The Stories Need to be Told

The politics of visibility/invisibility: Museum representations of migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities

Samineh Asri
Supervisor: Madina Tlostanova
# Table of contents

List of Figures ........................................................................................................... 3  
Abstract ...................................................................................................................... 4  
Acknowledgments ....................................................................................................... 5  

**CHAPTER 1: Introduction** ....................................................................................... 6  
  Preliminary Remarks ................................................................................................. 6  
  Research aim and questions ..................................................................................... 10  
  Contextualizing research ......................................................................................... 12  
  Literature review: ..................................................................................................... 13  
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 16  
  The birth of ethnographic museums ......................................................................... 17  
  Theoretical framework ............................................................................................. 19  
  Complexes of visuality ............................................................................................. 19  
  Assemblage ............................................................................................................... 21  
  Decoloniality and Border thinking .......................................................................... 22  
  Theory and methodology ......................................................................................... 23  
  Methods and empirical material .............................................................................. 24  
  Participatory spaces .................................................................................................. 25  
  Respondents ............................................................................................................. 26  
  Challenges and ethical considerations ..................................................................... 27  

**CHAPTER 2. Swedish museums from a historical perspective** ............................ 28  
  Cultural diversity from a historical perspective ....................................................... 29
Nordiska Museet .................................................................33
The National Museums of World Culture ........................................36
Medelhavsmuseet ................................................................37
Östasiatiska museet................................................................39
Etnografiska museet ..............................................................40
Världskulturmuseet (The World Culture Museum) .........................42

CHAPTER 3: Window to the world ....................................................47
Tensta area and Tensta Art Centre ..................................................47
Spatial image of the art centre ..........................................................49

CHAPTER 4: Conclusion .................................................................60
Discussion and Conclusion ............................................................60
Bibliography ..................................................................63
List of Figures

Figure 1: Folkhem apartment ................................................................. 35
Figure 2: Baghdad café ................................................................. 38
Figure 3: World Cultural Museum ....................................................... 42
Figure 4: Crossroads ........................................................................... 43
Figure 5: Tensta Art Center ............................................................... 47
Figure 6: Let the river flow ............................................................... 57
Figure 7: Language Café, Tensta Art Centre ........................................... 59
Abstract

International migration and the refugee crisis have sparked a number of debates within the public policy circle. This issue also has profound social and cultural implications, even in the museum sector. Despite the efforts of ethnographic museums to set aside skin colour or ethnicities as a means of distinction, and to be open to new perspectives, the representation of migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities still evokes the purported continuity of white supremacy as the persistent legacy of colonialism. In this thesis, my attempt is to examine the extent to which there is a probability of exercising invisible power in participatory and exhibition spaces. I look at how the Tensta Art Centre, as a small and local institute, tackles the production of different knowledges and attempts to become a space of appearance for migrants and ethnic minorities. I also compare its efforts with those of big-scale institutes such as the World Culture Museum, which is a Swedish ethnographic museum. This study investigates the possibility of producing a place of embodied institutional critique within exhibition spaces in an active and meaningful way. This has been explored through the concept of visibility/invisibility in the complexes of visuality, as evident in the observations made in my study cases. In addition, I have adopted a critical analysis approach to examine the possibility of having multiple and assemblage forms of knowledge productions in participatory spaces. Finally, through my study, I understood that despite the effort to make the new space without hierarchy, there is still the risk and possibility of hegemonic discourses and thinking that lead to complicities.

Key terms: Museum, Representation, Visibility, Decoloniality, Minority, Migrant, Complexity, Assemblage
Acknowledgments

I would like to profusely thank Stefan Jonsson for his unlimited support, and also my supervisor, Madina Tlostanova, for the thoughtful feedback and encouragement. Madina, thank you for beginning this journey with me and for all of your support.

My partner, Pedram, thank you for your support and understanding during the process of completing my thesis. You have always reminded me that to achieve something grand, you must take one step forward every day, and you were totally right. This thesis is proof.

During the writing of this thesis, I was fortunate to have Hannah Atkins, who advised me about the nuances and meanings of terms and helped me with their translation. I would also like to thank Shahnaz Shirdelian and Olga Zabalueva who put in extra effort into understanding what was, then, unclear and half-formed ideas, and discussing them with me. They encouraged me to articulate better, and their feedback was invaluable.

And to all my interviewees, whom I cannot disclose their names here, I am deeply thankful for giving me their time and trust. Lastly, I want to extend special thanks to the teaching staff at REMESO and my classmates in the EMS MA program, who provided me with moral support, interesting conversations and seminars.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Preliminary Remarks

Please let us try to kill the ‘us’ and ‘they’ approach to life and culture. ‘Foreigners’ come from other planets; on this one we are all human beings and should share the experiences which art and culture take across national boundaries.

(Beckwith 1987, as cited in Kratz 2002, p. 137)

Societies, institutions and individuals are becoming increasingly embroiled in the struggles of globalization, diversity and nationalism, and are also being increasingly divided by these powerful, and sometimes conflicting, forces. In such times of global complexity, when the mass movement of people leaving their homelands from the Global South to migrate to the Global North is the topic of daily news in Europe, it has become very important to call upon cultural memory and half-remembered history in order to oppose the, often, politically guided amnesia and ignorance. With the emergence of the complexity and complicity of post-modernity grew a sense of participation in hegemonic discourses and a sense of being subjected to power (Vourela 2009), on the one hand, and the debate about transmodernity as a way of reconfiguring and overcoming modernity, on the other hand. Mobility is one of the main reasons for thinking about transnational identities-in-politics\(^1\) and criticizing homogeneity, and it is also one of the reasons for the much ongoing debate around migrants and asylums and, in a general sense, diverse people who are portrayed as ‘threatening and undermining core values of European societies’ (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005, p. 515).

\(^1\) Transnational identities-in-politics affirms interculturality. Indeed, the correlation between transnational identities-in-politics and interculturality challenges the existing identities that were created through either silencing or trivialization. ‘Interculturality promotes the re-creation of identities that were either denied or acknowledged first but in the end were silenced by the discourse of modernity, postmodernity and now altermodernity’ (Mignolo 2011). In these times of fast social change, globalization and mobility, the notion of identity has been conceptualized as not only ‘a necessary condition for the existence of any notion of agency and subjectivity [but also as] a collective sense of order and meaning’ (Yuval-Davis 2010, p.267). Therefore, this global model creates a critical moment for the rethinking of the structure and mechanism of interculturality and transnational identity in politics and in societies.
Since 2007, investments in culture through the Structural Funds\(^2\) have been largely linked with the protection and promotion of cultural heritage and have attempted to reinforce the creative and innovative potential and social cohesion in European regions, as reflected in the *European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage* (European Commission 2018). This European agenda works to preserve Europe’s cultural heritage and support cultural industries in order to strengthen international cultural relations. As part of this agenda, museums and galleries have always been asked, as targets and instruments of cultural policies, to contribute to diversity ‘through their role in constructing and disseminating the dominant social narrative’ (Sandell 2007 as cited in Rose 2016, p.8-9). Thus, as modern institutions of knowledge production, museums and galleries have been affected in many ways by the proliferation of discourses on nationalism, multiculturalism and globalization. According to Billing (1995, p.61), the ideology of nationalism:

 […] conceives ‘our’ group in a particular way. In doing so, it takes for granted ideas about nationhood and the link between peoples and homelands. A whole way of thinking about the world is implicated […]

Nationalism promotes the idea of the border and leads to many issues that affect society, such as the exclusion and inclusion of immigrants and ethnic minorities and the prioritisation of certain values. Additionally, in pluralistic and multicultural societies, migrants and asylum seekers are expected to integrate into the host society. However, I would like to emphasize that the nature of multiculturalism, as a discursive assemblage itself, legitimizes those who are socially marginalized and assigns a certain weight to the voice of minoritarian subjects, *but* through ‘a loose assemblage of culturally pluralist sentiments, aspirations, and platitudes’ (Lentin and Titley 2011, p.3). This is, ultimately, a kind of colonial approach that promotes particular modes of visibility and identification through a special degree of consensus and solidarity, along with ‘assemblages of disparate ideas, elements, and sources’ (Haq 2015, Lentin and Titley 2011, p.6). This approach also represents a system of classification of immigrants and ethnic minorities under neoliberal conditions, that examines them based on their diversity and cultural differences. Furthermore, unlike the first version of globalization, which was characterised by an expansion of universal standards, the second version of globalization is based on homogenization and standardization of the single market and the rule that subjects who do not meet the standards are likely to be excluded.

\(^2\) The European Structural and Investment Funds program provides funds to help local areas grow.
from the world system (Jameson 1990, 1998, Jonsson 2013, Vignali 2001). The globalized construction of a cultural system that embodies specific values, norms and standards has disseminated worldwide a model of knowledge based on modernization, while side-lining the traditional forms of inquiry that are prevalent among local cultures (Gobo 2011, Smith 1999). This has led to the creation of a power hierarchy and a hegemonic space of global communication based on imperial visuality (Chow 2010, Mirzoeff 2011), which is not unlike a ‘colonial environment’, in a sense (Fanon 1970).

In many parts of the world, museums and exhibitions seek to respond to these global challenges by critically analysing their societal role and redefining their mandate, practices, institutional identities and approaches to their audiences. From this perspective, there is an obvious need to identify the situations and conjunctures that already have structured the hierarchization, subordination and marginalization of immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities, as well as to examine the tendency to recognize the other ‘only in the form of a non-present time’ (Chow 2010, p.179). The role of geotemporal politics needs to be considered here, along with the concept of allochronism, which literally means other from a different geological time. Fabian uses this concept to criticize ethnographic practices in which cultures of others are represented as existing in a different time from the contemporary time of the West (1983). In the history of the West, ‘indigenous’ and ‘otherness’ are embedded in a geographic alterity that lies in the past. This notion of the border has bolstered and perpetuated the colonial powers’ societal norms. It could be said that as a consequence of these projects that involve political segregation and homogenization, the re-presentation and creation of the image of the nation, as described by Benedict Anderson (2006), are being promoted under the authority of museums, exhibitions and other media (Simpson 2014), and are also being viewed through the eyes of dominant cultures.

It is imperative to consider (Boggs and Kurashige 2012) the incentive of using visionary organizing to bring about a change in the current structure of exhibitions so as to promote inclusion, social justice and the development of equitable internal and external practices in exhibitions (Kreps 2011). Additionally, it has become more urgent than ever to emphasize on the

---

3 Imagined communities is elaborated on in Chapter 2, p.33.
re-imagining and re-defining of institutions that can provide new alternatives to the existing system, as such a transformation would help in the decolonization of knowledge and perception.

The effective struggle for empowerment among minoritarian subjects who seek equality is a challenge to the dichotomy of the Western colonizer and dominant power, and this struggle is important for bringing an understanding of cultural orientation and different sets of values into the space of galleries and museums. This struggle against hegemony provides an opportunity for discussions about the knowledge and experiences of minorities that have previously fallen into oblivion. Further, the ways through which the hegemony of taxonomic and representational approaches is resisted are also important. In the hierarchy of the world, everyone is assigned a precise place, and the metaphors for ‘seeing’ become an important way in which the boundaries between us and them are demarcated (Chow 2010). Given this scenario, there has been a conscious attempt to delink from the existing system of knowledge production (Mignolo 2007) in the context of art and memory, in order to encourage people to build their own field study maps (Deliss 2012).

Since the 1980s, the connection between art and anthropology has raised and led to multiple collaborations between artists and anthropologists, and the emergence of different themes in art and cultural critique (Kester 2011). On the one hand, this relation has redefined and reframed the regime of art, as it has led to a critical contemplation of the institutional framing of art and the resultant explosion of the totality of art discourses in the West, as well as a critique of the hierarchy of sovereignty and the logic of national identity through the reversal and disruption of the position of subject and object (Kester 2011). On the other hand, the aesthetic as an autonomous form of life as a reference to Jacques Rancière, and the cognitive capacities of the viewer were introduced to contemporary art (Bishop 2012, Kester 2011). In general, art and ethnographic institutions attempted to put forward deep questions about representation and brought audiences to the core of debate, rather than feeding them with ready answers. In the 1990s, there was an increased tendency towards particular social, cultural and representational systems, and simplistic ethico-epistemological oppositions (coherence vs. incoherence, singularity vs. collectivity, etc.) among artists (Kester 2011). This period was also marked by the evolution of the political function of the arts and the rethinking of the very concept of institutions and spaces for knowledge production.

This thesis examines the aesthetic sphere from the perspective of coloniality and decoloniality, based on a study of different exhibitory spaces. To this end, it considers the
mechanism of knowledge production, the politics of representation and the questioning of the national myth. Specifically, I have focused on a critical analysis of two examples of Swedish exhibitory spaces with regard to the visibility and invisibility of minorities and migrants, with the aim of examining the dynamics of the space as a stage and place of practice (Certeau 1984), with the possibility of negotiation and dialogue.

The methods and practices of critical and participant anthropology can help us to better understand contemporary culture and the systematic destruction of ‘other’ cultures, as well as to scrutinize the ‘colonial wound’ for healing through ‘the restoration of power, life force, or soul’ (Anzaldúa 2015, p.33). These practices are imperative in fighting the racist and xenophobic imaginaries projected in galleries and museums. Additionally, in order to create a holistic space of variation, dynamism and change, it is necessary to understand the modern colonial patriarchal system (Lugones 2007), which is characterised by a space of representation and appearance, and what Judith Butler refers to as the ‘right to appear’ (2015, p.26), in her re-reading of Arendt (1958), and what Mirzoeff refers to as the ‘right to look’ (2017). This is a space where the power hierarchy is reflected in the complex hegemony and subjects are only represented in a particular reality, under the assumption of the disposability of human life in the name of civilization and progress. Such a space of representation presents as an ‘intelligible picture of modernity’ (Mirzoeff 2011, p.23), that often has tried to create an ‘aesthetic of respect for the status quo’ (Fanon 1994, p.3). This space has been constituted in dialectical opposition to non-Western alterity (Mirzoeff 2011).

**Research aim and questions**

In this thesis, I explore ways of transforming the subjects of coloniality into agents for decolonial delinking and the liberating of sensibilities trapped by modernity, by using examples from the National Museums of World Culture and the Tensta Art Centre. I will do this by critically considering the methods of representation at these institutions, in order to reveal how they interpret the minoritarian subjects they display and how conceptual instruments and mechanisms are used to deconstruct and reconstruct the exhibitory spaces and its meanings in a way that resists the contingent hegemonic projects. Additionally, I will investigate how curatorial thinking and exhibition planning at the Tensta Art Centre has taken form and how the participation of diverse groups and minoritarian subjects at many levels opens up the possibility of discarding the dichotomies of the same and the other. I will also address how the curatorial practices reposition
the used material and question complicity in an inclusive and collaborative way, based on the perspective of an ethnographic museum as a political institution. The aim of this study is to critically analyse and compare the current exhibitions, projects and strategies of inclusion of minoritarian subjects at the Tensta Art Centre, as well as to provide a general overview of the existing hierarchies within current art exhibitions and projects at the National Museums of World Culture that reproduce the exclusionary regimes of visibility/invisibility of various marginalized subjects. The overall purpose of this thesis is to further develop the museum and art centre’s strategies for depicting immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities, and to determine whether it is possible for a modern/colonial cultural institution to create a space of negotiation and social participation for/with minoritarian subjects.

To fulfil this aim, I plan to explore the following research questions:

- What is the current politics of representation of migrants and refugees in Sweden as constituted by and in the museums as one of the major institutes of knowledge production and distribution?
- What are the instruments and strategies of resistance against the dominant politics of representation, as elaborated by artists, curators and museum workers, aimed at turning migrants and refugees into individual subjects with agency, will and rationality?
- To what degree can an opportunity be provided for discussion and open dialogue between the exhibition organizing institutions and the public?

In order to better answer these questions, I will divide them into the following sub-questions:

- What legacy does Tensta Art Centre wish to avoid and what are the attractive aspects of this institution that make it a space of negotiation for immigrants, refugees and minorities? Answering this question will help to define the process of delinking from modernity/coloniality in public and participatory spaces and to delineate the process of the depolarization of narrativity into the minority and the majority.
- How issues are being opened up and/or changed for the visitors/participants personally, politically and spiritually within the context of institutions? This
question is designed to examine the ways in which the art centres interact with the audiences. I hope that this analysis will address how much these museums and exhibition centres have truly contributed to dismantling the boundaries between Us and Them, to what degree they offer a space to migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities for narrating their experiences, and which factors affect their motives for speaking.

**Contextualizing research**

The growing politicization of migration, with the widespread support for populist, Islamophobic and anti-immigrant ideas in recent years, has persuaded me to contemplate on how the diverse people who are perceived as immigrants and ethnic minorities are represented and displayed at galleries and museums. I sought to critically explore whether these institutions contribute to maintaining the notion of origin and the notion of alterity. I was also interested in exploring the contributing factors and the negative and racist tendencies that result in the neglect of the coevalness of cultures⁴ (Fabian 1983, Van Dijk 1993).

My reflections are prompted by the insights gained during the course ‘Race, Ethnicity, and Migration in Culture and the Arts’, which I took when I visited the Nordiska Museum, as this was when I found out that the concept of diversity was introduced to Swedish museums back in the 1970s. This made me realize that interest in the issues of migration has dramatically increased since 2004, when the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg was founded. In fact, the exhibitions at this museum affirmed this interest and incline towards the global perspective informed by globalization. However, my focus was drawn to how mainstream museum exhibitions and projects at art institutions re-interpret and re-categorize immigrants and refugees, and create stereotypical portrayals of them. What we see is, sometimes, more than just the creation and spreading of knowledge about others; in fact, collaborative projects with minoritarian subjects reproduce a neo-colonial approach rather than create a dialogical space. As Boast (2011) and Clifford (1997) point out, such projects represent the perpetuation of the colonizer–colonized dichotomy that is taken from the patriarchal model.

---

⁴ The term ‘coeval’ means belonging to the same physical and typological time. Coevalness, according to Fabian’s analysis, is systemically being denied by anthropologists, who tend to situate objects in a time different from ours (1983).
Another event that sparked my interest in this study was a conversation I had with a curator about an art project in a Swedish museum, the aim of which was to introduce three non-Swedish artists to society. Over 4,500 pieces of museum collections formed the source of inspiration for these three artists to create new artworks. According to the curator, the project was designed to build an interconnected relationship between the audiences, objects and artists. In addition, this was an interesting way for audiences to recall their past. Another aim of the project was to create a way of ‘corresponding with the collection in different perspectives. When I spoke with one of the artists involved in this project, he stated that ‘This project was an opportunity for me to glimpse somehow the Swedish art history; however, I like to have a chance to gain my own perspective and approach as well.’

Despite the tendency to reinforce cultural engagement in an equal situation, there is no opportunity for peaceful coexistence in plural societies when the existing power structure controls differences and heterogeneity, and tries to integrate the voices of the source community and stakeholders into the projects at such art institutions (Boast 2011, p.60). This made me question the role of museums and institutions in the exoticization of migrants and in the enforcement of the politics of visibility/invisibility. Finally, it also made me question the degree to which exhibition spaces are constructive and make an effort to create participatory environments.

**Literature review**

In order to critically analyse museums and galleries and develop a conceptual framework for this thesis, I explored the modes of representation and the foundations in place for the liberation of museums from practices which are rooted in power structures (Tlostanova 2017). For this, I focused on literature dealing with the issues of coloniality of knowledge and aesthetics and the decolonization of museums as knowledge production institutions. I reviewed a number of works that discuss the main approaches to the study of immigrants and ethnic minorities in exhibition spaces, as well as address the concept of museums as non-neutral institutions of socio-cultural and political engagement. I also reflect on the changing role of curators and artists as they try to redefine their system of cultural values so that it is free from emotional perceptions trapped by modernity and its darker cousin—coloniality (Mignolo 2007, 2012, Mignolo & Vazquez 2013).

In the last few decades, museums, by promoting inclusion and social justice and developing equitable internal and external practices, have revealed their tendency to transform into
decolonized public institutions (Kreps 2011, Nightingale and Sandell 2012). They have also tried to change their position from being a site of power to becoming a space of representation (Bennett 1995). There have also been many attempts to fight and break down the racist who ‘demarcates the boundaries of the space of appearance and makes it a space of representation’ (Mirzoeff 2017, p.12), and many studies have attempted to push museums to adopt a more self-reflexive and democratic approach ‘to answer to the crisis of collectively shared narratives and the heterogenization of cultural identities’ (Baur 2008, 2017, p.341). In addition to the decolonization approach, sociologist Tony Bennett’s approach (2017) paved the way for understanding the mind map of existing power hierarchies in the ‘exhibitionary complex’. He believes that some of the more recent historical concerns need to be reviewed, as the legacies of this period remain powerfully evident. He further adds:

[…] this way of presenting [decolonizing] the history of museums neglects the conception of cultural difference associated with the new relationships between museums, anthropological fieldwork, and programs of colonial and metropolitan governance that were developed over the first half of the twentieth century, and the legacy of these developments in the second half of the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first (2017, Con.).

Anthropologist Robin Boast is another researcher who discusses ‘the anatomy of the museum [that] seems to be persistently neo-colonial’ (2011, p.56). He notes that the mainstream museums tend towards shared colonial legacies and primary positions of authority in Western society, rather than acting as a contact zone. However, Boast argues that museums which act as a contact zone do not necessarily provide a dialogical space, which is based on educational engagement. Boast points out that, in order to renovate museums, we need to go beyond the knowledge and control of communities and agendas. In relation to the power of knowledge, Edward Said noted in his seminal work on the concept of ‘othering’ that:

The object of such knowledge is inherently vulnerable to scrutiny; this object is a ‘fact’ which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically stable. To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to ‘it’ (Said 1995, p. 32).
Said’s (1995) point about knowledge and power affirms the working of mainstream museums wherein knowledge is gathered into museums and is reclassified, reinterpreted and recategorized to produce a new form of knowledge (Bennett et al. 2017).

Many researches have suggested that museums are an arena where diversity engages with aspirations, skills and political projects (Baur 2008, 2017, Levitt 2015), and along this line, James Clifford (1997) proposed the possibility of museums opening up for dialogue and collaborative programs. In fact, the issues of cosmopolitanism, globalization and migration in relation to museums have been discussed with regard to the conversion of museums into viable and socially relevant institutions for the construction of inclusive scenarios of global citizenry (Levitt 2015). From this perspective, museums should be a site of encounters between global ways of seeing, exhibiting and teaching, and local ways of doing things. In general, museums should turn into spaces of cross-cultural dialogue in ‘respect and recognition of previously marginalized groups’ (Levitt 2015, p.152).

Reflections on ethnicity and diversity have brought the issue of the curatorial representation of migrants to the core of the debate. Some researchers are critical of multicultural nations and museums that are determined to be inclusive by representing the nation as a harmonious coexistence of diverse groups, because there is a risk that no attention will be paid to the real frictions and inequalities in society (for examples, see Baur 2008, 2017, Johansson 2017). Additionally, the transnational migration phenomenon has challenged the notion of the sovereign state and homogenous people, and consequently, led to friction within the museum sector (Aronsson 2008, Karp et al. 2007). The reorientation of museums based on the fresh idea of diversity has important implications with regard to the migrants’ right to narrate ‘their’ stories and cultures (Boast 2011, Baur 2008). However, many questions remain about how exhibitions in museums can be re-made and how their modes of representation can be scrutinized.

Anthropologists and curators have attempted to tackle various modes of representation, through the reflective questioning of curatorial practices in museums. This has led to provocative ideas based on Foucauldian perspectives, according to which the human body is considered to be an object of knowledge that needs to be organized like the display frameworks of museums, and modes of representation. This matter can construct a position of achieved humanity, that is
positioned at the end of evolutionary development, from man's development, and subsidiary evolutionary (Bennett 1995).

Deliss, curator and Professor of Curatorial Theory, noted that the term ‘remediation’ (2011) helps to establish new ways of defining and breaking down the earlier hierarchies between high and low\(^5\) in the space of museums. This term (remediation) was introduced by the anthropologist Paul Rabinow, who described it as the exercise of ‘thinking about ways of working with and re-interpreting ethnographic collections’ (Deliss, 2011, p.21): it describes how we (as an audience) connect with the collections. Moreover, according to Tlostanova, in relation to the role of curators and artists in museums, an essential factor in decolonial knowledge production is:

[...] merging of the roles of the artist and the curator and consequently, the turning of the selection, representation, and signification process into a truly creative artistic experience – curating as assemblage and the exhibition as a whole as a work of art. (Tlostanova 2017, p.91)

Finally, Nicholas Mirzoeff goes to the extent of saying that ‘emptying the museums’ is an act of decolonizing the spaces and responding to many existing challenges, such as authoritarian nationalism, that affect many aspects of social life (2017).

**Conclusion**

The term ‘integration’ has loomed in debates about newcomers and has emerged in immigrant policies in European countries; essentially, it is linked to core nation-state principles. Many debates about *modern citizenship* as an essential tool for national community (Marshall 1964) are based on social and political rights, as well as the process of inclusion and exclusion. The idea of integration led to the discussion of racial, ethnic and cultural differences between migrants and ethnic minorities. With regard to the majority and minority and the rise of the discourse of ‘controlling immigration’ (Hollifield et al. 2014), various institutions and organizations that have a direct relation to different ethnic groups and minorities drew attention to the idea of integration and multiculturalism. Navigating through the available relevant literature lends support to my

\(^5\) McKenzie Wark argues that ‘Low theory is the attempt to think everyday life within practices created in and of and for everyday life, using or misusing high theory to other ends. It happens in collaborative practices that invent their own economies of knowledge’ (2011). In contrast, ‘High theory’ is discussed at the university level and is mostly the terrain of white people (Mirzoeff 2017).
argument that the representation of migrants and minoritarian subjects in museums and exhibitionary spaces has been an interesting subject for both anthropologists and curators/artists. Open dialogue and collaboration with various stakeholders (Lynch 2014a, 2014b, 2017) have become new trends in the exhibitionary complex (Bennett 1995), which stresses on the rhetorical strategies of power as suggested by Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. In this regard, some ideas, such as collaborative processes that aim to decolonize these spaces, have been suggested; however, it is still necessary to frequently review contemporary museums and galleries in order to recognize the effects of differences resulting from the assemblage of different subjects and to trace the possible decolonial paths for their change. Furthermore, critical analysis and empirically grounded discussions are required to better understand participatory exhibition spaces, in order to break down the hierarchical relations of power.

**The birth of ethnographic museums**

According to Shelton, the first museums built in Europe to house ethnographic collections can be classified into two waves. The first wave (1849–1884) saw the opening of Europe’s huge ethnographic museums, while the second wave (1890–1931) was established under a ‘colonial paradigm’. During the second wave, museums were controlled by ‘colonial ideologies, policies, and aspirations’ (Shelton 2006, p.64-65). Thus, the rationalization of ethnographic collections is based on accidental circumstances (Shelton 2000).

In the last half-century, with the surges in global communications, changes in lifestyles and the empowerment of indigenous cultures, there has been a shift from museum anthropology to university anthropology, as well as the reorientation of anthropology away from the study of material culture. After the Second World War, anthropology was influenced by the rise of structuralism, which regarded language as ‘the model par excellence for understanding social phenomena’ (Henare 2005, p.259). According to Claude Lévi-Strauss (who moved anthropology ‘away from artefact-based research’), in a lecture presented at the UNESCO in 1954 on the status of museums of anthropology, it was now easier to study languages, belief systems, attitudes and the personalities of other cultures than to acquire their bows and arrows, drums, necklaces or statuettes (as cited in Deliss 2012). This reflects a ‘shift from material culture to immaterial knowledge’ (Deliss 2012, p.20).
The postcolonial critique, initiated in the post-war decades, affected different disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, anthropology and cultural products. Many anthropological texts reproduced the imaginary ‘others’ and triggered crucial debates about the extent to which contemporary vision and transparency are present in the representation and display of the ‘others’ in ethnographic institutions. Furthermore, various discussions have come to the fore about the ‘status of ethnographic collections and (arguing on) how to restore the presence of objects that easily slip into stereotypes of exoticism or anachronism: The artefacts in ethnographic museums reveal mysteries of cultural ingenuity, but how do we demystify them?’ (Deliss 2012, p. 19).

The 1990s gave birth to a lot of material on the representation of others in the field of museum studies, with some of the popular topics being the power hierarchy in relation to museums as a site of power (Bennett 1995, Kahn 1995, Muñoz 2011), the relationship of indigenous people and ethnic communities with museums and re-examination of the function of museums in social and cultural affairs (Simpson 1996). Indeed, many artists and curators have tried to build on this perspective and create a connection between body, knowledge and art. For instance, Judith Barry (artist and researcher), in 1991, attempted to build a ‘mnemonic museum, created with the help of memory using an ancient recall system activated by the viewer’ (Deliss 2012, p.31), in order to construct identity. She presented some video art projects and interviewed different ethnic groups about their reaction to the politics of nation states and discursive spaces. Moreover, Deliss, as a curator, argues for a self-reflective recharging of ethnographic collections with contemporary meanings, and for alternative ways to interpret and display anachronistic objects. She even suggests the possibility of post-ethnographic museums, as a means of ‘a change in the method of communication’ by ‘testing alternative platforms for describing and transmitting the meaning of objects, adding new contexts to what we know’ (2012, p.21). As Geismar points out, to change perception and problematize mainstream historical narratives, discursive interventions in the form of fine art exhibitions could be used to pave the way for the conditions of viewing established in the colonial metropolis through a formal aesthetic code (2015). Another example is the artists’ attempt to create a narration of colonial history: in 2015 and 2017, the museum of Weltmuseum Wien (the Vienna World Museum) exemplified an emergent display strategy by presenting a performance art: the second and third steps to ‘Ideal Paradise’. This was involving a specific visual mode of presenting ethnographic collections by uniting the paradigms of modernist art museums with a symbolic infrastructure that also referenced particular historical narratives and individual
identities. Choreographer Claudia Bosse was invited to present the second and third steps to ‘Ideal Paradise’. The narrative was created by interactions between the work’s performers and viewers in the imperial space and the vernacular objects that were presented within it, and pointed to the shift that happened with the 2017 reopening of the museum (Chwatal 2018).

To conclude this section, it can be pointed out that the interconnectedness and interdisciplinary collaboration between art and ethnography has influenced the role of curators and introduced new perspectives to ethnographic collections. Moreover, the role of collection-based research in bringing indigenous knowledge and its role within contemporary society, into the museum has received attention. As a result, the objects are tried to be considered ‘not as passive subjects but as agents acting to define the terms of their own representation’ (Geismar 2015, p.201). However, I still need to talk about the invisible power that has affected the minorities in exhibitory spaces; and doesn't allow museums to develop into spaces of multiple voices. In Chapter 2, I will try to explore this matrix of power and the invisible gaze that inadvertently direct their paths of identification, nonidentification and intensify the border between diversities.

**Theoretical framework**

In order to analyse the practices and politics of visibility and invisibility, as well as the representation of migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities in exhibition spaces, this thesis relies on three theoretical currents that frame the concepts being used. This section is not limited to the theoretical framework used in the analysis of the empirical materials, as I also talk about how the methodology of this thesis was formulated. I present my epistemological and ontological positions and the rationale for my choice of methods for both data collection and analysis.

**Complexes of visuality**

While museums and galleries have become progressively open public arenas, they formulate different messages of power throughout society, and have become a place where one can see and be seen, as described in the term ‘the exhibitionary complex’ coined by Bennett (1995). This attitude demonstrates the significance of the notion of complex, which refers to ‘the production of a set of social organizations and processes that form a given complex’ (Mirzoeff 2011, p.5). In the context of museums and galleries, the complex exchange between different cultures could be considered as an articulation of the claim to authority in coloniality, namely, the perpetuation of
the matrix of power in contemporary times. The establishment of meaning and questions about how meanings are determined in museums leads us to contemplate on the naturalization of human differences and the visualization of immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities in such a way as ‘to prevent them from cohering as political subjects’ (Mirzoeff 2011, p.3).

The Tensta Art Centre and the Museum of World Culture are institutions that attempt to situate themselves in a ‘politically charged locality’ (Shelton 2007, p.395) and to use various experiences and modes of knowledge to explore the various debates within the public policy circles, media and communities of artists and ethnographers working in the areas of migration and minoritarian subjects. The different sets of values and acts that are embodied by these institutions have inspired me to contemplate on the genealogy of visuality in my quest to present authority (Mirzoeff 2011), that is, the ‘division of the sensible whereby domination imposes the sensible evidence of its legitimacy’ (Rancière 1998, p.17, as cited in Mirzoeff 2011, p.3).

In order to understand the conditions in which visuality affects the authority to power in institutions, and the complexity of these multiplexes/complexes, it is imperative to trace the decolonial genealogy of visuality such as classification, separation and aestheticization (Mirzoeff 2011, Fanon 1994). This can be done by gaining an understanding of the modes of modernity and the colonial matrix of power, and this can, subsequently, lead to a better understanding of the assemblage of differences in varying forms of existences. The assemblage of differences seeks to condition our orientations toward thinking and practicing in the context of contradictions in exhibition spaces and overcoming complex operations. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I try to look at the modes of representation in ethnographic museums in Sweden, in order to examine their ability to speak in multilateral ways and create spaces of negotiation.

Chapter 3 presents the Tensta Art Centre’s strategies to understand the reality of modernity (by the dismantling of mental compliance with modernity through various exhibitions, projects and collaborative programs), and to engage diversely and make an effort to create a dynamic space of being and speaking ‘from their readability and from their unreadability’ (Bishop 2012, p.30). In the context of the art centre, I try to understand how knowledge is produced through acts of representation, as introduced by Mignolo through the term ‘performative epistemology’ (1995). I also use Stuart Hall’s system of representation to further my understanding:
The meaning is not the object or person or thing, nor is it in the word. It is we who fix meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural or inevitable. The meaning is constructed by the system of representation. (Hall 1997, p.21)

My underlying aim is to examine how complexes of visuality engender, albeit unintentionally, a form of aesthetic, namely, what is proper and normal. Consequently, the analysis of the two different spaces of representation will inform my thinking with regard to the regime and complexes of visuality, and will help me to imagine a different reality in which sustained power/knowledge is resisted and the systems in which agents operate in today are questioned. This study seeks to examine the experience of working productively in the spaces between oppositional categories and to critically review the process of interpretation of minorities/diversities in exhibitory spaces.

Assemblage

As a new mode of visibility and a mode of experience, assemblages emerged as a solution to the complexes of visuality. An assemblage offers a mixture of different objects based on a preconceived or organisational logic, and it helps us become part of the understanding and value of what we present (Bennett 2018). Museums, as an experience apparatus (Huhtamo 2015) that attempts to be open to change in recent years, examine different modes of assembling and aim to democratize their space and free it from the modern regime of exploitation and domination. Therefore, encountering and the experience of knowing can be understood as tools for perceiving different materials for the restoration of the vitality and the creative re-invention of exhibitory spaces (Rabinow 2011a). In other words, these tools can help to generate new insights within practice-based research. The Tensta Art Centre and the Museum of World Culture have to differing extents constructed a dynamic space for experiencing and reflecting the uneasy and unclear mutual connectedness of the diverse minorities (Rabinow 2011a, 2011b). Through assemblage, it is possible to think about the exhibitory spaces from within and develop observation and dialogue as processes of exploration (Rabinow 2011a).

In this study, I look at the process of assemblage through the methodological practice of curation and interpretation at the Tensta Art Centre and some Swedish ethnographic museums, in order to understand the level of prior information that is brought together through the curatorial practices and to comprehend the results of this process. This thesis, by focusing on the assemblage process, recognizes that this new way of seeing and negotiating with minoritarian subjects and
elements, induces what Rabinow (2011a, 2011b) describes as motion and affect, which is defined as ‘the passage from one experiential state of the body to another’ (Bennett 2018, p.7). Indeed, the intensity of the affect is based on emotions and feelings. Therefore, assemblage requires knowledge that is specific to a given situation, and entails a different way of seeing and comprehending the complexity of knowledge production that produces an affective and embodied moment of lived experiences (Rabinow 2011a, Deliss, 2012). The central to the idea of assemblage is the notion of effect created by difference that how we understand it. The challenges and responsibilities faced by the curators at the Tensta Art Centre in the various projects that are run by and engage immigrants and ethnic minorities are part of the assemblage process and reflect an opening to change. In other words, this art centre wants to be a site where gathering diversities.

Thus, what I tried to identify through the concept of assemblage is a kind of experience apparatus that combines material features with social roles and converts exhibition places into spaces that embody an institutional critique. Thus, exhibition places can be instantiated as a workshop in which multiple agents could be included to play active roles and to understand how people relate to one another, and thereby contribute to society’s sustainable development.

**Decoloniality and Border thinking**

Decolonial discourses are the principle theoretical grounding for practicing transparency and changing the way of seeing immigrants, refugees and ethnic groups in relation to the modes of representations and exhibition spaces. In this thesis, decoloniality is described as the experiences and suggested practices of galleries and museums that try to ‘enter into conversations and build understandings that both cross geopolitical locations and colonial differences’ (Walsh and Mignolo 2018, p.1). This paves the way for not only active engagement with the processes of struggle in the ways of the modern/colonial order but also recognizing and devaluing the default Western perspective. Decoloniality has been implemented through actions that resist and refuse the legacies, ongoing relations and patterns of power in response to the promises of modernity that were established by external and internal colonialism (as described in Aníbal Quijano’s introduction of the term) (Walsh and Mignolo 2018). My analysis of the two different spaces of representation (art centre and ethnographic museums), as well as the interviews with visitors, participants and the staff members, have highlighted the decolonizing methodologies as a ‘way,
option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice, and praxis’ (*ibid*, p.5) and as the ‘realization’ (*ibid*, p.207) that initiates the decolonialization of subjects (*ibid*).

When we talk about the mode of representation in exhibitory spaces (Bennett 1995), the emphasis is on a structure that is generally based upon hegemonic knowledge systems. Therefore, border thinking as expressed by the term ‘in between’ (Tlostanova et al. 2016, p. 216) is a well-turned phrase at a general epistemological level, and it also represents a process of transformation that facilitates dialogue between the North and the South and becomes a tool for disrupting dominant imaginaries in knowledge production (*ibid*). Moreover, according to Anzaldúa, border thinking ‘decolonizes western epistemologies by moving partially outside Enlightenment-based frameworks’ (2015, p.xxvii). All these ideologies and attempts represent the pursuit of the de-westernization of minds, bodies, and sensibilities.

I tried to explore the different aspects of various experiences and modes of knowledge that are employed at the Tensta Art Centre to devalue the Western default. The engagement of immigrants and ethnic minorities in various artistic and practical projects is an attempt by this centre to ‘rehabilitate space as a concrete locale’ (Tlostanova 2017, p.39), and also reveals many insights concerning minoritarian subjects. Furthermore, the activities at the art centre are ‘in-between academia and activism proper’ (Tlostanova et al. 2016, p.215) and aim to enable engagement with political art activist projects and the public sphere. The analysis in Chapter 3 is based on the methodologies of the Tensta Art Centre, and through this analysis, I have attempted to understand how people trace and map the projects and exhibitions, their engagement with the others, and how they recognise their place at the centre. These methodologies of the art centre are an attempt at border thinking that aims to decolonize minds, bodies and sensibilities.

**Theory and methodology**

I organized my research around various forms of investigation by combining ethnographic field study, a critical analysis of the existing literature and aesthetic engagement. Sharing the physical and social environment with the art centre personnel allowed me to discover more about their perspectives on the role of these institutions in their activities. Based on the epistemological and ontological premise of this thesis, I have interpreted the position of the Tensta Art Centre and its workers through interviews, observations, data collection and analysis that helped me answer the research questions. I have used an ontological constructivism approach, which represents a way of
understanding the world based on human experience and personal identification; the constructivist perspective that provides an understanding which is sufficient to go on (Peck and Mummery 2018). Hence, my interpretations are based on my experience of the world—the world that according to Gadamer (2003/1960) does exist independently of human affairs (as paraphrased by Peck and Mummery 2018, p.392), and that which we can perceive and experience. In this thesis, I see the bodies (of immigrants and ethnic minorities) who carry their own histories on their back, and are in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction of identity and in the midst of change/transformation. I have always considered institutions (art centres and museums) as being constructed with the aim of communicating the process of identity and cultural formation. Epistemology as a theory of knowledge and nature of belief is related to the possibilities, source and limitation of knowledge in the field of study. However, my position here is not epistemological. I have used the onto-epistemological approach that was introduced by Karen Barad:

[…] Onto-epistem-ology [emphasis in original] – the study of practices of knowing in being – is probably a better way to think about the kind of understandings that are needed to come to terms with how specific intra-actions matter. (Barad 2003, p.829)

According to Barad, intra-action as an internal process of differentiation shapes the world and determinates its concepts. This approach leads to the creation of different sets of material, or discourses, that are inseparable in practice. In this study, the notion of intra-actioning has helped me to understand that the concept of otherness never comes from below or from above; rather, it represents the coming together of an object and practice established from within intra-actions between the world and its beings. Thus, the effects created by the differences are the central idea, rather than scrutinizing what these differences are (2007, 2014).

According to the concept of culturally responsive methodologies that suggested by Berryman, SooHoo and Nevin, a researcher identifies a methodology which is beneficial to both the researcher and the subject (2013). Based on this notion, I believe that the method of diffraction is appropriate and also contributes to and supports my own approaches. The diffractive analysis is understanding the world from within, and it 'explores how material objects and processes can be

---

6 Coined by Gloria Anzaldúa, as expressed in the Theory on Flesh and the concept of Nepantla, which I will explain in more detail in Chapter 3.
understood through the effects created by their difference’ (Bennett 2018). In addition, to explore
and understand in more depth meaning as an assemblage of collective perspectives and differences,
I will critically engage with various scholars. This approach investigates how to think through
meaning in a non-authoritative way, by introducing concepts which show how hierarchical power
functions. The emphasis of this approach is on the right to subjectivity and the right to existence,
through the genealogies of visuality.

**Methods and empirical material**

In my thesis, I have attempted to apply a qualitative approach to my inquiry and build on
Creswell’s (2018, p.64) idea of the role that ‘the researcher plays in the study’. With this approach,
I have attempted to explain the object of the research and deduce a conceptual understanding of
social realities (Charmaz and Belgrave 2002, Mason 2002).

This thesis uses qualitative and critical analysis as an exploratory approach to inquiry, in
order to foster a holistic process of learning based on the subjective nature of relationship building.
I have used a theoretical perspective along with critical analysis in order to understand how
curatorial practices and the mechanisms of representation are implemented and to interpret their
societal power. Indeed, my aim is to scrutinize the produced and reshaped material objects, through
theorising, observing and knowing the curatorial practices and mechanisms of representation of
immigrants and ethnic minorities through *intra-action* (Barad 2007). As explained earlier, intra-
action refers to an understanding of the world from within, and through the effects which have
been created by differences As Barad points out where subjects and meaning are mutually
constituted (2007). My main case study is the Tensta Art Centre. I analyse its activities in relation
to how they are generating a space of participation, and examine their ability to forge and sustain
multiple contradictory connections, by trying to answer the following questions: how are various
insights generated in the art centre, and are there any possibilities of generating other viewpoints?
The other case study is examined in less detail: it is the rather differently positioned National
Museums of World Culture (I focus on only a few of its exhibitions and activities).

**Participatory spaces**

I performed a detailed investigation on various activities related to immigrants and ethnic
minorities at the Tensta Art Centre. When I was not carrying out interviews or database research,
I spent my time at the art centre, examining the displays, their settings and the selection, such as objects, artworks, texts, and videos. I was also interested in their curatorial collaborations with other organizations.

My approach with the National Museums of World Culture was different. Minoritarian subjects, such as immigrants, refugees and indigenous people, are increasingly involved in curatorial processes related to exhibition and public program development and implementation, collection preservation decisions, and outreach initiatives relevant to museum art and ethnographic collections associated with their communities. To examine the topic of how curators and artists are working together to decolonize curatorial practices within this museum, I use a discourse analysis of the relevant published materials such as journals, conference papers and catalogues, technical reports and online literature, with a focus on the exhibition and public program. In examining the National Museums of World Culture, I have used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach that involves a two-phase project in which I tried to collect quantitative\(^7\) information about the museum in the first phase, and then analyse the results and use them to plan the second, qualitative phase (Creswell 2018). My approach is based on the notion that various curatorial practices seek more dynamic ways of understanding the multitude of materialities and minorities, in order to establish ‘the role of the artist and the curator through engaging critically the permanent collections, the spatial and temporal structures of existing museums, and the ways they stage their interaction with the audiences’ (Tlostanova 2017, p.76).

**Respondents**

As one of the important methods of data collection and generation, I conducted 12 interviews with visitors and staff at the Tensta Art Centre, with each one lasting for 30 to 40 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, so as to enable the interviewees to reflect freely on their experiences and affects. I developed ten questions which sought to discover the frequency of meetings and the timeline of projects on immigrants and ethnic minorities at the centre, in order to examine the degree of engagement of the immigrants and minorities in different projects. During interviews with the staff, I followed the leading questions with questions on particular issues, such as the strategies of exhibiting and leading projects related to minoritarian subjects. Thus, I used a

\(^7\) It can be used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours and other defined variables.
flexible questioning strategy (Dunn 2000), in which the questions were always adapted to the interviewee and their position. I formulated the questions in non-offensive and understandable language. During the interview, I asked the participants to verbalize any non-verbal communication, if I felt that they were not clear. We also established a protocol for recording information (Creswell 2018), with the exception of one interview that was done by email. I selected and analysed those interviews that suited my research purposes (as outlined previously): to explore the various aspects that make the art centre a space of negotiation, to examine the ways in which the art centre interacts with the audiences, and to investigate the process of exhibition-making in relation to minorities.

I conducted two interviews with the Tensta Art Centre’s staff in order to understand the goals and strategies of this institute, but the rest of the interviews were conducted with visitors. Even though only some of the interviewees ‘speak’ in my thesis, my understanding of this research was developed based on all the interviews: all of the interviewees provided me with useful information. Indeed, the formation of my thoughts was completed through all the conducted interviews, and my awareness was fostered by their reflections and their embodied sensations in the process of interviewing. In Chapter 3, some parts of the interviews are discussed.

**Challenges and ethical considerations**

The social, ethnic, gender and racial position of the researcher has an essential methodological influence on the perception of and interaction with participants, and also requires certain ethical considerations. In this research, I positioned myself as an artist, migrant, female and international master’s student of Ethnic and Migration Study. This position had various effects on my perspective and provided me with more possibilities for accessing information. I have adopted a reflexive approach in the research process. I consciously refrained from commenting on some potentially racializing statements in some interviews, so as not to interrupt the flow of the interview. All the participants received information about me, my inquiry, my methods and aims, and they provided their verbal consent for the voluntary interview. I explained their role in the interview and informed them of their right to leave questions unanswered at any point.

One of the challenges in this thesis was related to how the choice of interviewees could be optimized to correspond with the mission and the scope of the thesis and the number of informants required to gain valuable insights and to help me develop my study further. Another challenge was
the physical distance of my case studies from my location. I therefore decided to limit the interviews to the art centre, as I had more access to migrants and refugees there. In the second case study, I limited the scope by gathering the empirical material from the existing academic literature and social networks. This approach allowed me to build bridges within the existing practices of my case studies.

The methodology of this thesis could be fruitfully applied to other types of exhibitory institutions that produce thematic exhibitions, such as art centres and ethnographic museums. There are various works on audiences’ reception of thematic exhibitions. Therefore, I tried to expand the scope of the current work by investigating to what extent this strategy informs visitors’ understanding of cultural similarities and differences. This approach has implications for museums’ and galleries’ unintentional contributions to maintaining the boundaries between Us and Them in their efforts towards inclusivity. There is clearly a need for further research in this area, as reflected in the observations of this thesis.
Chapter 2. Swedish museums from a historical perspective

Cultural diversity from a historical perspective

In the past, museums have provided a single authoritative voice, which emphasized on curatorial policies and traditional practices that focused not only on mirroring and reflecting the views and attitudes of dominant cultures, but also on the representations of material objects that were identified as *unknown* from conquered parts of the worlds (Levitt 2015). As Deliss points out, ‘the unknown, unchartered, unexplainable, even the uncanny were part of the anthropologist’s fascination with the Other and his bug-chasing desire to put the status quo at risk’ (2015, p.24). Museums, therefore, became a space within which a certain set of values and social norms from the past could be exposed, in what Kratz calls ‘rhetoric of value’ (2011, as cited in Levitt 2015, p.7). Museums have participated in the colonial project of taming and controlling the objects and have played the role of a place in which traditional practices are performed. In addition, within the space of museums, the imperialist projects are/were often justified. According to the concept of improvisation of the process and temporality (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007), in the knowing and understanding of the notions of they/unknown, there is a direct relation between discovering and contemplating on the notion of they/unknown, and our perspective and our politics of methods related to this notion. We know that museums have intensified their efforts to trace the possible decolonial paths, but becoming agents of social change involves increased complexity, which according to Bernadett Lynch (2014a, 2014b, 2017), requires a critical review of the museums’ practices, with the aim of discovering which assumptions undermine their agency, in the role of passive beneficiary. The global system of power is central to the neoliberal approach, which underlies the model of *free consumption only for a few*; this has produced a kind of hegemony that has already led to new conjunctures in the form of authoritarian nationalism.\(^8\) Indeed, this regime is characterised by the inclusion of *us* and the hyper-exclusion of the *other*, and is based on the promise to reduce inequality in communities by placing restrictions on immigration. This regime

\(^8\) From the contemporary perspective, authoritarian nationalism is a phenomenon that legitimates racial privilege. When the fantasy of homogeneity becomes a dominant discourse, it enforces the notion that some belong, while others don’t and should not have equal footing. Additionally, this phenomenon builds on ‘the idea of new foreign cultures threatening the coherence and cohesion of domestic culture values’ (Hervik 2019, p.20). Authoritarian nationalism has a direct connection with racism towards immigrants and aboriginal people, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and also other forms of racist subordination.
relies on order rather than law, and ‘a governing strategy that deploys executive orders rather than pass legislation’ (Mirzoeff 2017, p.6). This prevailing situation has opened a space for populist parties that feed on dreams of homogeneity and anti-immigrant approaches. This hegemony has also impacted exhibitory spaces and created an exclusionary regime that not only increases complexity, but also affects the politics of visibility and invisibility in museums.

The aftermath of the second World War and the post-1945 period led to the increased mobility of displaced persons, such as war refugees, to North America and within Europe, and turned European societies into destinations for refugees from the decolonizing world (Hoerder 2006). This period was also marked by a movement of labour migrants from Africa and Asia, especially from Turkey, in the 1970s, and the mass migration of East European populations from the Balkans, the Central European post-socialist countries, and particularly, the Baltic littoral countries, which according to Tlostanova, experienced subalternization and neocolonization (similar to the postcolonial populations) after the disintegration of the Socialist world (2017). In the global hierarchy, these immigrants were viewed and placed in an inferior position; in this way, migration was conceptualized as an integral part of social transformation processes. Thus, the phenomenon of migration was significant in the societal context and at the local level, and formerly, in global processes. Some exhibitory spaces and various discourses have tried to explore and problematize the relation between globality and locality as a way of reacting to globalising forces and generating new forms of heterogeneity; for example, the concept of glocalization emerged from the debate on social transformation (Castles 2010, Hampton 2011, Roudometof 2016, 2018). It was at this time that the wave of ethno-political movements and the issue of migration was introduced to Swedish museums.

The global hegemonic matrix of power is often referred to as the global coloniality. It exists in all spheres of life, such as race, labour, space, culture, knowledge and other aspects of modern existence, according to the needs of the capital and for the benefit of white supremacy (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012, Escobar 2004). Global coloniality has the power to influence societal values. However, global complexity and global hierarchy have also led to the demand for the recognition of cultural differences in the 1970s, when cultural and social changes altered the various

---

9 Look at the Museum of World Culture.
10 Look at the Nordic Museum.
legislations and gave birth to a platform and stage for showcasing the views of immigrants and ethnic minorities. At present, distinguishing and exploring the relations between ‘being a representative and being a creator of representations’ is very critical in museums from a political standpoint (Grinell 2010, p.177). This is because in the context of museums, objects gathered for collections are reclassified and reinterpreted based on mainstream narratives, and the marginalized narratives and their meanings are changed as a result (Bennett et al. 2017). Even in the case of exhibitions and programs which aim to have a dialogical space, the matrix of power controls the meanings and affects of the exhibitions.

In the decades that followed the second World War, the fighting for political and cultural autonomy in Africa and Asia turned the attention of the West to the political issues of these regions. Furthermore, the political awakening of indigenous people and cultural minority groups against inequality and racism was echoed by other suppressed minority groups. Such political and cultural revival reflected a growing worldwide trend which saw indigenous people and minorities forming political organisations to fight for their rights and equal opportunities in all spheres of social and political life. During the 1990s, indigenous knowledge systems became a clear voice and emerged in the form of qualitative research presented in scholarly publications by indigenous peoples. The focus on the ‘recognition and protection of indigenous knowledge’ was important to the decolonizing movement (Kovach 2015, p.48). According to decolonial discourses, indigenous knowledge must include the indigenous voices, as the understanding and interpretation of values is an integral part of cultural survival (Hoare et al. 1993, Kovach 2015). In the Swedish context, the concept of diversity was introduced in the 1990s, and traditional ‘Swedish museums intensified their works with these issues in the initial years of the 21st century’ (Johansson 2015, p.11). This period was marked by the launch of the Museum of Ajtte\(^\text{11}\) as the main Swedish museum for Sámi culture (Silven 2008).

Through the process of neoliberal globalization, the idea of accumulation of capital, the neoliberal practice of free market, the claim that rights only come with capital, and additional issues such as racialized inferiorization and identity politics, became an accepted part of the body of work on social analysis. This process is what made indigenous people visible and discussable and brought them to the forefront of public debate in the Euro-American world; this is also what

\(^{11}\) For more information, see www.ajtte.com.
convinced them ‘to migrate to the global North and become contemporary equivalents of the colonial subalterns’ (Tlostanova 2017, p.vii).

The growing politicisation of indigenous voices brought native issues to the forefront of public awareness; hence, the discussion on new post-war political consciousness uses concepts from anthropology and art to create the possibility of understanding and opening up to change (Deliss 2012, Rabinow 2011a). In fact, many European museums, including Swedish ones, have successively addressed debates on migration and culture diversity, as is evident in the creation of the World Culture Museum in 2004.

Today, it is commonplace to present and reflect on alternative or multiple perspectives on the complexity of societies and their subjects. Museums attempt to enter into collaborative partnerships through research, exhibitions and presentations; archive acquisitions; and the establishment of cultural centres. In addition, museums have also started undertaking projects in conjunction with society. Such collaborative projects are referred to as hybrid assemblages, which Rabinow describes as a composition of ‘pre-existing things that when brought into relations with other pre-existing things, open up different capacities […] and which only come into existence in the relations established in assemblage’ (2011b, p.123). This has led to a change in the traditional relationship between the museum anthropologist and the community. Indeed, not only museums, but also art centres, have tried to become fora for discussions of relevant contemporary issues and controversial exhibitions, and have provided valuable opportunities for public discussion in recent years, with the aim of creating a counter visuality, which lays ‘the claim for the right to look’ (Mirzoeff 2011, 2017, p.24). As Mirzoeff asserts:

The right to look is the attempt to shape an autonomous realism that is not only outside authority’s process but antagonistic to it. Counter visuality is the assertion of the right to look, challenging the law that sustain visuality’s authority in order to justify its own sense of ‘right’. The right to look refuses to allow authority to suture its interpretation of the sensible to power, first as law and then as the aesthetic. (Mirzoeff 2011, p.25)

With regard to the history of representation of ethnic minorities and immigrants in Sweden, I do not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of all its ethnographical museums. Rather, I will try to look at the structure and mechanism for display of the subjects, and how these mechanisms
construct past or present realities, through the lens of museums. Consequently, despite curators’ attempts to encourage self-reflection, I would like to reflect on the true meaning of their structures and explore the movement patterns of their collections and exhibitions from which individual meanings are derived. Although museums are limited in their ability to control broader social attitudes, understanding the system of representation and interpretation and scrutinizing how this system creates social inclusion and exclusion in Swedish society will enable us to engage communities in a shared healing process.

**Nordiska Museet**

Nordiska Museet is the biggest museum of Nordic history in Sweden. It was founded in 1873, and by the 1900s, it demonstrated an interest in collecting objects related to ethnic minorities such as those from the Sámi community, which was primarily recognized as exotic Others. However, the cultural identities of other ethnic groups such as the Roma or the Jews were not very well displayed, and they were identified as a social problem and a threat to national identity (Johansson and Thor Tureby 2016, Silven 2008). When Swedish society decided to deal with exclusion and its exclusionist national history in the mid-1950s, the Swedish government commissioned scholars to approach the problem of incompatible memory and outdated policies and rediscover the history of emigration of the previous centuries (Hoerder 2006). The intention to collect narratives for the museum’s archive in 1979 raised the question of how to document and

---

12 Historically, *Sami* people lived in the three states of the northern part of the Nordic region. Their territory was targeted by Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, and ‘the taxation of the, at the time, predominantly Sami population of the area was a central argument for domination of the territory, and they were thus of importance to the states’ (Lantto 2010, p.545). The division of the border between Norway, Sweden and Finland led to the division of the *Sami* population in the northern area, as they had to become citizens of one of the states. However, they were not part of society; *they were viewed as a nation within the nation* (Lantto 2010). Their position and rights as an indigenous people were ignored, and they were considered inferior to the settlers. At the time that they were Christianized, all magic was forbidden. Many of their objects were seized, and many were burned. In fact, there are different *Sami* items in *Nordiska Museet*, such as *Sami* drums with symbols and pictures on them, but the lack of sources and data makes it difficult to interpret them (Nordiska Museet 2012).

13 *National identity* is often reproduced and reinstated in relation to other ethnic groups. In the 1950s, the growing Swedish welfare society, and folk culture as a national symbol, attempted to produce a certain image of national unity rooted in nineteenth-century Scandinavian national movements (Löfgren 2017). According to Anderson (2006), communities are to be distinguished by the style and practices in which they are imagined. These ‘imagined communities’ are perceptible by identifying the cultural roots of nationalism and the concept of temporality (time); thus, the relationship between members of a nation and events within a community creates an abstract society (imagined community) that constructs the national identity. In this sense, authorization and ‘timeless version of folklife is produced through the processes of selection, categorization, relocation and freezing’ within the context of the national museums or the folklore heritage publications. ‘…but this identity also has to be marked to the outside world as a national otherness’ (Löfgren 2017, p.42-43).
represent the immigrant cultures, and this led to concerns about representation and how they were depicted. For instance, at Nordiska Museet, the Swedish National Museums of Cultural History, through a new workgroup called Samdok, integrated ethnic subjects ‘into all their projects in the form of dynamic and mutual cultural encounter perspectives’ (Magnusson 2001, Silven 2008, p.16).

At Nordiska Museet, special attention is given to the concept of nation and new national consciousness. Therefore, one of the ethnic categories that drew special attention was the Sa’mi, and the resulting aim is to include this ethnic group into Swedish cultural history and address Sa’mi questions related to their material cultural heritage. However, the post-war immigration toned down the earlier interest in Swedish minority groups such as the Sami (Silven 2008). Yet, one of the most important symbols of the changing status of the Sami was the establishment of Sami parliaments in Sweden in 1993, which increased visibility for the Sami, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which came into effect in 1998. This minority policy brought the Nordiska Museet into dialogue and collaborative networks with Sami organisations (Silven 2008). Additionally, the dynamics of identity formation and identity politics, along with descriptions of the life of the people (Silven 2008, 2011), as viewed by the state officials, was another focus area of this policy. However, lack of critical analysis of the Sámi ways of life, beliefs and cultural traits along with their contemporary life, is a critical problem that is seen at the museum. Moreover, the strategies for the representation of indigenous people and minorities are an attempt to spark debate at the national level. As Klein points out, the cultural expression of the Sa'mi represents ‘Sweden’s conquered exotic others’ (2006, p.60).

What distinguishes the Nordiska museum from other museums is the national Swedish culture or ‘Swedishness’ that the museum claims to represent. This statement is affirmed at the very first encounter with the statue of Gustav Vasa, who is often seen as the sixteen-century founder of the Swedish nation-state. Folk culture has become nationalized, and in this process, some elements and patterns of national culture and national memories have been selected and categorized for showcasing. Moreover, the lifestyle and traditions in the Nordic region are

---

14 Samdok was a Swedish network for contemporary studies and collection of objects that was founded in 1977 and operated until the end of 2011. The overall decision-making body was the Samdok Council, which consisted of representatives from national, regional and municipal museums (Sverigesmuseer, 2019).
exhibited as a *national pride or national identity* expressed in relationship to neighbourhood nations, ‘be they defined as Big Brothers or Little Sisters’ (Löfgren 2017, p.42).

Regardless of the topics of collections and thematic exhibitions that represent many aspects of Nordic lifestyle, the mode of some representations is controversial and is not effective in creating an active engagement space for *all* visitors. From my point of view, the Nordiska museum has deployed the strategy of concrete national narratives, even for the exhibition on *Sámi people*, although this, according to the museum, represents the ‘interaction between *Sámi* and Sweden’ (Johansson 2015, p.65).

At the time of writing this thesis, the ‘Folkhem apartment’ exhibit was being displayed at Nordiska Museet. Through this exhibit, we are offered a view of the lifestyle of a particular class of society. This exhibit, according to the museum, represents a typical Swedish home environment from the late 1940s. What is striking from this exhibition is the hierarchical organization of values, and how it is affected by the ‘mechanism of selection and exclusion’ (Foucault 2001, p.173). A decade after the 1940s, the construction of a large-scale housing project (Million Program) was started in the Stockholm suburbs; these dwellings were the shelter of the extant citizens and of the incoming labourers and asylum seekers, as Sweden was rapidly industrializing in the 1950s to 1960s (Arnstberg 2000). How is the lifestyle of this group of people as citizens displayed in the exhibition? Indeed, in the formation of the cultural politics of the nation, there is an inclination towards ‘*producing people*’ as an origin of political power (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). However, I would like to present the question of how assumptions of culture are being formulated at the national level: In what ways, and to what extent, does national culture legitimate certain kinds of cultures while subordinating or segregating others?

When the concept of race is represented by a nation of culturally and ethnically homogenous individuals, the exclusion of foreigners is implicitly legitimised (Mirzoeff 2017, Yuval-Davis et al. 2005).
museum tried to provide historical perspectives about our contemporary questions (Silven 2008); however, the exhibits still indicate a tendency to present images of the self and is based on a homogenous construction of national culture and identity, and this is indicative of the influence of mainstream narratives in this museum. I proceed to discuss how the National Museums of World Culture articulates ideas of diversity, or in other words, in what way the museum ‘applies [minorities] with endless flexibility under the state’s real or contemplated control’ (Anderson 2006, p.184).

The National Museums of World Culture

The National Museums of World Culture is a government agency that was founded in 1999 with the aim of highlighting the issue of migrant and ethnic diversity. Thus, its context is different from that of Nordiska Museet. The National Museums of World Culture focuses on worldviews and the classifications of colonial times by incorporating different cultures, particularly non-Western cultures and those cultures subjected to political control by the European nations. Indeed, along with the Cultural Encounters Group (Kulturmötesgruppen) that was established in 1994, this museum shaped and formulated the new ideas on diversity and inclusion of majorities and minorities (Johansson 2017). Additionally, in 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam was adopted in order to combat discrimination, including discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin and religion or belief. It came into force in 1999, when the Member States agreed that the aim of the treaty should be to grant third-country nationals rights and obligations that were comparable to those of EU citizens (European web site on integration 2017). The establishment of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Treaty of Amsterdam at the EU level, as well as other projects such as Kulturmötesgruppen and Agenda Kulturav, at the national level, drew attention to the essentialist view of immigrants and ethnic minorities. Indeed, issues of migration and questions about social cohesion occupied a dominant place at both the international and national level. Moreover, museums, as a target for cultural policies, have contributed to debates

---

15 Agenda Kulturav was launched in 2004, to produce a policy statement—an agenda—for the effectiveness of the Swedish cultural heritage, and to find new forms of dialogue between different groups in society. The goal was to construct a common platform for regional museums, county administrative boards and the National Heritage Board based on the realities of contemporary society (Agenda Kulturav, Riksantikvarieämbetet 2019).
about migration and understandings about the diversity of society. *Etnografiska Museet, Medelhavsmuseet, Östasiatiska Museet*, and *Bergrummet* in Stockholm and *Världskulturmuseet* in Gothenburg were brought together under the brand of the National Museums of World Culture with the aim of highlighting the common cultural heritage and intercultural perspectives based on the museums’ existing collections.

**Medelhavsmuseet**

This museum, which was founded in 1954, contains significant collections from Ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, the Middle East and the Islamic world (World Culture Museum 2019). Its current exhibitions include the *Cyprus Collection* and *The Expedition is a Knowledge Corner* (archaeological expedition), and they seem to have a greater focus on historical and Swedish subjectivity rather than the social and cultural identities of different times. *Medelhavsmuseet* offers an insight into daily life and death in the context of other ethnic groups based on the role of history and the culture of othering, through the lens of narrative collections and archival methods. For instance, the exhibition *Ancient Greece and Rome* covers the ancient time from the perspective of both emperors and ordinary citizens, together with tomb inscriptions, sculpture reliefs and terracotta figurines of gods, humans and animals; the aim is to take a more in-depth look at the structure of their own society, the language of power, and the thoughts and ideas at that time (Medelhavs Museum 2019). However, my interpretation of this exhibition is that it falls into the old trap of representing cultural ‘others’. It tries to address contemporary themes, but there is no dialogue between the past, the present and, probably, the future. In other words, this mechanism of displaying is representative of a particular reality and self-reality but rejects other ways of understanding. This mode of representation, which is used for controlling our perception of ourselves, according to Mignolo and Vazquez, is an indicator of ‘modern aesthetics hegemony’ (2013).

Through a deeper analysis of Medelhavs Museum, I found out that it was renovated to include Cypriot collections, but it also aimed to include various collections from other regions such as the Islamic world and the Near East, as mentioned above. However, the politics of representation is evident here, too, as the museum seems to prioritise collections from Greece, Cyprus, Rome and Egypt. In fact, the diversity is limited to three or four communities. The only
exception is the existing café at the museum (the Baghdad Café), within which there are connotations to the Arab ethnicity. In the history of the museum, there have been some exhibitions about Turkey, Iran, and other countries, but most of the exhibitions are centralized on representations of Cyprus, Greece, Rome and Egypt.

It is important to pay attention to the way items are catalogued and what gets shown and what remains hidden. All works are unintentionally engaged with visuality, as the centralized authority and power is evident in the politics of invisibility and passivity. There is a compound of objects that control our perceptions, thus laying the conditions of visibility. Gilles Deleuze, in his fascinating study of Foucault, interprets visibility in the following way:

Visibilities are not defined by sight but are complexes of actions and passions, actions and reactions, multisensorial complexes, which emerge into the light of day.
(Deleuze 2006, p.50)

Another perspective is that reluctance to single out ethnic differences, and ignoring and simplifying them, represents the efforts of the curators and scholars towards preventing the exoticization and stereotyping of the *other* (Klein 2006). While there is some assertion and some sustained efforts to encourage learning through a creative environment in exhibiting Egypt,
Cyprus, Rome, and Greece, this museum has failed in its determined attempt to create a space of negotiation and collective voices for other ethnic groups of the Near East.

**Östasiatiska museet**

This museum was founded in 1929. It overlooks the Stockholm harbour and the Royal Palace and has unique collections from China, Korea, Japan, India and Southeast Asia. Alongside the exhibitions, the museum offers various programs with plenty of room for discussion and more in-depth examination of issues. According to the website of the World Culture Museum, they focus more on new perspectives on the history of East Asia and their effect on people’s lives. Additionally, the museum pays attention to how identity and norms are inspired by rituals and routines in the context of East Asia. By adopting more inclusive practices and expanding collections, as well as exploring the relationship between Swedish society and East Asia (Östasiatiska Museet, 2019), this museum has generated a vision of ‘real-life’ in which knowledge and meaning itself are produced (Geismar 2018).

The museum has attempted to conceive of a dynamic space that is available for the public to hold dialogues with Asian cultures and for the reconfiguration of exhibitions that aim to increase internationalization. It is updated regularly with information about the cultural heritage of South and East Asia that is organised through the curatorial practices of the museum. I believe that the core of this museum’s agenda is public education. It reads the history of the past, and tries to reflect on it in the present; that is, it makes an attempt towards remediation by describing, interpreting and displaying the objects in the collection in the context of contemporary meaning (Deliss 2015). Deliss also adds that the remediation of ethnographic collections contributes to transforming objects into a contemporary environment and, thereby, adds additional interpretations to their existing set of references (2015). However, the essence of knowledge can be conveyed in institutional practice through the elaboration of certain concepts. By doing so, according to Foucault, knowledge can be asymmetrically transformed into power and domination. In order to deactivate the dominant structure of knowledge, it is necessary to share knowledge, experience, perception and thinking between museums and ethnic groups (Smith 1999). This approach is evident at the Östasiatiska Museum in their effective collaboration with different organizations.
and experts. For instance, one of the recent exhibitions, ‘Dig in Japan’, presents various collaborations with artists, journalists, authors and Japanologists with the aim of freeing our minds (visitors) from stereotypes and automatic reactions imposed by cultural notions. All the historical and cultural objects are engaged with contemporary issues, and are supplemented with documentary films that help us to understand and interpret Japanese culture in the contemporary context. Along with various activities such as educational events, library readings, and meetings at the museum, which are fused in an effective way, the past and current exhibitions have in diverse ways worked to produce and transmit knowledge.

**Etnografiska museet**

This museum, which opened in 1900, has 8,000 objects on display in a 3,960-m² space, with 800 m² of space reserved for temporary exhibitions (Etnografiska Museet 2019a). According to the website of this museum, their policies reflect the aspiration to create the tangible presence of diversity and magic in the public space; these policies of representation also testify to a complex history, mutual relationships, movements and power structures. From this perspective, in its current exhibition *Indigenous People in 3 Climates*, the museum attempts to demonstrate how, through the ages, ethnic minorities have been displaced due to colonization and exploitation. The exhibition focuses on three geographical areas: droughts in Australia, shrinking rainforests of the Amazon and the ice melting in the Arctic (Etnografiska Museet 2019b).

What is striking in these exhibitions is the mechanism of looking at the subjects with the aim of obscuring lines and bridging the gap between the past and the present through the concept of ‘intersubjective time’ (Fabian 1983). The aim is to create a dialogue within a shared present as coevals. However, what we see in the strategy of these exhibitions, for instance, in the exhibition of *Indigenous People in 3 Climates*, is the complexity in the representation of subjects. McClintock’s famous statement ‘Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance’ (1992, p.86) refers to this complexity and multiplicity, which lies under the surface in this exhibition. Although the exhibition attempts to spark debate about power relations and identity, knowledge

---

16 The term ‘coeval’ refers to belonging to the same physical and typological time. Coevalness, according to Fabian’s analysis, is systemically being denied by anthropologists, who situate objects in a time different from ours (1983).
production has become the central aim of the exhibition, as it draws attention to the aesthetics of white supremacy and the dominant mode of visuality. Hence, this exhibition has become a site for negotiation not with but also about the other ethnic groups, because it features a variety of black and white photographs taken during the ethnographic documentation. This mechanism of exhibiting has the possibility of reproducing the recursive procedure (Deliss 2014). Indeed, my attention is drawn to the moment of production and appropriation of photos (colonial period), wherein lies the ambiguity in this exhibition, and the focus on national and ethnic identity rather than singular individuals with their personal viewpoints.

From where I stand, the activities, collections and exhibitions practices at Etnografiska Museum are evidence of the propensity for the showcasing of other cultures. Along the lines of other museums which have brought the issues of migration and minorities to the forefront of their work, Etnografiska Museum also attempts to become more inclusive of minorities; however, the curator Michel Lee believes that beside the themed exhibitions,

[… it is important to not completely abandon culturally based and geographically based exhibitions, because they still help us to understand where we came from and how we got to be the way we are today (Lee 2017).

In the future, it is necessary to think about how Etnografiska Museum can open its doors further to engage with the question of minorities and how it deals with the methods of representations in order to provide an opportunity to the subaltern to speak (Spivak and Morris 2010). It is also essential to contemplate on the strategies of this museum in dealing with hegemonic knowledge and patriarchal consciousness, which promote the idea that cultures are static and homogenous. Therefore, by changing the methods of displaying ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees, a counter visuality could be curated as an acknowledgement of the power of subjectivity.
This museum is the result of the Swedish government’s decision to rearrange the museum landscape by grouping together four museums, which were part of the National Museums of World Culture, under one umbrella organisation. The World Culture Museum is one of the four museums that underwent this transformation, and in late December 2004, it opened its doors to the public.

The World Culture Museum is a government agency that falls under the purview of the Ministry of Culture. According to the website of the museum, they bear the responsibility of displaying and bringing to life various cultures of the world, in particular, cultures from outside of Sweden, as well as illustrating historical, contemporary, national and international perspectives on culture (World Culture Museum 2019a). The themes of the exhibitions also include local, national, ethnic and gender differences. The museum has a highly advanced architectural design, with a four-storey glass atrium and a wide stairwell positioned at the heart of the building. Since the museum incorporates various activities, it was crucial to create a meeting place where everyone felt at home (World Culture Museum 2019b). Further, the collections in this museum have evolved to meet international standards.
During 2013 and 2014, the museum presented its policy to make open storages, thematic exhibitions and installations accessible to the public in order to help create a world-class museum experience. This was a commendable step towards popularizing the museum. In terms of research, it has focused more on the material culture of Latin America, the broad museological spectrum, contemporary studies and also globalization theory (Muñoz 2011, Lagerkvist 2008). ‘Much of the research is done in close collaboration with Museion, an interdisciplinary centre at Gothenburg University that has connection with all universities faculties and is located in the museum building’ (Lagerkvist 2008, p.91).

The museum incorporates interdisciplinary approaches and thematic strategies with temporary exhibitions, with a focus on present day issues, as part of its aim to address migration and cultural diversity. Effectively, the World Culture Museum attempts to explore the patterns of migration to Sweden and governmental policies on diversity.

An example of its current exhibitions is Crossroads, which presents places within which there is an opportunity to compromise, build coalitions or wind up in a conflict. This exhibition is organized into various sectors, including historical collections, intangible heritage and global exchanges, sustainability and climate change (World Culture Museum 2019c).
One of the subsections of *Crossroads* is a film project called ‘Borderline’, which explores border cities as examples of political geography; the notion of border often recalls symbolically three concepts that we constantly hear about: *illegal immigrants*, *segregation* of black and white, and *permission*. The content and structure of this exhibition depict how this museum tends to reflect on the news, and how it attempts to provide a space of negotiation and aims to examine dominant social narratives. From my perspective, the notion of the border is transformed to *cultural material*, and consequently, structures the frameworks of meanings. As cultural material, the border is converted into a subject that according to Godoy Vega (2014), describes the system of death and the blood right of those who do not belong to this side. Godoy Vega adds that the border is not just the physical, material site, ‘[…] but also its historical dimension, which is what fuels the everyday cultural validation of the divide that enshrines the right to life for some and routinely legally eliminates it for others’ (2014, p.107). Thus, when the notion of the border is altered into cultural material and merged with the historical dimension, how can it continue to exist and operate in varying degrees without losing its semantic features? The answer to this question is the content of this exhibition, which depicts the border as a controversial issue with the capacity to form a normative framework. According to Chow, border ‘creates a hegemonic space of global communication through powers of visibility and control’ (2010, p.10). The representational forms of this exhibition and its narrative content are affirming the productive ways of seeing and understanding and indicate the hierarchical structure of the border that shapes the physical environment. Together with other exhibitions such as Democracy, The Silk Road and Choice of Path, the hierarchical structure of the border concealed in the notion of Crossroads is revealed. In the exhibition Choice of Path, the team of curators sought to investigate how objects from collections and stories could convey encounters and exchanges at different places and times (World Culture Museum 2019c). In this exhibition, the main topics of debate are climate change and immigrants; both are identified as a crisis and linked together through the concept of the choice of path.

While *Crossroads* is an amalgamation of ethnographical collections and contemporary global events in a new way, one of the other exhibitions focuses on the issues of childhood. Further, the focus of the upcoming exhibitions is sustainability and consumption. The timeline of the exhibitions shows that the museum is trying to create a space for experiences, knowledge, and new insights. One of the internationally acclaimed exhibitions in 2013 was *Secret Love*, in which
Chinese artists dared to reveal hidden longing and love that was forced to remain invisible. The artists addressed issues related to sexuality, identity and related norms, which in many cases, were a taboo in China. Through *Secret Love*, the Museum of World Culture wanted to reveal the power of the change underway in China and its significance for the individual citizen. In 2009, an exhibition entitled *Take Action* offered epistemological questions regarding alternative social solutions in life. Further, one of the exhibitions, which was on display from 2004 to 2007, told many stories related to Africa and portrayed the voices of the present and the past as a cultural identity (World Culture Museum 2019c).

The museum makes a sincere effort towards *glocalization*: the refraction of globalization through the local and interaction with core ties (Roudometof 2016, 2018, Hampton 2011). With regard to research, the museum focuses mostly on the material culture of Latin America (Muñoz 2011); however, the politics of representation avoids focusing on a certain ethnic group or nationality, and indeed, this approach (according to Lagerkvist) facilitates the interpretation and integration of discourses on diversity, and limits the division between immigrant culture and heritage, and Swedishness (2008). In my view, the activities of the museum effectively engage people that are diverse not only in terms of ethnicity but also age, class, gender, education and so forth. By providing a space for conflicting perspectives to reach new and diverse audiences, the museum advances its representation and inclusivity agenda as a part of its audience development strategy.

According to the National Museums of World Culture (2013), in the classification of people and cultures from colonial/post-colonial perspectives, multiculturalism and interculturalism are comprehended and challenged in the space of museums. Additionally, the museum has attempted to step away from traditional ways of representation and respond to the increasing diversity created by the migration and globalisation of Swedish society. In this regard, the World Culture Museum is the most successful among all the Swedish national museums, since it tries to deactivate representational situations and examine the passive role of ethnic minorities by bringing various meanings together in specific ways through the creation of specific subject positions. Its effort to represent global diversity by focusing on its complexity, as well as its engagement with many culturally diverse groups living in Gothenburg and including their voices, is striking (Lagerkvist 2008). In relation to this, Grinell (2010) asserts that this museum promotes
an intersectional understanding of the world, by governing over the practicalities of the arena that aims to exercise the voice of those who are in a weak position of power. The contemporary exhibitions in the museum try to create transparency within a space of dialogue by absorbing various groups of participants and audiences. In this regard, Karl Magnusson, the Chief of Staff at the State Museum of World Culture, states that contemporary exhibitions are not only intentions to express the fluidity of cultures, but also are linked to the museum’s aspiration:

   to move more towards a […] thematic way of working. It also comes from the wish to enlarge our audiences and become more attractive towards different target groups (2013, as cited in Iervolino 2013, p.199).

To conclude this chapter, I would like to add that the World Culture Museum, in comparison with other ethnographic museums, makes an effort to create systems of value and knowledge in order to suggest some perspectives about others and offer a seat at the table to minoritarian subjects. It does so by developing various new activities through an assemblage of curatorial authority, collection of history and even exhibitionary technologies. However, a true dialogue presupposes that all subjects are equally positioned. Despite its best intentions, the museum often ‘places people in the position of being passive beneficiaries’ (Lynch 2014a, 2014b, 2017), and by doing so, it triggers hierarchies and preconditions with an unequal relationship between the participants based on the taste of the audiences.

Currently, migrants and minorities are considered to be in a position of passivity and are considered as passive beneficiaries. Therefore, the recognition of the lack of ability of minoritarian subjects to exercise their voice, as such, is a great step towards change. However, while the museums act in an inclusive manner, their practices are exclusive in nature (Lynch 2014a, 2014b, 2017, Brown 2006). This paradox has created a critical situation in museums, but the recognition of this reality in which there is difference between thinking and acting is important.
CHAPTER 3: Window to the world

Tensta area

The Tensta Art Centre is situated in a marginalized area in which 90% of the inhabitants are translocal\(^{17}\) and the rate of unemployment is high. The neighbourhood was constructed between 1966 and 1972, during which period intensive construction of dwellings was being undertaken nationwide (as part of the Million Program, between 1965 and 1974). Tensta is identified as a part of the Million Program and the resulting ‘concrete suburbs’ (*betongförort*) that were created (Arnstberg 2000, p.53). The program (*Miljonprogrammet*) was created and sustained by the Swedish Social Democrat Party and received the support of all parties in the government. Its objective was to provide affordable housing for all inhabitants moving from rural areas to the city, and it was proposed as a solution to the problem of housing shortage (Stockholms Stad 2019). The dwellings in this area were made for incoming labourers and migrants.

Tensta Art Centre

---

\(^{17}\) Translocal refers to a group of people who experience a sense of multiple belongings to different places. Translocality in a descriptive sense means ‘the sum of phenomena which result from a multitude of circulations and transfers. It designates the outcome of concrete movements of people, goods, ideas and symbols which span spatial distances and cross boundaries, be they geographical, cultural or political’ (Freitag and von Oppen 2010, p.5).
The grassroots initiative of the Tensta Art Centre was started in 1998, and it soon became a private foundation with seven employees. However, it is very difficult to examine the history of the Tensta Art Centre, as it has been run by directors and curators who employed a variety of strategies. In the face of some crises, Maria Lind took over as director of the Tensta art centre in 2011 and served in the position until 2018. Cecilia Widenheim took over as the new director in 2019.\textsuperscript{18} The motto of the art centre is ‘We work with radical art in liberal ways that can practice transparency as a mindful tool’ (Tensta Art Centre 2019).

This art centre employs fifty artists, architects, local groups, musicians, sociologists, cultural geographers, philosophers and other practitioners, who together run and handle all the projects, with the aim of using their multiple voices and group dynamic to create. The art centre has expanded in recent years, and the organisation of different exhibitions, seminars, lectures, workshops and public debates at the art centre have converted it to a multifaceted and complex space. For instance, in cooperation with the Stockholm City Museum (StadMuseet), the centre organised an exhibition in collaboration with some municipal schools and facilitated discussions concerning lessons from Swedish 20th century art history. To advance the discussion of the educational function of art in public spaces in Sweden, the art centre organized an exhibition entitled Art Treasures: Grains of Gold from Tensta’s Public Schools that was held from February to December 2018 at the art centre (Tensta Museum 2018).

The Tensta Art Centre has curated some exhibitions at ArkDes, which is the Swedish national centre for architecture and design. It is also a museum, a study centre and an arena for debate and discussion about the future of architecture, design and citizenship. The exhibitions here mostly focus on local history and memory as seen through the eyes of the people who live and work there, as well as the place itself with its many physical layers (Tensta Art Centre 2019). A central aspect of the art centre’s mediation work is that it is based on contemporary art, and that it is developed with respect for the integrity of both the art and the audience. The strategy of collaboration with different institutions has brought different projects to the core of the art centre,

\textsuperscript{18} At the time of writing this thesis, the new director (Cecilia Widenheim) had not taken over as director. Therefore, all the information about the Tensta Art Centre was obtained during the directorship of the former director.
such as Language Café, Silent University, Women’s Café and Citizen to Citizen (These projects are elaborated on in the following section).

**Spatial image of the art centre**

In order to write and gather information about the Tensta Art Centre, it was necessary for me to do my fieldwork at the centre itself and to see the space and the spatial and societal patterns of this centre in terms of its institutional agendas and self-conception as a societal platform. The Tensta Art Centre identifies itself as a ‘possible place for people living in the area to connect with the most interesting artists from all over the world’ (as cited from Engqvist and Möntmann 2018, p.28).

From the central station in Stockholm, I boarded a train directly to Tensta Central. After 20 minutes, when I arrived at the final destination, there were only six or seven passengers (including me), mostly from Asia and Africa, who alighted. The area was surrounded with buildings marked by a functionalist architectural style. They were designed based solely on the purpose and function of the building. In my opinion, the area, as an urban periphery, tries to create a cognitive map by going beyond the subjective existential experience of locals, as a process of wayfinding to an environmental image. Engagement with ‘immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience’ (Lynch 1960, p.5) enables us to recognize and pattern our surroundings. This recognition is based on how we interpret the environmental image, and the two-way process between observer and observed forms this image. Indeed, the way in which we see the dwellers and constructions reproduces our knowledge about this area.

At around eleven o’clock, I was at the Tensta Art Centre. At the entrance, there is a café that is run by an Ethiopian family, with a vegan menu inspired by food from Eritrea and Ethiopia. During my many interviews with visitors, I enquired about the café. All the interviewees, with the exception of two informants, revealed that they liked the café. This is what one of the informants had to say about the reception at the café:
[…] they are a cultural representation and all the people there [at the café] that ate the food [or drink something] are a symbol of peace, together with me in that space.

Another informant said:

[…] I always like to taste international foods, especially from Africa and Asia. Here it is more than a taste! Sometimes, when I am eating a meal there, and I see non-Swedish people here, I feel I am in another land […] taste, sight and smell help me to imagine myself in Africa and Asia. [laughing]

However, some of the informants were sceptical and critical; they felt that the café was representative of some form of elitism and hegemony that ‘involves the rise to dominance of a group that is able to diffuse its culture to all levels of society’ (Chow 2010, p.42). For example, one visitor reflected that ‘[…] the café there serves only vegan food. That for me is following a movement and being part of the culture of the upper elite, that is served only for certain group’.

Along similar lines, another informant added that ‘[…] this is the first time that I am in an art centre in Sweden. I expected to see better than this. A café like in other art centres [...]’.

I perceived this café as being located at the core of the art centre, in an area where local people, most of whom are immigrants rather than ethnic Swedes, and various visitors from other areas sit together. This perspective corresponds with the motto of the Tensta Art Centre, which identifies itself as a ‘window to the world’ (Engqvist and Möntmann 2018, p.28). This window facilitates a space for interaction between people and the new form of identity interconnected with their surroundings, which goes beyond race, gender and class (Anzaldúa 2015). The new form of identity, according to Anzaldúa, is reconstructed and transfigured through local histories of our bodies, and hence, by making a new sense of the past and memory (1999, 2015). Furthermore, the diversity in the staff and their level of cooperation with the institute affirm that the art centre desires to provide tools and capacities for the extensive mediation of diversities. Being at the art centre presented me with ample opportunities to talk with the staff members and ask them about the different projects. Although the events and the Language Café had brought many people to the art

---

19 The informant was a participant of the project Citizen to Citizen. After the project, he met the other participants at the cafe on a weekly basis. Therefore, the café was a symbol of peace for him, because of the different connections he established with the people who were there.
centre, and the staff were occupied with handling the space, I did find moments in which I could to talk with some of them.

Based on my conversations, I gathered that the non-Swedish staff have direct communications with the locals, most of whom are immigrants and refugees. Indeed, these staff members were trying to build a bridge between the national minorities and mainstream society. Due to differences in educational attainment, formal qualifications, language skills and access to local networks between some Asian and African immigrants who had moved to Sweden between 2009 and now, these immigrants needed help in shaping their own affinity and attachment to society, or as Gill says, ‘establish the validity of the needs and aspirations of a new community’ (2010, p.1157), as expected by the host communities. They also needed assistance in being recognized and accepted by other migrant populations and constructing a mental picture of the new community/area. In other words, the requirement here is a holistic awareness that heightens the potential depth and intensity of the dwellers’ experience (Lynch 1960) and this is dependent upon the migrants and community that how to receive and interpret each other.

*Citizen to Citizen* and *Language Café* are projects that target newcomers. They are operated by one of the staff members, who believes that her living long-term in Tensta has led to a deeper comprehension of the migrants, in addition to her pedagogical and migrant background, which allows her to conduct all her activities according to the needs of the migrants who live there. Finally, I decided to interview some people who had participated in the Language Café, in order to explore to what extent these local participants are involved in different projects at the art centre, and to examine to what extent these projects and the art centre are able to create a space of ‘counter visuality’ (Mirzoeff 2011, 2017) and a ‘zone of possibility’ in which ‘the outer boundaries of the mind’s inner life meet(ing) the outer world of reality’ (Anzaldúa 2015, p.122). Since the interviews create a space for reflection, I attempted to encourage the informants to independently reflect on their thoughts, acts and experiences. One of the informants said:

I come here to participate in the Language Café and sometimes come by to join in the [project of] Citizen to Citizen. I have to learn the Swedish language, in order to keep my job—the Language Café in this centre is very good […] I don’t know about art, but when there is an exhibition here, I look around, so sometimes I feel like making an art piece. But more than the art exhibitions, the staff is also very friendly [*laughing*].
Another informant said:

I always come to the Language Café and also the Women’s Café, both of them are interesting. I am looking for a job, […] if I didn’t need to learn [the] Swedish language, I would only come by here and drink tea with maybe one of my neighbours at the café. I haven’t ever been to an art centre, but I feel all the art centres are alike here […] even their decoration.

Another interviewee says:

Well, I can speak Swedish, but when I am free, I like to participate in Language Café, to sit and talk with different people, so, sometimes I make friends […] being between these people [pointed with her hand] reminds me of, my country, my family […] I always go to [the] Woman Café, I learn some crafts there, also I teach some handicrafts to others with [a] crochet hook needle.

Another interviewee adds:

I remember there was an exhibition here, I was here also for [attending] Language Café […] when I walked in the exhibition and saw the art works, I recalled my grandfather […] he used to make some handicrafts, […] sometimes there are somethings here that remind me of my land, my friends […] although here [in the art centre] everything is made by IKEA [laughing], there are somethings that I like […].

While conducting the interviews, I thought of Yuval-Davis’ idea that identities are ‘narratives, stories that people tell themselves and others about who they are, and who they are not, as well as who and how they would like to/should be’ (2010, p.266, Denis-Constant 1995). Indeed, through the use of various forms and concepts in the exhibition practices at the art centre, the metaphor of knowledge as a vision is being reproduced. This knowledge is a way of seeing and recognizing create materials and processes that help to construct identity narratives. When the informants describe the experience of family, art crafts, or feeling of belonging, they create different narratives. In other words, the construction of reflectivity along with the formation of cultural changes, which Anzaldúa describes as a complex healing process, involves emotional psychical dismemberment, splitting of the body, thought and soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, and thereby achieving a new notion of ‘otherness’ and the story of
identity (2015). This story of identity is constructed through a bridge, that is, a ‘boundary between the world you’ve just left and the one ahead […] by crossing, you invite a turning point, initiate a change’ (Anzaldúa 2015, p.137). What is important in this context is not the differences that appear in narrations or processes of identity, but the effect of these differences, which is the result of the changing of material from one medium to another (Barad 2007), and how these effects construct mainstream society or the process of healing.

In my opinion, the art centre attempts to facilitate a space for social interaction. Their clear understanding of the local public, and their ability to listen to those publics’ needs, has transformed their centre into an arena for knowledge production for immigrants and refugees who participate in certain projects. Nearly all of these people have left their lovers, parents, friends and belongings in their homelands. The art centre, as a small-scale institution, attempts to offer a platform to the local public by moving, partially, outside of some form of normativity.

As an example, Silent University, which was started at the Tensta Art Centre in 2013, is an autonomous knowledge exchange platform created by and for refugees and immigrants. This project has changed the conventional understanding of ‘university’ into a ‘method of working with organic learning like study circle’ (Malzacher et al. 2016, p.84). Language Cafe is a part of Silent University and caters to those who wish to learn Swedish, English or Arabic, and meet and share experiences and ideas. Hence, this platform and arena share a category of identity that has a wider scope than social positions or racial labels. I met Hanna Nordell, a producer at the Tensta Art Centre, at the café. I was eager to understand the strategies that had been adopted for producing a cognitive space and social interaction at the art centre. She provided a comprehensive picture of the art centre and acknowledged that it perceives differences instead of highlighting the separate world: that is, the art centre has a grassroots approach and aims to negotiate with different backgrounds. Moreover, describing the Tensta Museum as an important and momentous project that ‘indicates a desire for stability, continuity, and seriousness in discussions about the past, present and the future’ (Tensta Museum 2014), she pointed out:

---

20 Organic learning ‘involves individuals in self-education, engaging them in the research process without pressuring them to practice redundant, rote exercises’. Organic learning is based on prior learning through a variety of explicitly designed information literacy instructions. Some activities in this type of learning include searching for advanced skills and increasing new scholarly knowledge (Nagra, López-Fitzsimmons 2019).
[...] Tensta Museum as a whole doesn’t work in a single format like the exhibition, but it appears in the form of a book club, or as a guided tour and it takes different shapes so it is always with the aim of looking into different layers of history and memory and looking into [the] future in different ways.

Furthermore, she added that the Tensta Museum’s appearance, sometimes, is based on a particular idea or a program being displayed. It aims to create different dialogues with its different exhibitions in collaboration with various organizations such as ARK DES,²¹ for example, the Public Luxury exhibition hosted at ARK DES. Public Luxury attempts to chart the debate about the public realm and raises questions that are highly engaging for the people.

In collaboration with different institutions such as the Women Centre Tensta (Hjulsta), the Tensta Art Centre held an exhibition entitled *Soon Enough: Art in Action* in 2018 as a critique of the concept of the *future* which is triggered by the urgencies of our time. In this sense, the art performances and research, together with running seminars and workshops, aimed to achieve solidarity, and through the lens of the politics of visibility, deal with land rights, collective memory and object histories. Maria Lind, former director of Tensta Konsthall, commented on how art can be an active agent in relation to the exhibition *Soon Enough: Art in Action*:

[...] the past is being recreated for future use at Tensta Kontshall, employing various experiences and modes of knowledge, not least indigenous ones. There is plenty of attention directed towards one of the most pronounced competences of art: formal articulation. How something is being made and shaped, and the meaning that is produced through that, playing with opacity and transparency as mindful tools. (Lind 2018, p.2,3)

There are also some educational projects, such as the Art Club for children, which teaches art techniques and encourages art, as well as the Art Camp, which was created in 2018 with the aim of teaching traditional and new techniques of printing to residents in different areas and was part the project *The Futuristic Resort (Den Futuristiska Orten)* that addressed the promotion of dialogue with people of all classes, genders and ethnic backgrounds. In this project, the artists came from different parts of the world and expressed a strong interest in rural crafts, craftsmanship, and...
food production and natural resources. There was a representation of a kind of cultural identity, and the main target audience for this project was young people. At the art centre, one striking project that reflected on feminist practices and educational methods of social gathering was inspired by the radical educational experiment at the Fogelstad Women’s Citizenship School. As an attempt of the Tensta Art Centre to generate a space of communication with the aim of offering people a room for creating their own version of culture and telling their own story, this project invited curators and artists and offered art courses, seminars and lectures. Furthermore, Women’s Café and Language Café are a part of the Classroom project which was inspired by this school.

The location of the Tensta Art Centre, and the high number of migrants and working-class people in the area, means that this project is very useful for local women, as long as this approach creates a space of negotiation. Since this project represents a rational effort to change the norms and institutions of a society, and to examine the political potential of the produced knowledge, it is imperative to be aware of the risk of changing this model based on the prevailing claim that the oppressed groups ‘have no valid independent interpretation of their own oppression’ (Collins 1989, p.746). According to this claim, the lack of knowledge puts them under the gaze of the majority and exposes their experiences, interpretations of reality and their system of thinking about racist acts (Anzaldúa 2015). Thus, there is a risk of positioning these migrant women as an oppressed group, in a situation where the oppressed are conceived as being in a state of being-looked-at/to-be-looked, and this circumstance might direct society’s paths of identification towards racial stereotypes (Chow 2010).

On taking a closer look at the interviews, it is clear that the complexity of the situations of men and women who are being affected by migration regimes puts them in a vulnerable position. At the beginning of their arrival, they prefer to meet their needs rather than developing, probably, a sensible outlook on life or a deep intuitive understanding of things. In this context, how can they democratize their perception in order to create an interpretation of their own experience of life and make their own voice heard in public? As Collins points out:

---

22 This school was founded after women were granted the right to vote in Sweden in 1921. From 1925 to 1954, the school held courses designed to educate women about their new roles and responsibilities as citizens (Tensta Kontshall, Practicing Politics, 2019).
[…] an oppressed group’s experiences may put them in a position to see things differently, their lack of control over the apparatuses of society that sustain ideological hegemony makes the articulation of their self-defined standpoint difficult. (Collins 1989, p.749).

Hanna Nordell acknowledged that the Tensta staff did question whether these activities provide any space for communication and dialogue for migrants. She stated that engaging people not only inside the art centre but also in the activities outside, by bringing them to museum and exhibitions, is an attempt to create a space of being and communicating—a space for education and cultural production. The other staff members also acknowledged that at the art centre, there are projects designed as advisory activities to support newcomers in meeting their needs, such as making a doctor’s appointment or replying to official letters. Through these assistance projects, the centre also aims to encourage migrants to participate in social activities and have conversations about art and social issues.

The message here is that the Tensta art centre projects represent precise attempts to heal colonized minds and allow people to feel that they are also human beings with dignity. However, in order to create democratic spaces and develop new forms of individual and collective identities, it is important to draw attention to the effect of differences (Barad 2007) by exploring different angles of the process of being/becoming. Raising consciousness about geohistorical locality (memories and habit) and the body is essential for understanding the effect of differences and perceiving the differences from the viewpoint of a particular locale and specific local history (Barad 2007, Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015). Undoubtedly, the strategies at the Tensta Art Centre are based on the creation of a space for various dialogues such as the concept of time and space (as evident in the exhibition *Let the River Flow*), and also understanding reality and employing various experiences and modes of knowledge. However, in my view, there is still a risk of epistemic domination, if the art centre wants to be take on the role of being a saviour for immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities (Lynch 2017). Different types of exhibitions and collaborative projects based on the perspectives of various narrators are the possible ways of delinking from epistemic modes. The Tensta Art Centre has already taken up this challenge, but it needs to make more efforts towards practising transparency.
At the time of my observations and interviews, the exhibition *Let the River Flow* was on display at the art centre. This exhibition was the result of a three-year dialogue with scholars and artists across Sami, that involved not only a reflection on the memory of the protest movement against the construction of a large dam across a river in Sami in 1978–1982, but also a reflection on ‘the place of Sami art amongst the new global, modernist museologies dedicated to expanding the canon of art history to a world scale’ (Tensta Kontshall, *Let the River Flow* 2019, p.2). The vantage point of this exhibition is the hint of a very politicized and powerful decade in Sami history. In the 1970s, the broad movement across civil society, including the Sami people, and international solidarity revamped a sense of belonging to the native culture, myths and epistemologies among the Sami people. This was a form of delinking (Mignolo 2007) and transforming, and consequently, rethinking of the dominant discourses in society and modernity, which is the existing system of knowledge production. What I would like to emphasize on in this exhibition is the mechanism of displaying the indigenous perspectives, through their culture, myth, crafts and traditional values, which are utilized as a mediator between the past and the present by contemporary artists. This exhibition reminds us of an epoch in indigenous history when a social justice movement gained strength against exploitation in the Nordic region, and simultaneously, it calls to mind the threat of climate change and how it could impact many indigenous people around the world. Indeed, this holistic view of the situation of indigenous people is what makes this exhibition special.

When I was at the exhibition, a visitor took the time for an interview. I asked questions on how much time he spends in art galleries and why he chooses the Tensta Art Centre. He said that he is interested in new spaces in which art is being presented, but he acknowledged that he was distrustful of the Tensta Art Centre the first time he visited, mainly because of its geographical

---

23 ‘The A`lta` action grew in reaction to the profound impact that the flooding of large areas of Sampi would have on Sami communities, their livelihoods, cultural heritage, as well as on their role as environmental protectors’ (Tensta Kontshall, *Let the River Flow* 2019, p.2).
location in a suburb of Stockholm. However, the various activities in this art centre made him visit occasionally. He added:

[…] the most important is the way you can come there, relax, eat, watch and take part in discussions and just ‘be’. That is important. The small rooms are small enough to feel like your living room and the more spatial ones aren’t too big to feel intimidating. Both contributing to make it a good place to meet with friends.

What attracted my attention in this interview was his interest in returning to the Tensta Art Centre, because he felt it was a contact zone in terms of exhibiting—a flexible space in which various subjects could be displayed. He also believed that through different activities, this space has turned to a practice space for people, particularly immigrants (he pointed out to the diversity of staff and people at the centre). In this sense, I thought of Michel de Certeau’s space that could be transformed to readable places (1984), where there was a possibility for minorities and diversities to liberate their creative and imaginative potential, and heal their wounds (Anzaldúa 2015, Mignolo 2013). I also thought of the potential of this place for acting as a nepantla, which in Anzaldúa’s interpretation is a space where one can ‘include what has previously been excluded or has not been part of consensual reality’ (2015, p.84), as a form of a place for adopting of the bodies to the cultural environment through their local histories. Indeed in Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s formulation is the Theory on Flesh: ‘the one where the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a political born out of necessity’ (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981,p.23). This space also allowed the construction of different forms of narratives that encourage visitors to question and challenge their established values.

All the activities at the art centre are interconnected with each other. Most of the projects are designed to include minoritarian subjects through different ways of narrating and organizing that put all the subjects in a situation of conversation with each other.
These projects, along with all the participants, create a system of performance rather than representation. Feminist practices, activist groups, pedagogical experiments and all the other forms of activities at the art centre attempt to grasp what political potential and what modes of knowledge can be produced to include all diversities and heterogeneities. This approach has the possibility of creating a new form of assemblage, by gathering related or unrelated materials/people, and this is proof of the creative symbiosis that makes this centre special.

Figure 7: Language Café, Tensta Art Centre

Source: Samineh Asri (2019)
CHAPTER 4: Conclusion

Discussion and Conclusion

In this last chapter, I will sum up the results of this study. My aim was to explore, identify, and question how the complexes of visuality, as a perpetuation of colonial effects in contemporary times (Mirzoeff 2011), establishes meaning and probably becomes a tool to control the perception of, and interpretation by, the audiences of ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees in exhibition spaces. I took a close look at the Tensta Art Centre because of its activities, projects and its claim to be multivocal and mediative. Indeed, Mediation takes the form of a cultural space at the art centre, which ‘sees its café as the most important vehicle for mediation among many others, which together serve to identify, create and debate commonly shared concerns’ (Löfgren 2015, p.30).

I have paid particular attention to the content of some of the exhibitions and projects at the Tensta Art Centre, with the aim of investigating the complexity in the constitution of processes of domination and resistance. In other words, in this case study, I am attempting to understand the complexes of visuality and conflicts that could create by unequal relationships between the people who engage with projects or programs in exhibition spaces. This visuality separates those that it visualizes (Mirzoeff 2011), and it has the ability to disrupt the connection between minoritarian subjects and exhibition spaces through classification, separation, and aestheticization. Although, today, certain practices and widespread discourses aiming to expose audiences to a particular knowledge based on a certain set of values are becoming outdated, and interest in the model of experiencing the world outsides the doors of galleries and museums has increased, understanding the effects created by differences is more necessary than ever. In a situation where various elements in the exhibition spaces are being assembled through curatorial and artistic practices and collaborative projects with various stakeholders, such as immigrants and refugees’ organizations, we need different ways of seeing and understanding in order to forge and sustain multiple contradictory connections.

A striking aspect of the Tensta Art Centre is its special position in the area as a connector with locals through its projects. In other words, this engagement with people in the area has become a contemporary model of assemblage in which locals who are immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities share insights from their experiences through collaborations with various projects at the
art centre. Moreover, it gives them a chance to make a meaningful connection with the art centre’s activities.

I realised that apart from analysing the Tensta Art Centre, it is also important to investigate other ethnographic museums in order to explore the extent of their engagement with immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities, given that they were former facilitators of colonial and nationalist projects. While the disobedience of artists and curators has already become part of a new trend in post-critical theory and decolonial thought, the needs of migrants and ethnic minorities need to be addressed by giving voice to them. My analysis revealed that the main focus of most ethnographic museums is a narrative in which a system of complicity is built through curatorial practices around exhibitions, collections or projects that speak from positions of power and hegemonic thought. This could be construed as a model of autocratic leadership—a form of visuality that might develop new means of normalizing the boundaries. This is a kind of representation that emphasizes on culture as a language: according to Rancière, the moment that sight becomes invisible is the point ‘[…] where saying and seeing have entered into a communal space without distance and without connection […]’ (2007, p. 47). Thus, the ethnographic museums’ actions have always aligned with hegemonic discourses in practice, and therefore ethnographic museums always been political as instruments of government rather than sites of neutrality. Yet, we should draw attention to their current strategies in contemporary debates that reveal their endeavour to shift and to revise their definition. (Foster and Message 2019).

In my thesis, I have attempted to understand the modes of representation at the National Museum of World Culture and Nordiska Museum too. Indeed, I have discussed how their practices and their exhibitions are articulated as political projects of belonging constructed around the notions of nationalism and critical multiculturalism, that is, how the creation and dissolution of boundaries occurs between national communities by including and excluding minoritarian subjects in the narration of cultural heritage.

In my analysis of the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, I found that this ethnographic museum asserts the new methodological practices of curating and interpretation and identifies itself as a space where the objects have the potential to convey and to experience encounters and exchanges of different values. However, in comparison with the Tensta Art Centre, this museum is not open enough to the local public. What I wanted to demonstrate with this
comparison is how large-scale institutions, such as the Museum of World Culture, have tried to reach out to audiences, in addition to their attempt to becoming a space that encourages empathy, transparency, curiosity and critical thinking in engaging with immigrants, refugees, and their history and stories (Engqvist and Möntmann 2018). In this way, the museum understands that it is in a position of shaping audience opinion rather than an active public sphere and zone of change. In contrast, the Tensta Art Centre is capable of generating a vital process for ethnic minorities and immigrants who are in the midst of transformation. This is important, given the politicization of migration in recent years and the colonial dimensions of multiculturalism that has had a drastic effect on the formation of minoritarian subjects and cultural differences (Gunew 2004), which create a nomadic border that can intensify the sense of alterity. Therefore, the centre’s effort is focused on facilitating a space that allows various agents to explore and engage with their own different forms of existences and experiences. Moreover, the art centre has the potential for a dialogic praxis that can disrupt dominant logics and imaginaries in knowledge production through border thinking, zone of change and delinking, and thus, provide the possibility of understanding one’s own being and perception (Anzaldúa 2015, Fanon 1970, Mignolo 2007). This represents an endeavour by the art centre to create intercultural dialogue and a meaningful context for the lives of the minorities (Winkler 2016).

Ultimately, in this thesis, I sought to explore how complexes surrounding the notions of visibility/invisibility, along with the complexities of migration and the phenomena of minorities, affect the understanding of diversified populations. Specifically, I have tried to apply and analyse the concepts of representation and visibility/invisibility in exhibition places: on the one hand, I analysed the conditions for the creation of the concept of the de/colonial plane of thinking in the context of museums and galleries, and on the other hand, I engaged in the creation of the potentialities of these concepts in my case studies. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that we must try to ‘give it [the concept] the forces it needs to return to life’ (1987, p.503), through active experimentation with concepts, rather than critical analysis only. Therefore, I placed these concepts on a map, and then traced and analysed them in relation to the specific cases. This research practice helped me to demonstrate the ways of producing knowledge that can be used when discussing the crisis of visibility/invisibility, and the possibility of this knowledge (or language) becoming complicit in the perpetuation of a problem. Finally, I looked at the role of
local institutions in healing and creative symbiosis, which make these places an active public sphere that is open to locals and a space where there is a possibility for stories to be told.

**Bibliography**


University Press.


Deliss, C. 2015, 'Materiality and the Unknown, Dating, Anonymity, the Occult', in *Opinions L’INTERNATIONALE Books* 2015, published online by Europe programme of the European Union.


Moraga, C., and Anzaldúa, G. 2015, This bridge called my back: writings by radical women of color. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Muñoz, A. 2011, From curiosa to world culture. The history of the Latin American collections at the Museum of World Culture in Sweden, GOTARC. Series B, Gothenburg archaeological theses, Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg.


