that I've been to school with work as youth leaders now. So, it's like, they know me, they also know maybe my colleagues as well, so it's like... it feels more secure and familiar.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

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<sup>187</sup> It is also worth mentioning that there was a continuity of sorts with the team composition, as one of the interview accounts pointed out: “the same people who made a report became the people who are physically starting the museum” (Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11).

The idea of personal agency underpinned not only *why* the project team members were doing what they were doing, but also how they approached, again, the museum's role in society – in ways that sometimes challenged the image of the “unhelpful museum” (cf. Chynoweth et al., 2020). We can notice through the different interview accounts how the idea of being open, welcoming and safe space often is nuanced with very basic details, like ordering pizzas for the school kids who came to discuss their possible project, or just “hanging out” together and discussing all sorts of things. The conversational nature of the possible projects, collaborations and activities stems from the feasibility study and dialogue meetings, but what is important here that this tradition wasn't forgotten after the first report, contrarily, with the opening of the working space it came to a more developed form, as one of the already quoted excerpts puts it: “we have a venue, we have coffee, some staff, let's see what we can do, let's see what comes out of it” (Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11). It was a step forward from imagining a participatory, democratic process of museum-making to actually performing it, as the following account describes, with an emphasis on sharing and being able to redistribute resources:

And what we were able to do with the venue in the last couple of months, or the last year, that we have gone from talking about shared authority and doing things together to **actually redistribute resources**. I mean, that wouldn't happen without the venue, I'm talking about practical stuff like our working hours, our expertise and our, I would say like manpower, just like - that's the resource we would redistribute... but also like technical stuff, just the speakers, the microphones - we've shared that with groups that needed, and we've shared the space - that is too... erm, **omfördelning** [redistribution], that is *omfördelning* in practice, we redistributed resources, and if we wouldn't have done that I don't think we would have... the same **respect** from the civil society. Because if we wouldn't have the venue we wouldn't be able to redistribute anything except from (ourselves), so I think the venue was like the best thing we could do. And I think that is something that is like... gone missing in the conversations about what made us so good and important, and because... I think it's because redistribution is such a political charged word (giggles), it sounds like we Robin Hood and so I... it's... and I don't know if my colleagues have thought in those terms, but that's how I see it.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

Sustainability, management, and organisation

The museum's precarious mode of work (for instance, always depending on the next year's cultural budget from the government, which as we saw from the 2020 decision was vital for the museum's existence) was sometimes perceived as something of a risk for the project's future sustainability:

Participative civil society and social movements and organizations, that also feel like this is a place for them as well, that they feel represented there and they feel an ownership of the place - this is something that also is important to think about. In a way it's a bit easier because we've already started collaboration with them, but, I think, it's also very important to make sure that that is not like just - you know, we come and ask and that's it. It's crucial to really implement what we hear. And also **implement that not on the personal level, within the foundation of the museum**. Otherwise, the risk is - a person that is in a certain position within the museum, feels strongly about some things and are engaged with a certain issue - they will address it and work for it. But if that person leaves the position all those contexts, all those connections are gone. So how do we make sure it's not just on the personal level? That's kinda what I'm thinking about: how do we make sure that it's in our policies, how do we make sure that it's in the methodology, yes, that it's not only dependent on one or two people, or a director, maybe, but how is it implemented in the core structure.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

This is another point of convergence for the Museum of Movements being a *museum*, with institutionalised structures and policies – however, keeping its fluid and elusive nature. Some of the plans and predictions for the future museum aimed to accommodate this uneasy balance between long-term and short-term planning:

We have (that) risk, you bring together like a group of really... forward people now, and fifteen years down the line they are gonna be twenty senior advisors that'll go like "Oh, you know back in the early 2000s we said that this was important..." - yeah, but times change, old-timer. So we must build in the constant ability to evaluate and change and progress.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

One feature on the structural level that I observed – and which is probably impossible to overcome, because it also fuels the activism

from within the institution – was the presence of several very active and persistent team members with a strong vision for the future institution. This did not, paradoxically, affect the position of being humble where it concerned the museum's publics, stakeholders and civil society, but it could at times cause tensions withing the team.

I think the issues come to the project when it comes to the leadership, and sometimes, you know, it can work, in the favour of a project not to have people that have had experience in museums, because then they can create something else, something new, can, you know, all of these things can happen. Suddenly, this was not the case in this project.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.05.20)

I'm not even sure right now how our management should look, we could, you know, secure a position by going out there and find an international hotshot to be the leader of this museum - that'd be one way, that could also kill the whole thing, completely. I don't know, I think we need a structure to facilitate a space that is open for many voices – also in the management. I don't see myself as the... future museum director. But I'm sort of driving this rusty vehicle towards something.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

This presence of strong personal agencies and standpoints, without doubt, produced a lot of important discussions and insights along the way, but could also easily be seen as unruly by the existing structures of authority and cultural bureaucracy (and here we are back to the contradiction between being responsive and quick to act – and the demand from the City and state to deliver some concrete results). This was also noted by one of my interlocutors, even though in March 2019 it was just a hypothetical outcome prognosed:

I think that is [what] happens in a lot of places, like one person who's really pushing the boundaries, and really thinking [doing] different things, and then that person just leaves, and... then all that work and commitment stays.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.07)

The incentives that affected the museum project and the way it was treated by decision-makers and stakeholders alike, were coming from several directions. First, there were the strong connections on the ground:

I think that it's important with international recognition, but I think that we should focus a lot on the local. we should have a strong connection to the municipality, to people living in the municipality.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

This strong focus on Malmö, its cultural actors and civil society, did not negate the importance of international connections:

Internationally - well, again, there was lots of people drawn to the project because of the all of the public speaking that I was doing everywhere, right, and then the people wanted to know. <...>

All of those things I think have created an impact, like not just in Malmö, in Sweden, but in the museum world people are still talking about it. it's going to be able to influence museum practice in other places.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.05.20)

We're also concentrating into look at different conferences in places that we could go and learn... do a little bit more networking like I said, also now being part of ICOM, to connect with different groups, committees and things like that to just sort of start building a network of muse... and sort of **take our place in the museum community**, as well.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2018.12.10)

The tension between local stakeholders, *statliga*/governmental decision-makers and the international outlook is also one of the sources of power that transforms the “token” on its way. One cannot omit the following criticism from an international museum professional and one of the museum team’s members when it comes to the project’s structural flaws and the view of its level of competency from outside the Swedish cultural landscape:

The lack of competency when it comes to museums really became an obstacle, and I'm not saying even 'museums' in the traditional sense, because there are museums already out there who are doing amazing work, amazing community work, but maybe having people who didn't really understand what museums can do and what museums are already doing was one of those challenges, having people who thought: we're going create something completely new - which is not the case, right, like I mean, [the] wheel doesn't have to be reinvented, I mean, the project was innovative in the way that it is a national museum, and I think that's where the project was sort of - like I said, innovative. But, the reality of things that we were not doing anything new, like I said, a lot of these ideas about like the temporary venue, and this and that - we

discussed, you know, prior my arrival in Sweden and some of them were coming you know, influence from other - like Queens museum in New York, for example, you know that sort of do like very similar stuff, right...

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.05.20)

However, this brings us to the question of how unique, innovative and radical the Museum of Movements actually was compared to all the different (geopolitical) levels of the museal field.

### Radical museum

Mission statement, I mean if I should rephrase it, what we are doing is: this is a museum that has decided to take off (from) the civil society movements on democracy and migration - this is what we are working with. And to do that together with the stakeholders. 'Nothing about us without us'. And we... somehow we are not taken aback by the amount of stakeholders, that there are hundreds and hundreds of stakeholders involved already. And what I think... that will win for us - it's a hundred-year project, it's a museum. It's something we will build over time and be able to listen, to understand and adjust... It's not a festival, where everyone must fit in at once. But we can start with a very... We can have meetings with stakeholders that can be very open, and we can be very far from each other in the understanding of what museums do or why, and then build from there. To be allowed the time to be thorough also when it comes to listening and understanding and expanding our knowledge and networks together...

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

In this recollection, there is already an acknowledgment of differences within the team in terms of the "understanding of what museums do", which was arguably crucial for the museum project to continue, even for a short time. The curiosity of the team members and the eagerness to ask questions, which was there all the way starting from the feasibility study, only induced this acknowledgement. This can be supported with being critical and reflexive towards the museum world in general:

We are demounting what is sometimes a very firm idea of what a museum is at the same time as people are relying on the museum to be a very trustworthy place.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

The Museum of Movements at its core – if we set aside the practical moments, the funding issues and even the politics – was envisaged as a way to rethink museums as institutions. This awareness and readiness of the museum team to discuss these questions is exactly why this case is so relevant for the dissertation.

I would say that the museum even became more **radical** than I thought in the beginning, - and radical in different ways. I don't think that is applicable to all institutions but at least for one that had those circumstances that we were around: small group, pretty close in perspective... not always, but thinking in some way, in pretty close terms, we were thinking similar, not always but very close... And I think I also got the freedom I needed to do those small things that would mean a lot. And also the fact that we didn't have the Culture Department at Malmö like, close to us, so they didn't question what we were doing, so we were more free in a way, so I think the circumstances around us allowed us to be more radical, in a way.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

However, being “radical” today is always being “political” – and in the vein of Chantal Mouffe’s thinking and agonistic (memory) theory, museums as cultural institutions should not shy away from politics and conflict as an ontological condition. This issue was also taken up by several of my interlocutors, confirming the embeddedness of the museum project into the field of *the political* (which, according to Tlostanova and Fry, 2021, is drifting away from politics):

One of my fears is that... for instance we're saying that we want to... we're thinking migration, democracy but also social movements, and most of the social movements in Sweden has been... for child care, for equal pay, for LGBTQ-rights, for trans\* rights. The things that considered to be 'left', these movements, today. And I'm afraid that the museum is getting a stamp, 'lefty' stamp when we're only showing the actual social movements of Sweden.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

There's an interesting debate... What's it called now? **Identity politics**. Which is... they tend to use these words that are never explained, and they say: oh, this is identity politics. But it means nothing, it is only rhetoric to diminish someone.

While in essence - and I think that is a **discussion that we need to take**, constantly - and say, you know, to debate from a scientific point of view, people saying: oh, you're just doing identity politics, and then you say - okay, describe to me what you mean by "identity politics", and try

to explain what you actually mean don't just throw it out there. And then you can boil it down to actually being the ones who are **pretending that they are being apolitical, are the ones who're being extremely political.**

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.11)

The latter account also implies that the issue of “identity politics” (and especially its rather free rendering in the media debates) could be one of the “difficult issues” approached and discussed by the Museum of Movements. Though acknowledging the importance of *being political* in the museum project, many team members were coming to their own understanding of the arm-length distance, meaning, for example the actual political parties:

It's difficult to say that everybody included in the museum... But I think it's important for the museum to not involve political parties, both from the left side and the right side.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2019.03.06)

This issue was also taken up from the “outsider”, non-Swedish perspective, both before and after the museum was operational:

The other challenges I see and the risk is - there's **a lot of political interference**. I feel that everything here is so dependent on the government, and it is something that, you know, everything is about politics. The people that I've talked to in museum, they were all saying: oh, do not become a national museum, that is such a risk, because every change of government, there is change of structures, and everything can just go out the window, and so, if we're trying to build an institution, and if we're trying to create the [soul] of an institution, and ever... and there's no stability it never going to happen. If we have a change of management and stuff, like we're not going to be able to build an institution. We need time, and to build an institution of the type that we're talking about, that is going to have a little more democratic processes and this and that - we need time to work with people and it's not gonna happen in like five or six years, from my experience, and, in five-six years there's going to be another change of programme, and that... so that's everything that we've done then we're going back to square zero.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2018.12.10)

Having politicians so involved in a museum project is not something I had experienced to this extent. I am not saying that this is the only place where political interference on museums takes place, as I have also seen it and experienced it in Canada and Colombia. However, the case of

Sweden is more closely related to how political interference takes place in Colombia.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.05.20)

The political side of the museum-building process, especially in the sense of *realpolitik* and political parties' representatives both on local and national level, as we know, had direct consequences and eventually ended up in the closure of the venue and the discontinuation of the project. Which is somewhat, again, contradicts the issue of museums as neutral sites of knowledge production, taken up in the museum debate from the third chapter and entrenched in the Swedish museum legislation from 2017 and the principle of arm-length distance between politics and culture (see, for example, a report from Swedish Museums Association: Sveriges museer, 2021).

As one of the the team members said in December 2020, summarising the political circumstances of the decision to close down the museum:

For the museum project officially there's no plans because what we hear from Malmö Stad, and the State and the region is that... yeah, there's (no) way to take it further. What we've heard is that they no longer want to *stödja* [support], they don't have the resources or money to take the museum further. And not in any different shape or form either. And what's also very interesting - I don't know if you've seen, but there's been a political debate in the *Kommunfullmäktige* [Municipal Council], I think a couple of days ago, where [Council's Chair] once again said that her biggest mistake was to call the Museum of Movements 'a museum'.

There is **no will**. But I don't think they used the name 'will', they used the name 'resources' or 'lack of money' and so... so on.

(Museum of Movements team member, 2020.12.22)

One can reflect, therefore, was it a form, contents, emerging networks and collaborations or the *ability to (re)act politically* which provoked this "unwillingness" not only to continue the project, but even bestow it with the name of "a museum" in retrospective.

## 5.1. Continuing the dialogue

This chapter was designed as a polyphonic dialogue between the former museum team and the museological perspective in order to investigate the question: what lessons are there to be learned? Is it helpful to think

together with museums about museums as processes – (fr)agile, radical, (un)sustainable and full of controversies? Does it constitute socially relevant museum praxis, and how can individual agencies shape and form this process?

The one idea that did not make it from ICOM's proposed new museum definition of 2019 into the approved definition of 2022 is that of museums as "spaces for critical dialogue".<sup>188</sup> As the accounts quoted in this chapter have demonstrated, the Museum of Movements project was keen on fostering this kind of dialogue on different levels – within the surrounding communities of stakeholders and civil society representatives, and between the project team members as well (though maybe less so with the political stakeholders). This chapter has also shown that the museum team had an articulated position on *what* they wanted to do and *how* they were planning to do it – sometimes involving strong language and "outbursts", as one of my interlocutors put it later when we were discussing the interview excerpts. All of these elements added to the momentum of the power of association, as every one of us involved with the project affected the token – the Museum of Movements – in our own particular way. I also occupied my own unique position as a researcher as well as a participant in this process that became – even for a short time – the *Rörelsernas museum*.

The sub-headings and thematic sections in this chapter are connected to each other, and in some cases the same excerpt relates to several topics at once – which, I believe, gives a versatile picture of *multiple ontologies* (Mol, 1999) that existed around the museum project.

One of the Museum of Movements' forming principles was the openness and humbleness involved in working on the grassroots level. By no means is this a new practice in the museum world (for the most recent examples, see Raicovich, 2021); however, in this case it also permeated the whole organisation, small though it was. Management and personal networks are often understated in museology (cf. McCall & Gray, 2014; van Mensch, 2004) as "the museum" is sometimes

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<sup>188</sup> François Mairesse describes this expression as one of the "values which appear as very important topics in the current museum world" together with "gender, postcolonial or decolonization, ... democracy, sustainable development, etc." (2020, p. 78).

perceived as a homogeneous hybrid machinery which is being studied through the lens of something else (see also discussion in Chapter 1 on museum studies and their subjects). Even more understated are the precarity and vulnerability of the museum professionals; here, the Swedish example gives us a very clear vision of an (un)sustainable institution dependent on the external political will (or lack thereof).

Another important feature of the Museum of Movements project was that it opened the project-based practice to the institutional level of “the museum”. There are several examples of experimental exhibitions in the museums all over the globe that have implemented the principle of trying, testing and adapting the display according to visitors’ feedback. However, in the Museum of Movements, the existence of the whole institution resembled the frameworks used in management, hi-tech and software development, such as agile design and scrum. The problem with this is that the cultural institutional structures are not geared for quick decision-making and flexible solutions; moreover, when the rigid heritage-related structures are challenged to adapt, their fragility – instead of agility – becomes especially visible.

In this situation, the structural, institutional network functions only as a formal façade, and the actual *process* of museum-making and functioning depends on individual actors.

Museum (and, more broadly, cultural heritage) processes can be fluid or rigid (or both at the same time). In subchapter 2.2.4, “Preservation drive”, I discussed two parallel processes that were taking place at Malmö Cultural Department: the *Safe Havens* series of events for artists at risk and the Rescue Archive project. If the former can be described as fluid, artistic, free-format, unorganised, holistic, and unruly, the latter would function within the less flexible frameworks of regulations and archival regime (which later also manifested in an open to public form as the Dawit Isaak Library). The Museum of Movements, if it had existed for longer and in cooperation with those two projects as it was initially planned, could have served as a bridge over this gap. The museum form, due to its boundary nature, could have provided a sustainable practice between the free artistic spirit of the gathering space for artists and activists and the preservation drive that aims to protect endangered heritage. Museums, by nature, are hybrids that inhabit the Latourian Great Divide due to their ambiguous character; in

the Museum of Movements' case, this inner tension could have become a way of rethinking the museum practice – in Sweden in particular – based on individual agencies and memory activism.

Craig Middleton and Nikki Sullivan (2019) suggest “queering the museum”. I want to take this further and, in the light of my overarching question – what does it mean to be a museum? – to humanise this impossible institution, taking into account the material and key topics set out in this chapter.

## Conclusion

Before considering some conclusions which can be drawn from this dissertation, it may be useful to briefly revisit the research questions that underpin my research, namely:

- How is politics being employed in the process of museum making (and unmaking)?
- Why are some issues “difficult” in both the global and the Swedish museum context?
- What is the role of memory politics in the museum-making processes?
- What role do individual agencies/actors play in constituting socially relevant and sustainable museum practices?

If “the politics starts in the museum”, and the Museum of Movements starts (and ends) with politics, the same is true for this dissertation. The changes that are taking place in the institutional ontology of museums today gravitate towards reintroducing *the political* into the field. As Fry and Tlostanova indicate,

It cannot be presumed that politics reimagined would arrive and immediately produce direct confrontations with existing political ideologies, parties and institutions. Rather what could be expected is that it would initially show itself, and gain agency, by the extension of already politicised practices and the politicisation of many currently un-politicised.

(2021, p. 132)

The Museum of Movements and its making (and unmaking) has been used in my research as a lens, both in the sense of a looking glass through which various concepts and theoretical frameworks were examined and suggested, and as a point of convergence, where these frameworks and concepts are showing themselves, gaining agency and interacting with each other. However, if the museum as an institution is to address the current challenges and rethink itself, the solution lies not only in the extension of politicised practices (such as, for instance, inviting activists into museums), but rather in owning its position as a political institution.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the entanglement of political agencies within and around the Museum of Movements represented different layers of involvement: the city, local government and political parties, local institutions and civil society; the Swedish government, Ministry of Culture and national museum community (which was somewhat lacking influence and involvement in this case), academic and public debates, similar and/or contrasting museal projects; international museum actors and collaborators, scholars and experts, as well as professional bodies such as ICOM. All these factors affected the Museum of Movements as a process; however, probably even more important was the role of politics ingrained in the museum mechanics, with its inherent dichotomies of conservation and accessibility, safeguarding and contributing to the societal change, expert knowledge and lived experience – the sort of museum politics that was emphasised in the museum definition debate and echoed in the Swedish museum debate.

However, before moving further in the concluding discussion, it is important to consider the issue of sensitive and politically charged topics in the museum world, how can they be understood in the case of Sweden, and how cultural memory theories can provide the instrumental analytical framework both for the Museum of Movements and for the general museum processes globally.

Museums today are more and more invested in the recent past and contemporary history; they are striving to address topics that often generate emotionally loaded responses. These topics, or “difficult issues”, are not only difficult for the audiences to engage with, or for museum professionals to put on display, but also difficult to operate in the sense of employing the museum mechanics, which presumes detachment and decontextualisation. The processes that can help us to approach the question of what the “difficult issues” are in the Museum of Movements’ case are drawn upon the North American examples, even though more globally this notion involves the remembrance of mass atrocities, human rights violations, and colonial plunder.<sup>189</sup> The argument here is twofold: first, the project’s involvement with the

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<sup>189</sup> For a similar analysis of museum approaches to the “difficult heritage” of war, violence and mass atrocities see (Bull et al., 2019; Macdonald, 2016).

Canadian Museum for Human Rights, both in the sense of shared expertise, but also the CMHR being a prime example, and aspiration for the Museum of Movements: and, secondly, the close and somewhat obsessive attention with which Sweden scrutinises all the possible American practices (cf. O'Dell, 1997). This by no means excludes the heritage institutions, which becomes especially apparent in the globalised “cosmopolitan continuum” of museums (Levitt, 2017)

The “difficult issues” in the construction of Swedish heritage are, among others, the issues of racism and far-right nationalism, the unrequited colonial past, and the disparity between the declared tolerant, diverse, and multicultural society and the concept of white Swedishness permeating a national culture of consensus. Whereas these issues are being addressed by both academic researchers and “special” institutions, designed to handle “difficult issues” in a containe(re)d space, such as the Multicultural Centre or the Living History Forum, the question of museums’ neutrality remains a hot topic on both the global (#MuseumsAreNotNeutral) and national (*Museidebatt*) level. The Museum of Movements, if pursued further, could have gained the traction to contribute to this debate, including Malmö as a locality, among other things, into the picture.

Chapter 4 continues the discussion of the “difficult issues” with a supposition that the elements that are perplexing certain forms of heritage are the recentness of the past, the level of emotional investment (and, therefore, sensitivity towards representations) and, evidently, the political implications of the issue at hand. All these features can be explained using memory studies frameworks, and the analysis provided in this chapter, apart from drawing together connections between different understandings of memory, brings in the Swedish Holocaust Museum project as another example of the musealisation of “difficult issues”. The cosmopolitan national narrative of Sweden as a “good state” is something that reappears in different contexts throughout this dissertation, be it the idea of building an “Ellis Island” museum, the remembrance of the Holocaust as “part of Swedish heritage”, or the practices of the representation of disenfranchised Others in the museum institutions.

The analytical model bringing the memory studies frameworks together, outlined in Chapter 4, suggests a way of understanding the

gaps inherent in museum institutions through cultural memory theoretical perspectives and, once again, addresses the politics and “difficult issues” which are recurrent in both the global and the Swedish museum context.

	Cultural memory	Communicative memory	
Antagonistic mode	Imposed narrative of “us” and “others” (national history museums)	Non-resolved past conflicts continue in the present	Agonistic mode
Cosmopolitan mode	Universal values (e.g., Holocaust remembrance)	Contemporary cosmopolitanism (e.g., migration museums)	

Table 3. Analytical model of memory studies frameworks and the politics behind them

The third and fourth chapters demonstrate that in the contemporary debates on museums’ role and significance, the entanglement with the communicative memory realm or the recent past is often considered politicised, whereas the antagonistic model of cultural memory can be seen as outdated and conservative. Therefore, to be on the “safe side” and comply with the “moral remembrance” agenda, it is innate for the museums to gravitate towards cosmopolitan cultural memory as their conventional mode of operating.

The theorisation of cultural memory in relation to “difficult issues” and the frameworks of memory and activism point to the concept of “agonistic memory” and, consequently, agonistic museum practice, which reflects the potential (history) of the Museum of Movements.

If Chapter 2 outlines the employment of politics in the museum-making in the sense of traditional museum functions, Chapter 5 takes a more integrated approach and looks at individual agencies and their involvement in the process. In a way, if Chapter 2 examines how the Museum of Movements was shaped by the socio-political landscape in

which it operated, Chapter 5 takes a closer look at how this landscape was being shaped and affected, in turn, by the museum project.

Chapter 5 continues to elaborate on the models of musealising, contextualising and performing recent and contested histories in museums, but here the analysis goes inside the institution in the making, looking for the points of convergence which this “lens” has provided so far. It also talks back to the concepts of memory activism surveyed in the previous chapter; or, rather, “memory in activism” as a way to mobilise the contested past in order to inform activist movements of the present. From the accounts of the museum team, it is evident that each individual interlocutor has *trust* and an optimistic approach towards the project, despite eventual tensions. Regardless of the abrupt closure of the museum, the underlying idea and mission persisted, and the picture painted by the team members in their accounts, still remains the one of the possibilities of *becoming*.

Drawing on individual accounts, Chapter 5 explores what it meant to be the Museum of Movements in the late 2010s and beginning of the 2020s, and what future-facing insights we can take away from this museum project. It also provides the essential context to the gaps and tacit controversies between politics, the political and how the historical recentness of the issues addressed by the Museum of Movements played out into these controversies.

## **“No museum is an island”: concluding remarks**

This dissertation started with an interest in a particular museum project, the Museum of Movements in Malmö; but even early on in the research process, it became obvious that this interest could provide more than one entry point and approach. One could choose to focus only on the content of the potential museum – what kind of collections, exhibitions, and public activities were going to fill this space. Another take would be the museum and the city, with special attention given to spatial practices and the role of the museum project for and in Malmö. There is also an interesting entanglement between Malmö’s cultural scene and civil society actors which could be the subject for a separate study, as well as the very process of conceiving the museum “from above”, as a politically loaded project. The discontinuation of the

museum also deserves to be examined thoroughly, highlighting the issue of short-term projects catering for specific agendas.

I have touched upon some of these aspects; but the central focus for my understanding of the Museum of Movements is (museum) politics, memory, and museums as processes. I have also brought in theoretical frameworks to connect museology and memory studies (with a pinch of political philosophy) in order to explain these issues. Furthermore, in this dissertation I suggest an extended reading of “museum politics”, not only in the sense of international, national, and local politics, nor in the sense of how politics affects museums or how they are intrinsically and inescapably political institutions. Rather, I propose thinking of museums not as an institutionalised answer to political issues but as self-conscious actors in the contentious politics of the global contemporary. If museums were not to shy away from politicised issues (as in agonistic memory practices), if the reflexive position of museums as separate institutions and as the field itself, including museology as a discipline, were mediated and approved publicly and internally, then politics could indeed start *in* the museum on purpose, not on a whim of whatever agenda is imposed from the governmental apparatus. However, then the museal field also has to attend to the issues around institutions being solitary, encapsulated cases and open up for a broader perspective; for understanding museums as a community,<sup>190</sup> a *gathering* in the Heideggerian sense, of things, bodies and relationships. A single specific case is not the sole focus of my research; rather, I am studying the complicated connections that grew and multiplied as the Museum of Movements moved through the social worlds of the involved parties.

In an article of the same title as this concluding chapter – “No Museum is an Island” (2018) – Sharon Macdonald, Christine Gerbich and Margareta von Oswald argue against methodological containerism in the ethnographic research conducted on museums. They suggest a “project design for a multi-sited, multi-linked, multi-researcher ethnography” which goes beyond perceiving the museum organisation as a fixed container and taking it for granted, and claim that this “new

museum methodology... retains ethnography's capacity to grasp the often overlooked workings of organizational life – such as the informal relations, uncoded activities, chance events and feelings” (p. 138).

I agree entirely with their methodological discussion and approach (and lean towards it in my methodology as well). I want to stress, though, that despite making visible the overlaps and interconnections between different museum institutions, organisations, decision-making bodies, and stakeholders, on a variety of levels – from local (the project described in Macdonald et al. is based in Berlin) to national and international – it still lacks, in my opinion, the additional angle of critique, as in the placing of emphasis. No museum is an *island* – or *No museum is an island*? Does the issue here lie in the detachment of the “container” from other actors and the overlooking of the possibility for archipelagic, networked thinking? Or should we ask why this methodological containerism took shape in the first place; not why we take “a museum organisation for granted” as a unit (token) in museum ethnography, but why we think of a museum as such a unit in a broader sense. What do we need to understand about museums?

Throughout the dissertation, a single museum project (a container of sorts) was investigated via different angles and contexts. However, it was also placed into the broader picture of museology, which, in turn, can be perceived as an archipelago of diverse positions and entry points; as well as neighbouring fields of memory studies, other relevant disciplines and methodological commitments. This highlights not only the developing area of museums as actors of societal change (Chynoweth et al., 2020; Janes & Sandell, 2019; Message, 2013; Raicovich, 2021, to name just a few publications), but also the potential of museum institutions to expand the understanding of what museums are.

This brings us back to the discussion in Chapter 1 on the question “*What does it mean to be a museum?*” and the role of museums as discursive and epistemic devices (cf. B. Lord, 2006). As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, the “difficult issues” are one of the ways to expose the relevance and urgency of this question. According to

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<sup>190</sup> One could argue that the lack of solidarity from the *museal community* and related actors from the Swedish museum landscape in the case of the Museum of Movements

her, every attempt to deal with a problematic display foregrounds the “museum itself, its operations, history, and, in retrospect, its mistakes. Such reflexive moves make the museum, its practices and its mediations, visible. They effect a shift from an informing museology (the exhibit as a neutral vehicle for the transmission of information) to a performing museology (the museum itself is on display)” (2017, p. 78). In other words, the awareness of museums as institutions that are complicit in producing hegemonic narratives and reinstating coloniality of knowledge globally can open multiple new possibilities for social relevance, political engagement, and bringing about change.

The features of the Museum of Movements project, explored in this dissertation, may help to understand, reshape, and inform the realm of museums more widely, both as practice and from a theoretical perspective.

The ambition of the Museum of Movements from the very beginning was to create a national, state-funded museum project that would challenge the current trends in the Swedish museal landscape (Gradén & O’Dell, 2022, p. 414). The idea to provoke and ask difficult questions, to challenge the institutional *order of things*, is something that can be read in the interview accounts, but also in the reports and documents; it can be seen in the activities organised by the museum and in the presentations that the team members delivered in various contexts.

Regardless of the actual “result” of this museum process (which was, in the end, its discontinuation), the case of the Museum of Movements highlights the importance of the “activist turn” in the museum sector globally. More importantly, it emphasises the value of institutional reflexivity and the ability to take a stance.

What are the fields and ontologies of *museal* in which the museum project in focus came to be, existed, moved around and left traces? And, more importantly, what are the gaps between these fields and how can they be bridged?

The literature proposes various ways to bridge the Latourian divide, to look beyond Enlightenment classifications and ways of organising reality: unlearning, delinking, decolonial thinking, new materialisms, emotions and affect, to name just a few. In my dissertation, I have

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may have contributed to its discontinuation.

looked at memory studies frameworks and the contentious political topics, and how they played out in Sweden in the late 2010s. I have woven together different fields of knowledge to see if it is possible to transcend the “methodological containerism” of museum research and identify what is there apart from the reductive disciplinary mode of thought in inquiry and action.

The Museum of Movements project existed – and still exists, in the form of traces and echoes – in several very different realms. It is employed in this dissertation to showcase the relationship between museums (not all museums, though) and *the political*, framing the important division of “us” against “others” in the contemporary museal field. This museum – inspired from above, funded by both the city and the state, leaving an impact on local communities and permeating the international museological discourse (while the said discourse was seeping back through by the involvement of foreign expertise) – was placed in a very intricate entanglement of policies, affects and visions for the future. This entanglement, however, was inherently unstable due to what Wayne Modest calls “anxious politics”<sup>191</sup> (2018; 2016), and what Madina Tlostanova and Tony Fry address as the “failure of politics” (2021), arguing for a new political imagination which can be the starting point in addressing the perpetual crisis of a *defuturing* world. In a sense, however, such entanglement *does not have to be* stable, as more and more scholars are choosing to address museums as fluid, porous and complex processes (cf. Cameron, 2015) rather than rigid structures.

The notions of anxiety, crises, and defuturing are contributing to the narrative of continuity and change in museum structures as well as museal ontologies, from the museum definition debate to the #MuseumsAreNotNeutral hashtag on social media; from the Swedish museum projects (be it a “radical” Museum of Movements or a “safe” Holocaust Museum dealing with a particular past) to global

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<sup>191</sup> Such politics “undergirds popular and political imagination across contemporary Europe. This peculiar political formation is characterized by heightened anxieties about the fate of the different nation-states that constitute Europe, and based on a projection of the ills currently imagined to face Europe – insecurity, unemployment, lack of housing, [cultural lack] – onto specific subjects, often racialized Others” (Modest & de Koning, 2016, p. 98).

cosmopolitanism; from the issues of museum management, HR policies, and institutional practices (Brekke, 2018; Gray, 2016; Pabst, 2016) to “museum activism”. All these challenges demand for a new political imagination, not only in the broader sense of humanistic thinking, as Tlostanova and Fry are suggesting (2021), but also for rethinking museums as legitimate actors in this process.

I argue that if museums want to survive in the rapidly changing global contemporary, amidst the pandemics, economic crises and political protests, the radical change of the institutional structure, for which generations of museum scholars and professionals have advocated, is urgently needed. As Janes and Sandell put it in the *Museum Activism* anthology, “the posterity has arrived” (2019, p. 1): it is no longer possible to safeguard the heritage of the past for future generations without rethinking museums’ – all museums – mission, role, values and responsibilities today.

François Mairesse, in his critical piece on the 2019 ICOM museum definition debate (which he also addresses elsewhere as “The battle of Kyoto”), writes: “According to this new doxa, the museum will be multicultural and active or better activist, tackling the problems of society (from human rights to global warming), or it will not be. If there is no doubt that such establishments must be able to play a major role and are sometimes among the most exciting to attend, should we therefore limit museum diversity from this single component? Should all museums, including the Louvre or the National Museum in Warsaw, tackle the question of human rights or global warming as a priority? Paradoxically, the desire for inclusion advocated by the new definition, in this perspective, seems very largely to exclude any other form of vision” (2020, p. 78).

Apart from closely resembling the global debates around “freedom of expression” and negating the position of the “implicated subject” (Rothberg, 2019), this argument once again brings up the classical dichotomy of “the West and the Rest” – “the political and not”.

Unfortunately, it does not work this way. Moreover, if the activists advocating for social justice and human rights or tackling issues around climate change are banned from the “neutral” and “depoliticised” institutions, it will not preserve said institutions from serving as

epistemic devices of other forms of ideologies, be it neo-liberalism, global capitalism, or nation-state creed.<sup>192</sup>

Once again, I want to return to Hilde Hein and her words: “Museums, like people, exercise agency and are no less morally responsible for what they do” (2011, p. 174). Should *all museums* do that? Debatable. Should *all museums* recognise the need to be reflexive and responsible, even if it means sometimes resistance and questioning *status quo*? This dissertation is built upon the questions, and I intend to keep it open for the further conversation, as this is what I deem activist museology should do: pose (difficult) questions and instigate democratic debate.

As can be observed in the museum debate globally and in the case of the Museum of Movements, an ongoing reflexive discussion on the museum’s role in society is needed, and museum institutions themselves must step into this discussion as active participants, “*daring to discuss without losing respect*” (fieldnotes, 2018-03-13).

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<sup>192</sup> As it happened, for example, with historical exhibitions turned into propaganda devices during the 2010s in Russia (Zabalueva, 2022a).

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## Abstract in Swedish

Syftet med denna avhandling är att analysera museernas institutionella ontologi: hur den förändras och vilka frågor och aktörer som efterlyser en sådan förändring. Studien använder ett museiprojekt som initierades i mitten av 2010-talet – *Rörelsernas museum* i Malmö, Sverige – som en lins för att undersöka hur pågående globala förhandlingsprocesser om vad ett museum är och gör utspelar sig.

Avhandlingen undersöker vad som händer när politiskt känsliga ämnen eller ”svåra frågor” behandlas av museer. Den undersöker de maktrelationerna som är format och formas av sådana processer, hur museets position i samtiden påverkas och hur museets institutionella ontologi förändras. Med detta vill jag bidra till en förståelse av hur samhällelig minnespolitik påverkar tolkningar och diskussioner kring dessa känsliga, ”svåra” ämnen, och vilka konsekvenser minnespolitiken har för vad som kan behandlas av museer. Jag vill särskilt undersöka svåra frågor som finns i den nära historien. För att studera detta fokuserar avhandlingen på museers inneboende luckor och kontroverser och identifierar vilka incitament som är synliga i det samtida museilandskapet.

Avhandlingen undersöker följande frågor:

- Hur används politik i processen för att skapa (och lägga ner) museer?
- Varför är vissa frågor ”svåra” i både globala och svenska museisammanhang?
- Vilken roll har minnespolitik för museernas verksamhet?
- Vilken roll spelar enskilda agenser/aktörer för att skapa socialt relevanta och hållbara museiverksamheter?

För att svara på dessa frågor tar avhandlingen sin utgångspunkt i museologin och tar in begrepp och ramverk från andra discipliner. Den behandlar museipolitik som ett komplext område som inkluderar realpolitikens fält; minne och glömska, ”svåra frågor”; museernas epistemiska politik som kunskapsproduktionens institutioner; liksom de faktiska metoderna för att samla in, ställa ut och kurera denna kunskap. Analysen utgår från deltagande observationer, intervjuer, tidningsmaterial och offentliga dokument om *Rörelsernas museum*s verksamhet. Textmaterial från kontextualiserande och kontrasterande

musei- och arkivinitiativ liksom offentliga debatter om museers ontologi och epistemologi dras också in i analysen.

Det övergripande syftet med avhandlingen är att skapa förståelse för vad som kan stimulera museiinstitutioners förändring och hur politik, minne och museiaktivism spelar in i dessa omvandlingar. Är det möjligt att utveckla ett nytt slags museum som tar upp svåra och omstridda samtida frågor utan att vara auktoritärt och neutralt? Vilka förutsättningar och möjligheter finns för detta nya föreställda museum?

I avhandlingens andra kapitel undersöks tillkomsten och upplösningen av Rörelsernas museum i Malmö. Processen påverkades av ett samspel mellan lokala myndigheter och politiska partier; lokala institutioner och civilsamhället; den svenska regeringen, kulturdepartementet; akademiska och offentliga debatter; liknande eller kontrasterande projekt; internationella museiaktörer och samarbetspartners; forskare och experter samt yrkesorgan som International Council of Museums (ICOM). Ännu viktigare var dock inflytandet från museiinstitutionens inneboende dikotomier mellan bevarande och tillgänglighet, stabilitet och förändring, expertkunskap och levd erfarenhet, det vill säga de spänningar som kom upp i debatten kring ICOMs museidefinition och som ekade i den svenska museidebatten.

Dessa spänningar handlar i grunden om hur museer hanterar samtidshistoria och näraliggande förflutenheter som genererar känslomässigt laddade reaktioner. Dessa ämnen, eller ”svåra frågor”, är inte bara svåra för publiken att engagera sig i, och för museiprofessionella att ställa upp, utan de utmanar också museernas inneboende logik att lyfta ut och dekontextualisera företeelser från sina samhälleliga sammanhang.

I kapitel tre diskuteras spänningen i museernas inneboende logik i relation till Canadian Museum of Human Rights (CMHR) som var en av förebilderna för Rörelsernas museum och #MuseumsAreNotNeutral-debatten som spred sig över världen från Nordamerika. Kapitel tre lyfter också fram hur de svenska museerna, deras neutralitet och konstruktion av det svenska kulturarvet utmanas av en samtida spänning mellan å ena sidan rasism, högerextrem nationalism, och obesvarade frågor om Sveriges koloniala förflutna, och å den andra sidan föreställningar om det officiella toleranta och mångkulturella

svenska samhället. Rörelsernas museum hade, om det levt vidare, kunnat agera i detta landskap.

I kapitel fyra fördjupas diskussionen om hur museer hanterar ”svåra frågor” med utgångspunkt i teoretiska debatter inom fältet minnesstudier. Här fördjupas avhandlingens diskussion om associationen mellan den nationella berättelsen om Sverige som en ”god stat” och den kosmopolitiska museimodellen och minnespolitiken. Den analytiska modellen som beskrivs i kapitel fyra analyserar museiinstitutionernas inneboende klyftor genom teorier om kulturellt minne och relaterar dessa till de ”svåra frågornas” politik i både globala och svenska museisammanhang.

Det tredje och fjärde kapitlet visar tillsammans att i samtida debatter om museers roll i samhället blir det nära förflutna ett politiserat aktivt kulturellt minne som inte ryms i en antagonistisk modell för kulturellt minne. Aktiva kulturella minnen har därmed svårt att få plats i statliga museer och deras distinktioner mellan ”oss” och ”de andra”, och strävan efter ett monumentalt och kanoniskt kulturarv. De ryms inte heller i den etiska eller kosmopolitiska minnesmodellen som betonar de abstrakta aspekterna av ont och gott med fokus på offrens lidande. Detta kosmopolitiska minnesmodell och associerade museiform bildar ett slags moraliskt och säkert kulturellt minne som kan förvaltas av förintelsemuseer och museer som fokuserar på universella mänskliga rättigheter. De ”svåra frågor” som Rörelsernas museum potentiellt kunde behandla faller i stället inom ramarna för *agonistiskt* minne och museipraktik. Detta introducerar individuell handlingsfrihet i minnandet, ger utrymme för en dialog som inte fokuserar på konsensus utan inkluderar passioner och känslor och inte skyggar för att inkludera historiska och samtida konflikter.

Kapitel fem bygger på intervjuer med Rörelsernas museums medarbetare och analyserar hur de skapade en museipraktik som mobiliserade både omtvistade förflutenheter och samtida aktivistiska rörelser. Trots en rad spänningar inom projektet och den osäkerhet som följde av politiskt stöd visade enskilda medarbetare förtroende för museiidén och en optimistisk inställning till projektet. Trots den plötsliga nedläggningen av museet bestod den bakomliggande idén och uppdraget och den bild som målades upp av teammedlemmarna är fortfarande ett möjligheternas museum i vardande. Att Rörelsernas

museum skulle provocera, ställa svåra frågor och utmana den institutionella ordningen går att utläsa från intervjuerna, i rapporter och dokument, de aktiviteter som anordnades i museets tillfälliga lokaler och i de presentationer som teammedlemmarna höll i olika sammanhang.

Trots att Rörelsernas museum avvecklades visar det betydelsen av den aktivistiska vändningen i museisektorn globalt. Ännu viktigare är att detta museiprojekt betonar värdet av institutionell reflexivitet och förmågan att ta ställning. Rörelsernas museum fanns, och existerar fortfarande, i form av spår och ekon. Det används i denna avhandling för att analysera och tolka relationen mellan museer (dock *inte alla museer*) och det politiska i det samtida museifältet. Detta museum – inspirerat från ovan, finansierat av både Malmö stad och staten, lämnar ett avtryck på det lokala samhället och den internationella museologiska diskursen. Utvecklingen visade sig dock vara instabil vilket kan relateras till vad Wayne Modest kallar ”ängestfylld politik” (2018; 2016), och vad Madina Tlostanova och Tony Fry diskuterar i termer av ”politikens misslyckande” (2021). Tlostanova och Fry argumenterar för en ny politisk föreställning som kan utgöra en utgångspunkt för att ta itu med en värld i kris och förfall. Deras resonemang pekar mot att museer kan vara rörliga och ett antal museiforskare väljer också att resonera om museer i termer av flytande, porösa och komplexa processer (jfr Cameron, 2015) snarare än stela institutionella strukturer.

Föreställningarna om ångest och kriser bidrar till berättelsen om kontinuitet och förändring i museistrukturer såväl som museala ontologier, från debatten inom ICOM om en ny museidefinition till hashtaggen #MuseumsAreNotNeutral på sociala medier; från de svenska museiprojekten (vare sig det är ett ”radikalt” Rörelsernas museum eller ett ”riskfri” Förintelsemuseum som behandlar ett visst förflutet) till global kosmopolitism; från frågorna om museiledning, personalpolitik och institutionell praxis till museiaktivism. Alla dessa utmaningar kräver en ny politisk föreställning, inte bara i den bredare meningen av humanistiskt tänkande, som Tlostanova och Fry föreslår, utan också för att ompröva museer som legitima aktörer i denna process. Avhandlingen argumenterar därför för att om museer vill

överleva i den snabbt föränderliga globala samtiden mitt i ekonomiska kriser och politiska protester, finns det ett akut behov av radikal förändring av museers institutionella strukturer, vilket också har förespråkats av generationer av museiforskare och yrkesverksamma. Som Janes och Sandell skriver, "eftervärlden har anlänt" (2019, s. 1), och det är inte längre möjligt att värna om arvet från det förflutna utan att tänka om museernas – alla museernas – uppdrag, roll, värderingar och ansvar idag. Som kan konstateras i museidebatten globalt och i fallet med Rörelsernas museum behövs det en pågående reflexiv diskussion om museets roll i samhället och museiinstitutioner måste själva kliva in i denna diskussion som aktiva deltagare, "*våga diskutera utan att förlora respekten*" (fältanteckningar, 2018-03-13).

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