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across

anthropology

troubling colonial legacies,
museums, and the curatorial

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Material Kin: “Communities of Implication” in Post-Colonial, Post-Holocaust Polish Ethnographic Collections¹

Erica Lehrer

“Objects, then, make subjects; subjects make objects.”

Paul Basu, *The Inbetweenness of Things*²

“The tragedy and misery of things was comparable to the tragedy and suffering of people.”

Rachela Auerbach, “Lament Rzeczy Martwych” [“The Lament of Dead Things”]³

Introduction⁴

Contemporary museums of national culture – a broad genre that includes ethnographic museums, folk museums, *skansens* (open-air museums), and their ilk – are diverse inheritances: of colonial exploration and rule, empire- and nation-building, modernity, and industrialization. They bear the imprint of European epistemologies developed to make sense of and manage the anxieties of identity and difference, social and cultural change, and the demands of ethno-national politics. Their legacies of collecting, categorizing, displaying, and looking not only reflect but also continue to impact relations among groups of people, mediating differently-situated visitors’ senses of connectedness to or distance from each other in the present day.

Such culture-focused museums tend to propose relationships between people and things – often in the language of ‘heritage’ – that fall on two poles: universalist/free-choice relationships (where anyone may claim as heritage the items that feel integral to them) and descent-essentialist relationships (where objects are understood as physical manifestations of the world views of the groups that created them – so-called ‘material culture’). The latter, origins-based view – expressed in the notion that objects are uniquely linked to their ‘source communities’ – may be broadly politically progressive for groups attempting to re-claim items removed from their communities under colonial conditions. Yet this framework can also re-inscribe erroneous colonial categorizations of human collectivities, along with ossified stereotypes about them. The former, identification-based view, on the other hand, risks eliding the ways that people are unequally inscribed into more and less chosen cultural, historical, political, and affective entanglements with objects.

Betraying the insufficiency of these museum frameworks are what I will call “awkward objects”,⁵ items that bear traces of forgotten or suppressed social histories that both index, and link across communities in ways that raise questions about both ‘source’ and ‘heritage.’ These are not innocent categories. The materials in question reference enduring legacies of inter-group violence, some of which are sustained by ongoing museum epistemologies and curatorial strategies. Helping us think through these issues are three kinds of objects in particular, awkwardly linked to Jewishness in Polish ethnographic collections: the hybrid, the caricature, and the commemorative. These items point towards an alternative conceptualisation – “communities of implication” – that may prove useful for situating and interpreting a range of accessions in diverse museum contexts. I propose adding this term to a growing vocabulary that will be required to speak to the necessary decolonial social and cultural work of redress, repair, recovery, and reimagining that goes beyond (although does not replace) property restitution, which currently dominates the global conversation.⁶ New language is needed both to grasp the full range of relationships and of injustices referenced by museum objects, as well as to develop both political and curatorial strategies to make these implications visible in museum spaces.

Colonial conversations

Recent debates about the status of colonial-era objects in European national museums (Hunt 2018) – think Benin bronzes or Elgin/Parthenon marbles – have grown out of post-World War II shifts in moral sensibility and attendant

human rights discourse. These sensibilities and discourses remain biased, however, towards models of identity embedded in a national framework. In this framework, a group's claims to having a distinct cultural (and thus potentially national) identity are strengthened by the ability to point to a collection of 'our things,' or 'material culture.' National museums of culture have thus taken for granted particular notions of human-human and human-object relations that privilege the 'boundedness', 'homogeneity', and 'completeness' of groups, who are 'owners' of their cultural objects. These notions, in turn, help establish claims regarding the restitution or retention of what has come to be called "cultural property" (Barkan 2002) They also have consequences for curatorial practice; peoples who are characterised by cultures and possess objects expressive of these cultures are displayed together as a logical, self-evident set.

'Universalist' Western European museums have been increasingly pressed to publicly recognise the existence of complex and diverse meanings and social relationships that pertain to the objects in their collections, given the far-flung itineraries that led them there. Predictably, the administration and patronage of hegemonic museums are biased towards concepts that uphold the status quo of housing and managing collections in their current institutional homes, and they are correspondingly reluctant to embrace alternative notions of relatedness that might question these relations of power. These museums' elites focus on how objects originating in overseas colonies came to be the cultural property or heritage of the collectors' and museums' communities – becoming part of, say, British, French, or German patrimony – by virtue of the decades or sometimes centuries they have been in their care (ICOM 2004). While such a 'retentionist' idea is not without intellectual merit, it underpins conservative arguments that obscure the frequently unethical facts of the provenance histories in question. Indeed, European nations subscribe to juridical principles of property – for example the French principle of "inalienability" – mobilised today ostensibly to protect major victims of the post-colonial trafficking of cultural objects, such as multiple countries in Africa.⁷ Still, national governments refuse to apply these principles retroactively, thereby all but ensuring that their own collections, even those partly based on colonial plunder, are now the legal property of their new (present) owners.⁸ To correct such injustices, juridical innovation is needed.

The idea of "source communities" or "the people from whom collections originate" (Peers and Brown 2003: i) has been a progressive development in the debate about cultural property, strengthening claims for the return of objects from museums to their cultural (and typically geographical) contexts

of their birth. The term relates to the indisputable notion that museum objects and collections can be crucial scaffolding that helps maintain the identity and support the survival of communities who have been historically marginalised, embattled, or oppressed – and from whom significant objects have been misappropriated. Yet the term “source” privileges an understanding of identity that is fixated on origins and risks replicating the historical classifications of social groups imposed by colonial institutions (Landkammer 2017: 278) (Modest 2012). It also naturalises the ‘universal’ museum and its conservationist regime as the given endpoint for objects no longer in everyday use (as opposed, for example, to natural decay, burial, or destruction). Further, while doing important decolonising work, the notion of a “source community” re-inscribes a dominant (and socially hermetic) Western idea of “one object, one culture, one progenitor”.⁹ While the 2018 Sarr-Savoy report, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage*, commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron, is being heralded as a watershed, restitution is a narrow solution that overlooks a range of messier historical and contemporary injustices. Per some of the report’s critics, restitution also risks both self-satisfaction and additional prestige conferred on the very museums that benefitted from the original wrongs, lacks a full moral accounting, and leaves fundamental colonial structures in place (Azoulay 2019).

Decolonising (post-Holocaust) Eastern Europe?

To portray restitution as the conclusive ‘decolonising’ response to colonial museum practice privileges post-colonial concerns related to Western Europe, specifically those contemporary nation-states that had ‘new world’ empires with overseas colonies to plunder. The spoils here accrued to one – the European – side. Poland provides an instructive counter-example. The country has been described as an ‘internal’ European coloniser, ruling over great swaths of today’s Baltics, Belorussia, and Ukraine during the early modern era. Yet Poland was subsequently ‘colonised’ for over 120 years by Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary beginning in the late eighteenth century until 1918, later by Nazi Germany, and then the Soviet Union during and (as a satellite state) after the Second World War for almost a half century, until 1989. Polish museums, in their epistemologies, collections, architectures, and *raison d’être* reflect this complex legacy.

Colonialism, however, was not only a grand system of domination, theft, and redistribution, and its effects cannot be reduced to the vagaries of military, economic, or political aggression. It was also the highly successful

attempt to replace a vast diversity of world views with a largely elite European-Christian perspective. Museums (along with universities, churches, and schools) played a key role in inculcating these. Eastern European national ‘museums of culture’ as a form were cut from epistemological cloth broadly shared with those in Western European metropolises – part of the wider heritage of European colonialism, empire-, and nation-building.¹⁰ Such museums can be split into two main types: those based on *Völkerkunde*, or studies of faraway, exotic others, and *Volkskunde*, studies of the internal, peasant other, a class-based ‘exotic,’ celebrated as the source (and proving the territorial rootedness) of a distinctive, essential cultural self. If *Völkerkunde* museums naturally burgeoned in those countries with overseas colonies, *Volkskunde* museums were crucial in societies struggling for national recognition or liberation under nineteenth-century imperialism, and continued to be nurtured as part of the emancipatory ideology shaping the ‘national sciences’ under twentieth-century Eastern European socialist rule (see Lozoviuk 2005; Stocking 1982; Vukov 2011).¹¹ In Poland, the two types were blurred, with national culture privileged in permanent displays, and ‘exotic’ collections developed piecemeal from diverse sources at different historical moments.¹²

‘Material culture’ collections assembled by museums in nations without clear histories of imperial plunder may not be embroiled in current property restitution debates that focus on post-colonial nations vis-à-vis their former European rulers. Even so, the question of what such national culture museums are for, what roles they play, and how they frame ‘culture’ in general, as well as how they depict specific human groups, are complex, and still largely unasked questions in Eastern Europe. Polish ethnographic museums have also been largely spared the glare of critical attention directed towards their counterparts in the West in part because such attention often emanates from representatives of aggrieved communities who have historically been ill-represented by such museums. Poland, due to the combination of genocide, out-migration, and territorial shifts, has lost its historical multicultural character, and is today more than 96% White and Roman Catholic. Further, the link between today’s majority citizenry and their largely peasant roots (as represented in these museums) has been effaced in Polish collective memory (Leder 2014; Lehrer and Sendyka 2019a).

While Eastern European nations have not escaped colonial legacies, their broad indifference to the divisive debates that wrack their Western counterparts are also a result of the additional aftermaths of their own that they must confront. In Poland, layered onto the shared European colonial epistemologies embedded in the museum form, are structures of thought, practice, and habitus that reflect both the country’s particular historical experiences

with feudalism, partition, dismemberment, and more recently World War II, a half century of communist rule, and the lingering and (at times officially) muffled trauma of the Holocaust. These are the controversial ‘hot topics’ in the Polish public sphere, where colonialism (and its range of attendant legacies – particularly in museums) is generally seen to be someone else’s problem.¹³

Because of this palimpsest of historical injuries, attending to Polish ethnographic collections points to a range of issues not captured in the discourse of ‘ownership’ and ‘source’ emanating from restitution debates, but which are nonetheless relevant to thinking through the aftermaths of violence. These may, in turn, suggest a new vocabulary that can enrich our treatment of objects that have been ‘museumised’ in the wake of large-scale oppression and injury. Doing so will also help link discussions of post-coloniality and decolonisation with post-Holocaust and post-socialist conditions, as a number of prominent scholars have been calling for in recent years (Chari and Verdery 2009; More 2001; Rothberg 2009). The goal is not to collapse significant differences in historical experience, but to build broader solidarities around shared struggles against erasure, exclusion, and injustice in and via the treatment of material heritage in contemporary national museums of culture.

The murder of most of Poland’s 3.5 million Jews during World War II and the Nazi occupation was a highly public cataclysm for their Catholic neighbours. As described by historian Irena Grudzińska-Gross,

[t]he extermination of European Jews was happening mostly on Polish territory and in front of the eyes of Polish citizens – it was impossible not to notice it. One third of Warsaw was first walled off and then burned; across Poland Jews were expelled, assembled, transported, walked, and demonstratively humiliated before being murdered; tens of thousands escaped and tried to survive in cities, villages, and the countryside. (Grudzińska-Gross 2016: 41)

Public knowledge about this crime was censored during the subsequent decades of communist rule in Poland and even today is still a subject of “contentious heritage” (Macdonald 2016), in part because of disputes regarding the extent and quality of Polish complicity (Gross 2001, 2012; Grabowski 2013).

An enormous amount of tangible heritage was also left behind as a result. What are Poland’s largely Catholic citizens today to make of the orphaned objects that survived the human genocide? The material traces of the lives of their prior compatriots – from synagogues and cemeteries to photographs,

housewares, and religious ritual objects – range across local everyday landscapes (Auerbach 1946; Shallcross 2014). These objects beg some sort of relation with their remaining neighbours, who typically have deeply ambivalent associations with them, worsened by nationalist discourse that tends to whitewash the country’s less-glorious historical episodes.

Much (particularly Eastern) European Jewish material heritage – albeit in immovable, sometimes monumental architectural form rather than objects in museum collections – may be seen as ‘disinherited heritage’. It constitutes the built heritage that has become detached from its “source community” via genocide, out-migration, loss of knowledge or identification, or lack of resources for meaningful present-day stewardship. Objects perceived as conventionally valuable, especially those that had individual owners, have their legal claimants.¹⁴ But what about the rest? In their radically changed demographic contexts, these material traces of the past have become “dissonant heritage”, in that they do not fit the dominant national imaginary of the surrounding, non-Jewish population, and as such disturb the ‘chosen’ heritage narratives promulgated by many Eastern European national governments today (Ashworth and Tunbridge 1996).

Indeed, the sense that these dissonant objects are liminal, that they have been ‘incompletely’ inherited (and perhaps not entirely *disinherited*), is suggested by the widespread term for such objects or properties that so many Catholic Poles personally or communally inherited: *pożydowskie*, or “post-Jewish.”¹⁵ While neglect, vandalism, or even destruction are unfortunate and common options for these misfit materials – as is simple appropriation – progressive Polish artists, culture brokers, and activist groups working since the first decade of the 2000s have illustrated the potential for ‘re-inheriting’ post-Jewish objects, creating heightened awareness, and developing educational initiatives to foster new caretaker communities and create expanded, pluralistic identifications.¹⁶ How may we describe the relationship between these people and objects? We also lack a term that captures the emergent communities that may ‘newly’ form around these kinds of objects and sites.

“Awkward objects”, significant Others

A different category of awkwardly ‘post-Jewish’ things can be found in Polish ethnographic museums. These are remarkable objects made by non-Jewish Poles, but which in some way represent or register the memory of and imagination about Jews and testify to these two communities’ long territorial

co-presence. Examples of “awkward objects” drawn from the Kraków and Warsaw ethnographic museums defy single-origin stories and challenge the common terms of decolonising museology.

The Kraków museum is particularly fascinating, not least because it sits in the middle of the city’s historical Jewish quarter. The neighborhood was emptied of its human Jewish culture-bearers by the Germans during World War II and its Jewish ‘heritage sites’ left largely derelict during the socialist period. Though over the past three decades an explosion of Jewish heritage revival activity has blossomed in the quarter, little of this has touched the museum’s core displays or interpretive frameworks (Lehrer 2013). The museum’s permanent galleries of Polish ‘folk culture’ remain largely, at times strikingly absent of Jews (10% of the pre-war Polish population) and lack context for understanding the awkward references to Jewishness that do exist, both of which I have described elsewhere (Lehrer and Murzyn-Kupisz 2019, Lehrer 2016: 49–51). This is in stark contrast with the fact that the museum’s annex is named ‘Esther’s House’ (*Dom Esterki*) for the legendary Jewish mistress of King Kazimierz the Great. Indeed, the main building’s façade is adorned with a plaque depicting the king welcoming the Jews, who were fleeing persecution in German lands, to Poland in the Middle Ages – a key element in Polish national mythology. What is more, the building itself housed a Jewish school in the interwar period. The museum also stands across the street from the edifice that housed the offices, library, and kosher kitchen of the (tiny) local Jewish community from 1946 until 2015. The museum’s wartime director, Tadeusz Seweryn (b. 1894), was posthumously awarded the Yad Vashem Institute’s title of *Righteous among the Nations* in 1982 for his clandestine work to save Jews in World War II, and there is a (thus far undocumented) story that recently emerged that Jews were also hidden during the war in the building that would later become the museum’s annex.

Despite this surrounding density of Jewish historical referents, attention to Jewish co-presence in Poland – either historically or in the present day, including as potential viewers of the museum’s displays – has clearly not been a curatorial priority. The only interpretive material related to a group of ratchets (wooden noisemakers) on display in the “spring customs” room of the permanent exhibit of “Polish folk culture” in the Kraków museum ‘reads’ them as Catholic Polish *terkotkas* (or *kołatkas*) used in Easter ritual processions or in place of bells to call locals to church.¹⁷ Yet they could just as easily be Jewish *groggers*, used by local children each time the villain Haman’s name is said during the traditional reading of the Book of Esther on the holiday of Purim. (That is how they appeared to this author, having played with similar ones as a Jewish child in the USA.) Indeed, the relation of the Jewish *grogger* to

the Christian *kolatka* – by way of the Polish springtime tradition of the burning of Judas, described below – adds an important element of socio-religious hostility and tension to the relationship of the ‘two’ objects (Kalman 2017).

From a curator’s point of view, very small interpretive interventions could reframe the objects in terms not of simple provenance (and associated, normative function), but of “implication”: the addition of an explanatory label connecting the two traditions that employ the same object, historical and contemporary photos of the two religious communities using them, and/or reminiscences from Jewish and Catholic individuals who played with them.¹⁸ This kind of addition could remind museum visitors that, prior to World War II, Poland was (and to a very small extent is still today) a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society; doing so, it would place Jews within the story of ‘Polish culture’ from which they have, in significant ways, been erased. It would also challenge the common myth that Jews lived entirely separate social lives from their Catholic neighbours, a misconception held equally by Poles and foreign Jews. The display would tell a challenging story of cultural proximity, exchange, and hybridity – including a story of cultural boundary maintenance via mutual endogamy and prejudice, as well as anti-Jewish

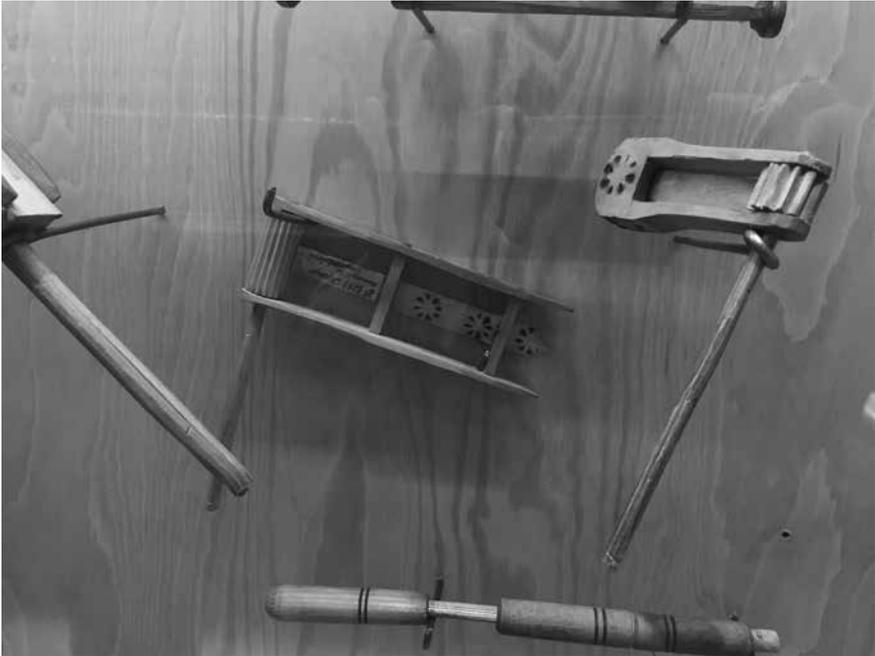


Fig. 12.2 Terkotkas on display at the Kraków Ethnographic Museum (Brzezowa near Myślenice, 1929), gift from the girl’s junior high school. Object inventory no. 3764. © Erica Lehrer.

symbolic (and real) violence. An implication-minded approach would challenge both communities to understand ‘their cultures’ in more expansive ways than those that colonial-era ethnographic presentations and nationalist narratives have encouraged, and to acknowledge the contemporary political, educational, and emotional impact such museums have.¹⁹ Similar treatments could be applied to many areas of social and cultural life that are or could be exhibited, from carpentry to papercutting, money-lending, and inn-keeping.

Also in the Kraków Ethnographic Museum (MEK) are objects that represent Jews through the eyes of Catholic Polish peasants, including masks, comical rocking wooden figurines, figural beehives, and a photograph of a straw effigy of ‘Judas’ hanging from a tree. These objects were used in Catholic seasonal rituals and strongly connected to the realm of magic, but they cannot be justly understood without reference to a broader European history of stereotypical and often anti-Jewish imagery, nor without attention to the contemporary affective responses of Jewish (and non-Jewish) museum visitors to them. Still, how are these objects ‘related’ to Jewish communities? The question points to a broader range of ways a community can be the ‘source’ of an object. Here Jews function as the precursors for a stereotype. The resulting artificial ‘stand-ins’ serve as proxies for the real community and are subjected to the out-group’s feelings and fantasies about them. Similar to the proliferation of Jim Crow-era ‘memorabilia’ depicting Black people in racist ways (Patterson 2010) or the plethora of images and mascots of Native Americans in U.S. popular culture – legacies of colonialism and slavery – these Jewish caricatures also perform inter-group hierarchies and relations and thereby help keep them in place.

A black-and-white 1970s photograph on the gallery wall adjacent to where the masks hang shows local Polish men and kerchiefed women in colourful skirts from a provincial town laughing while another man, dressed as a Jew complete with mask, mounts a life-sized puppet depicting a traditional horned beast, or *turoń*. Clearly amused by the bawdy antics of this Catholic Pole dressed as a Polish Jew, what had been these local people’s relations with their actual Jewish neighbours? And in the postwar period, what were their memories of them? In pre-war times, such costumes were often assembled out of clothes stolen from or forcibly demanded from Jewish neighbours, who were often required to pay a ransom for the Judas figure, hanging high in a tree near Jewish homes, to be cut down. Jews learned to stay indoors as much as possible during the Easter season due to threats of violence stirred up by such rituals, which can also be discerned in the lyrics of Christmas puppet plays featuring similar trickster Jewish characters (Tokarska-Bakir 2011).

Due to the traditional ethnographic style of display, these objects are presented as if they belong to a distant past and a bygone culture, divorced from contemporary concerns. Yet ‘freighted’ objects like these are not inert or outmoded. The stereotypical figurines can be purchased in updated forms – today holding shiny gold coins for luck in business – in shops just outside the museum’s front door. These newer types of figurines, which draw still closer to explicit anti-Semitic stereotypes, have been viewed by the Kraków Ethnographic Museum curators as irrelevant to the ‘bygone’ culture on display in the museum, as I was informed when preparing my own exhibition in the museum in 2013. School children gaze up at these Jewish caricatures



Fig. 12.3-7 Left to right: Figural beehive (Zabierzów, late nineteenth century; archival photo); masks worn by “Jew” character in Christmastime carolling groups, (Silesia, 1956); Emaus Jewish figurine (early twentieth century). Photographs by Jason Francisco

on popular school trips to the museum. Many of them will never meet a real Jew, but it is hard to imagine that they would not connect the figurines in the museum's displays to those they see in their local stores. These objects are also political. The photo of the Judas effigy is no longer on display, removed from the "spring customs" gallery during renovation in 2011 (Kultura Ludowa 2015). If we are concerned with "implication", however, it should be. The climax of an anti-(Muslim) immigrant rally in the Polish city of Wrocław in November 2015 involved the burning of an effigy of a Hasidic Jew – a close kin of the one in the museum's 'Judas' photo – holding the flag of the European Union while the crowd chanted "God, Honour, and Fatherland."²⁰ In addition, on Good Friday of Easter 2019, inhabitants of the Subcarpathian town of Pruchnik revived the 'hanging of Judas' tradition, with members of the crowd (which included many children) shouting to deliver to the straw Jewish effigy an extra five lashes for 'reparations', referring to contemporary debates over Jewish calls for reparation for expropriated World War II property.²¹ For a national museum of Polish culture, whose slogan is "my museum, a museum about me," the use of 'folk' traditions in xenophobic present-day politics offers much to be discussed.

A third type of object that begs pluralist contextualization can be found in the archives of ethnographic and other 'folk' museums across Poland, though my present example is from the collection of Warsaw's State Ethnographic Museum. Dedicated primarily to Polish rural culture, until recently the Warsaw museum obscured Jewish culture much as the Kraków museum had. Since 2014, though, a major re-installation of its permanent display, titled "Celebration Time",²² has segregated it in an adjacent room (Lehrer and Murzyn-Kupisz 2019). The objects in question are part of a sub-genre of Polish 'folk art' carvings from the 1960s and 70s that represent the Nazi occupation of Poland and the Holocaust.²³ Rarely displayed and largely forgotten, these works are unsettling documents that in their symbolic constitution implicate multiple communities. An example is Polish carver Zygmunt Skrętowicz's *bas-relief* entitled *Gassing*, which is part of a series dedicated to the theme of Auschwitz, depicting the various forms of murder perpetrated by the Germans. Does it make sense to consider such a work as a part of 'Polish' heritage alone, as such works have typically been classified?

Jews are not a "source community" vis-à-vis such art objects; they did not create or own them. But they are 'implicated' in them. To the extent that such art depicts Jews or attempts to represent something of their historical experience – communicated via personal stories, news, or perhaps the few existing photographs documenting naked women being driven towards the gas chambers – we might say Jews 'inspired' it. The tombstone shape of the

sculpture with the Lion of Judah carved on the top right panel suggests the artist had knowledge of Jewish symbols, and the work demands such knowledge to decode. Germans, too, are linked to this art, as it presents them, whether directly – here in the form of an SS guard and a Nazi death camp gas chamber – or invisibly, via the war, occupation, and genocide they perpetrated. Such objects open rich questions regarding bystander perspectives and the possibility of relations of witnessing via an artist's empathic, moral gaze on the suffering of an 'other' – albeit that a museum object may be experienced very differently for various viewers (Lehrer and Sendyka 2019b).²⁴



Fig. 12.8 One of two panels (the lefthand) from Zygmunt Skrętowicz's *The Gassing*, from his *Auschwitz* series (1963). Warsaw State Ethnographic Museum. Photograph by Wojciech Wilczyk.

What were, are, and could be the relations among the groups implicated by these three kinds of “awkward objects”? Who were the real Jews that inspired such art pieces? What kind of contact did the carver have with the people he depicted? How to respond to the fact that the masks of Jews displayed until 2017 without any critical context in the Kraków museum (and still insufficiently so today) “are eerily similar to the forms of domination and violence associated with genocide” itself? (Feldman 2006: 265). And what is the relationship of Jews to these objects, and to the museums who hold and display them, to Jewish communities, today? Consultation with “source communities” regarding collections and displays of objects originating with them has become increasingly standard protocol in recent decades in North America, due largely to the activism and increasing empowerment of Indigenous people and post-colonial nations. To address the questions I pose above, protocols for engaging “communities of implication” must be developed and adapted to Poland’s particular historical and contemporary reality.

Anthropologist Jeffrey Feldman writes about the “broad range of sensory experience that constituted the Jewish, German, and Polish encounter in the Holocaust”, and develops a theory of “contact points” to move beyond James Clifford’s widely cited use of Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of “contact zones”. Similar to the Khoisan facial casts in South African museums he discusses, these “awkward objects” in Polish ethnographic museums “are not just representations, but records of the process of encounter”.²⁵ These, in turn, create a “lost body problem”, in which “sensual products of unequal encounter” are “concealed by visual surfaces and routines of display” (Feldman 2006: 259). While Feldman’s core attention is focused on Holocaust relics – objects that were separated from Jewish people (or bodies) in the process of genocide, like the now-iconic piles of shoes – “awkward objects” are a step, or sometimes two, removed from the bodies that inspired them. Feldman’s critique is nonetheless generative: What is missing here are the “multiple aspects of agency” that gave rise to an object and brought it into the museum, and the stakes for the real people whose lives were (and, I would argue, still are) touched by them. If Feldman’s critique is about missing bodies, I propose extending it to highlight elided relationships, around which ethical curatorial principles – principles of care and kinship – must be developed.

“Communities of implication”

How may curators simultaneously grasp the plural meanings of objects, constitute ethical stewardship, and allow for (or encourage) the emergence of

future (-oriented) communities? What notions of ‘inheritance’ or ‘kinship’ might transcend the modern Western framework of “possessive individualism”²⁶ – that we are what we own – and address a range of circumstances within, but also beyond, Western post-colonial paradigms? And what approaches to display and encounter can museums use to open up such objects to their inherent plurality? Anthropologists Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz invoke the variety of “links and claims” that define the relations that diverse “stakeholders”²⁷ may have to objects in museum collections, including “felt kinship, ownership, and rights” (Karp and Kratz 2014: 284). It is this range of possible relations – “relations of implication” – that might be enlarged, to bring a dynamic, pluralist gaze to bear on museum objects, one that accounts for the wounds of history of which such objects are traces. Such an expansion can help re-envision our relations not only to objects but also to each other.

Given the intensifying global migrations of people and things during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the grounds for ‘cultural authenticity’ – and the authority and analytical tools to determine it in relation to material culture – increasingly overflows the contours of any single national or cultural community. Quite simply, the language of ownership and property is insufficient both to theorise and to productively activate certain kinds of material culture present in museums today (Coombe 1993). Without eroding the fundamental ethical (and legal) achievement of recognising “source communities” and championing the restitution of “cultural property” to those groups from whom it was unjustly acquired, we must explore how museums can supplement and expand notions of object-community relations. Such a move would acknowledge that both colonialism and twentieth-century genocides destroyed more than property restitution can ever restore. Museums, however, are in a powerful position to help broker novel modes and terms of engagement with collections that enhance both our understandings of meaningful objects, as well as our ability to envision and call into being new, progressive communities and solidarities. Critical museum curators need a broader set of concepts, such as “communities of implication”, that support innovative museum work in a range of social, cultural, and political settings, a vocabulary suited to complex past and present relationships of museology, object-making, and culture-building. The language of implication would also support new visions of identity politics and cross-group solidarity that help counteract our dangerously polarised world.

A starting point for conceptualising relations of implication is the notion of a “heritage community”. The Council of Europe (CoE) defines a heritage community as “people who *value* specific aspects of cultural heritage that

they *wish*, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations” (Council of Europe 2005, my emphasis). This conception brings a usefully flexible sense of agency, process, and change to people-object relations.²⁸ Even so, the idea of a heritage community is also limiting in its focus on ‘desire’ and ‘choice’ in relation to heritage. For this reason, I propose the term “community of implication”, building on the CoE’s definition to include people who are ‘affected’ by or can be said to be ‘implicated’ in certain tangible or intangible cultural products, in ethical terms.

A key concern with notions of heritage that construe material and intangible cultural traditions as freely chosen by anyone who comes to value them – as suggested by the CoE’s definition – is the problem of cultural appropriation. That is, a simple desire on the part of Europeans to identify with, say, Jewish *mezuzahs* (doorpost prayer boxes) – or North American Plains Indian headdresses, for that matter – at minimum sidesteps the issue of what happened to the sources or former stewards of these cultural practices and objects; it risks simply replacing them and their narratives with new ones, and displacing these objects from their original owners a second time. Appropriation entails the loss of crucial historical and contemporary meanings – and thereby power – due to the choice by new individuals and groups to identify with, or simply employ or enjoy, objects or intangible heritage originating with other groups.²⁹

The work of building ethical relations to material (as well as intangible) heritage involves building new kinds of human relations around them.³⁰ The idea of ‘implication’ highlights the need to reckon with the particular character of one’s historical and contemporary connection to a given object. It means asking, “What other groups have claims to this object, and *how does my relation with it relate to theirs?*” In this way, identification takes on the quality of obligation, implying responsibilities as well as rights.³¹

I am broadly inspired here by Michael Rothberg’s expanding on and complicating the standard victim/perpetrator/bystander paradigm via his theorization of “implicated subjects”, which he defines as the “large and heterogeneous collection of subjects who enable and benefit from traumatic violence without taking part in it directly” (Rothberg 2014). He notes that

[t]he category of implicated subjects emerges in relation to both historical and contemporary scenarios of violence: that is, it describes the indirect responsibility of subjects situated at temporal or geographic distance from the production of social suffering. It helps direct our attention to the conditions of possibility of violence as well as its lingering impact and suggests new routes of opposition...*implication* draws attention to how we

are *entwined with* and *folded into* (“im-plied in”) histories and situations that surpass our agency as individual subjects. (ibidem)

Debarati Sanyal’s etymologically overlapping exploration of “complicity” in relation to cultural memory conveys a similar “gathering of subject positions, histories, and memories”, which is both intimate and risky (Sanyal 2015). Both formulations resist the collapse of memory and identity, and both provide the grounds for ‘ethical commitments’ that push against the presumption that the proper containers of group memory follow ethno-cultural boundaries. Acknowledging one’s implication and complicity in any history of victimization is the first step towards taking responsibility, helping to “foster a nuanced understanding of how power folds us into its mechanisms, of the institutional forces that mediate our agency, of the past’s reverberations into the present” (Sanyal 2015: 13).

Finally, Gerald McMaster suggests that visual art and culture provides a basis for developing a historical perspective on cultural entanglement and interrelatedness, along with new curatorial approaches for juxtaposing objects (McMaster 2002). Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz’s work on Jewish influences in Polish ‘folk art’ reveals such entanglements in the Jewish motifs that found their way into Polish domestic and public buildings via the Jewish craftsmen who built them – further disrupting mono-ethnic presentations of ‘folk cultural’ production (Goldberg-Mulkiewicz 2003).

In the present context, I am particularly interested in the lingering impact of violence, and the conditions of possibility for retroactively witnessing it, in ways that surpass our agency as individual subjects. How are we to not only redress but also ‘account for’ the wrongs perpetrated by the very museum institutions that purport to care for culturally-significant objects – from the misappropriation of such items, to the dehumanization of and implicit threats of violence towards marginalised groups embedded in offensive depictions and practices, to the ongoing erasure of these due to the absence of interpretive materials that would illuminate them? When regimes of display maintain modernist ethnographic priorities of hiving off the past, distrusting emotion, and presenting ‘cultures’ as if they are natural taxonomies rather than shifting, hybrid formulations, then colonial categories and ways of knowing endure, regardless of what objects museums return, what compensation they give, or what aesthetic risks they take to entice contemporary viewers by way of updated institutional identities. We must make objects’ awkward implications visible if they are to be broadly and thoroughly addressed.

A move towards “implication” usefully decentres Europe as the space of definition and yet keeps European connections to the objects that have

sojourned in colonial museums in full view without imputing any necessary or noble character to such custodianship. It also involves shifting the focus away from the agency of the ‘subjects’ – the idea that we always choose what aspects of heritage relate to us – and transposes it instead to the agency of the ‘objects’, recognizing the material world’s ability to depict, to move, to connect, to remind, even to accuse.³² Such a shift is particularly salient when considering complex recent histories involving both colonialism and other forms and catalysts of mass violence, forced migration, and subsequent mnemonic formations – so-called difficult heritage. “Difficult heritage”, as defined by Sharon Macdonald, refers to that past that is meaningful but also contested, as it presents problems for positive, self-affirming identity discourses (Macdonald 2008). Yet as Macdonald herself notes, governments have in the last two decades become adept at using the museumification of past misdeeds to burnish their current national image, co-opting even this kind of history for self-affirming, exclusivist heritage projects (Ibid 2016). Chiara De Cesari, for example, describes how new, supra-national discourses of ‘European heritage,’ intended to counter exclusivist projects, are often deployed in museums in ways that draw on regressive nationalist paradigms (De Cesari 2017).

We must thus look beyond the notion of ‘positive valuation’ and a ‘desire to protect and bequeath heritage’ as a gift of identity that one hopes to see continued by one’s descendants. There are simply too many tangible and intangible traces of the past that intrude on our social lives or consciousness unbeckoned, and often undesired, to allow us to think of heritage as always fully chosen and embraced. Such disturbing traces, too, may strongly contribute to our senses of self and others’ ideas about us. Artist-researcher Paula Gaetano-Adi provocatively calls for us to consider objects not simply as artefacts, but as “essential members of the community in which they were created” and further that decolonisation requires not only material return, but also restoring these objects’ abilities to enact their communal functions – and, I might add, new social roles proper to the changing historical context (Azoulay et al 2019).

While lawmakers do their necessary juridical work, museum scholars and practitioners can invent new concepts and devise new curatorial strategies that express material relationships otherwise. Indeed, thinking curatorially allows us to address crucial issues that processes of restitution risk overlooking. For example, if European museums want to claim and retain ‘foreign’ objects as their own heritage, should they not be required to account for the full biographical experiences of these objects since leaving their original homes? As Gaetano-Adi suggests, we should be radically opening the question of what these objects are evidence of, rather than limiting their meanings

to illustrations of ‘the culture’ of the place from which they were long ago taken.³³

To do this work of redress and repair, we must rethink the relations of people to material heritage in terms of not only voluntary identification but also involuntarily affectedness, or implication. I would suggest we consider this kind of relation as a form of kinship, those mutually constitutive entanglements we have with ‘significant Others’ whose own experiences of and reactions to us make up the other half of the dialogue that always co-constitutes our identities. These kinship relations form “communities of implication”.

Conclusions

Histories of violence and oppression are inscribed in objects, which implicate us by proximity, symbolism, or other vectors of the past. The “awkward objects” I discuss often need at least Jewish, German, and Polish historical and cultural knowledge to unpack their full biographies.³⁴ Strategic curatorial approaches can frame objects to function as a source of ethical inspiration and empathy, spurring people to acknowledge and address those histories that are *unchosen* by national or communal authorities. Those authorities, as a rule, work to maintain an illusion of a singularly proud heritage they desire by effacing and rejecting, rather than embracing challenging pasts. Taking stock of, rather than expunging abject heritages provides the grounds to call into being new communities based on a sense of interrelation, mutual responsibility, and commitment.

There is important work to be done to help museums relate creatively to their diverse constituencies, even, as Steven Lavine proposed almost thirty years ago, “reimagin[ing] who those constituencies might be” (1992: 137). Colonial-era museums have inherent multicultural heritage. Their collections span the globe and contain evidence of cultural contact and heterogeneity elided by the very national boundaries that these museums were founded to underscore and legitimate. From continually-transforming American Indian totem poles (Jonaitis and Glass 2010), to Kenyan Samburu marriage beads (of nineteenth-century Venetian origin, coveted today by middle-class American women, see Straight 2002), to ubiquitous ‘tourist art’ created by cultural insiders but catering to visitors’ desires (Phillips and Steiner 1999; Phillips 1999), the objects contained in museums embody and illuminate relationships among a wide array of cultural meanings and affects reverberating from a history of ambivalent inter-group engagements. Should not their galleries do the same?

This is not to collapse fundamental distinctions among various difficult histories nor among the differently constituted human taxonomies and hierarchies (cultural, ethnic, racial, class, gender) that underpin them. These historical classifications have contemporary corollaries and afterlives that inevitably distinguish the treatment of communities and objects in museums in ways that merit sustained consideration.³⁵ While a transcultural turn in memory studies has been forging important new ground, bringing histories of the Holocaust and colonialism into productive conversation (Partridge 2010; Rothberg 2009; Sanyal 2015), that work largely remains to be broached in the museum world.³⁶

It is worth thinking – even if speculatively – across diverse cases to see what explorations of implication might illuminate. Like Indigenous objects in North America and elsewhere, Jewish-related objects were rendered mute, and were often misappropriated, in places where once vibrant source populations were destroyed, dispossessed, disempowered, and elided. However, due to political changes and associated global movements of people (via migration, tourism, or travel related specifically to museum collection-community re-engagement projects), such objects are being re-encountered and recognised by, re-acquainted with, and re-framed under the care of newly configured “communities of implication”, setting the stage for attempts at their historical and cultural re-contextualization and social re-animation.³⁷

These changes may – and do – proceed in progressive and regressive directions, towards increased social polarization, or go on to develop cross-group solidarity and social justice. Some projects of reclamation retrench ethno-nationalism: For example, Israeli youth tours that attempt to read Jewish and Holocaust history as hermetically sealed from its historical Polish (and broader Eastern European) surroundings, except as regards Polish violence against Jews, or Yad Vashem’s spiriting of Polish-Jewish artist Bruno Schulz’s murals to Israel by identifying them as the heritage of the Jewish people only (Paloff 2004). Such examples share characteristics with Polish right-wing discourses (including some that appropriate post-colonial discourse) that fixate on Polish oppression by Russian, German, or European power (blatant anti-Semitism like the ‘Judas’ ritual is simply one step further). New language is needed to resist the inscription of heritage objects into a range of pre-existing ethno-national and xenophobic formulations.

Museum practice is a highly political, overdetermined field. Ostensibly emancipatory terminology may elide the ongoing injustices perpetrated by European and Euro-colonial museums that continue to hold and misrepresent ill-gotten collections. The development of a notion of “communities of implication” must distinguish itself from the practice of “inventing

conceptions and slogans that will protect [museums'] illegal holding of looted/stolen cultural artefacts of others" (Opoku 2015). Regressive formulations may hide under the banner of 'shared heritage,' 'world heritage,' and 'heritage of all mankind'. Difficult questions also arise about the divergent power relations surrounding Indigenous, Jewish, and further racialised, ethnicised, or otherwise 'othered' collections. Anthropologist Sharon Macdonald recently raised the question of whether the sort of "difficult heritage" she has long written about – for example Nazi heritage in Germany – is still actually difficult (Macdonald 2016). One cannot answer this question in universal terms, but it is worth asking. Holocaust memory, for example, has been popularly institutionalised to such an extent that it can in some locations and under some circumstances form a "comfortable horrible" that is *grievable* – and politically, socially, and emotionally 'safe' – in ways that colonial memory is not.³⁸

With these caveats in mind, I offer the idea of "communities of implication" to expand the circle of voices that museums bring to bear on understanding objects, with plural, inclusive interpretation and exhibition, and new network-building in relation to these, achieved through the widest range of means. Further, the push to diversify the interpretive toolkit does not apply only to Indigenous or 'minoritised' cultural objects in majority, dominant-culture museums.³⁹ A Picasso painting inspired by African masks stands to gain as much from being viewed in the context of a multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-vocal "community of implication" as does a Benin bronze, or a Polish 'folk sculpture' depicting the German Nazi persecution of Jews. Arguments that such objects are somehow better exhibited in the British Museum, rather than in Benin or Brooklyn, are merely exercises in the perpetuation of colonial-era power politics. Rather, such contextual shifts – potentially achieved via rotating itineraries of custodianship agreed upon by the original owners, after restitution – would aid in the accumulation of perspectives on human-object, and human-human implication, and in building the envisioned caretaker communities, a new kind of inter-cultural, cross-group kin.

While my own work has long focused on Jewish memory in Poland, living and teaching in Canada has meant being immersed in discourses and practices emanating primarily from Indigenous people's struggles and negotiations with national and particularly ethnographic museums – institutions that have long unjustly collected and often misrepresented their material culture. I have found myself transporting, and working to translate, the progressive gestures of such decolonising museum methodologies into the Polish-Jewish context. There are risks in such a transposition, foremost

among them repeating a colonizing gesture by imposing a ‘Western’ decolonising paradigm onto an ‘Eastern’ space with its own complex history. Yet the attempt to face and untangle these has been generative. Creative, critical interventions in museums by Indigenous and minoritised artists like James Luna, Fred Wilson, and Michael Nichol Yahgulanaas inspired me to work with Polish colleagues and students to develop a series of exhibitions and interventions in the Kraków Ethnographic Museum since 2013. These have moved from more external to increasingly collaborative projects vis-à-vis the museum, in a ‘trans-anthropological’ attempt to break out of problematic ethnographic tropes, while still finding value in the collections and the institution as a public platform. These include: exhibitions of ambivalent ‘folk art’ objects (and their contemporary corollaries)⁴⁰ displayed in an “interrogative” mode (Karp and Kratz 2014); “hacking” the museum with Polish university students⁴¹; working with a Jewish festival to catalyse local Jewish community attention to the museum’s Jewish-related content⁴²; and developing a critical tour of the museum.⁴³ It is hard to grasp the dynamics and directions of change in the museum, especially as since 2015 the radically conservative Law and Justice government, with direct influence on the museum’s funding, has gained power. Yet overall our projects seem to have both paralleled and contributed to incremental changes at the Kraków Ethnographic Museum in relation to their depiction of Jews in the permanent exhibition. Some of the most troubling items have been removed – beginning in 2011, when a major renovation took place – and additional such work is being advanced. Whether such gestures signal increasing empathy, growing ‘disidentification’, or both, the result betrays the intense, multifaceted anxieties that “awkward objects” provoke for the museums that hold them (Lehrer and Murzyn 2019).

These material objects contain great affective potential that can lead to important inter-group insights. Talking with my Polish (non-Jewish) colleagues has been challenging and illuminating, and the museum’s openness to experimentation has resulted in meaningful dialogues within and beyond its walls, and new audiences recognizing the institution’s significance. MEK’s director agreed to hold a public meeting at a recent Jewish culture festival to discuss the museum’s treatment of Jewish themes.⁴⁴ He seemed genuinely surprised by the expressions of pain recounted by the audience members, mostly local and foreign Jews. After the event a friend of mine, an American Jew on a trip to connect with her Polish ancestral roots (and one of those people who spoke), bumped into the director near the museum. She had spent the previous day bushwhacking through blackberry brambles in a provincial cemetery to look for family tombstones; there was no way to connect with local Polish people there to discuss this ambivalently shared material

heritage. But at the museum – where my friend had seen the masks and figurines and *groggers* – there was. The director clasped my friend’s hand after the event and said, simply, “I’m sorry.” She was moved, she said, and felt a little bit closer to home. Decolonising the museum here is not about restitution. These “awkward objects” are most valuable to us curated in ongoing, caring conversation wherever historical injuries still resonate, reminding us that we are tied together by our wounds.

Notes

1. Substantially shorter versions of the core idea in this text were published previously in Lehrer (2018) and Lehrer and Sendyka (2019a). Thanks to Aaron Glass, Shelley Ruth Butler, Cara Krmpotich, Nora Landkammer, Wayne Modest, Monica Patterson, Roma Sendyka, Jennifer Shannon, Jonas Tinius, Margareta von Oswald, Magdalena Waligórska, and Joanna Wawrzyniak – as well as the participants in the Museums and Public History Research Group at the University of Toronto – for their comments on prior drafts.
2. Basu, Paul. 2017. *The Inbetweenness of Things: Materializing Mediation and Movement Between Worlds*. London: Bloomsbury, p. 4.
3. Auerbach, Rachela. 1946. ‘Lament Rzeczy Martwych’. *Przełom 2*: 6–8.
4. The image on p. 288 is Figure 12.1 One of two panels (the righthand) from Zygmunt Skrętowicz’s *The Gassing*, from his Auschwitz series (1963). Warsaw State Ethnographic Museum. Photograph by Wojciech Wilczyk.
5. I am borrowing and building on the term “awkward objects”, which originates in the research project ‘Awkward Objects of Genocide: The Holocaust and Vernacular Arts in and beyond Polish Ethnographic Museums’, led by Roma Sendyka as part of the European Commission Horizon 2020 grant *TRACES: Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts* (grant agreement No. 693857), 2016–2019. Also see Tinius (2018), particularly his notion of approaching artworks as “relational prisms”, made for a happy confluence that further strengthens the notion of awkwardness.
6. Collecting practices and policies as a discrete process (separate from interpreting or curating what has already been collected) also have implications for the notion of “communities of implication”, as the act of amassing materials may itself make visible previously unseen cultural interconnections and raise new questions.
7. French cultural heritage code and the general code of the property of public personnel (CG3P) uphold a “general principle of the inalienability of publicly owned cultural objects – the founding principle of the legislation of French

- museums". Sarr and Savoy (2018: 77). The 'inalienability rule' was originally written to protect the French crown's property but still today prevents individuals and other countries from taking possession of France's 'public goods' and monuments.
8. "France ratified in 1997 the UNESCO convention of 1970 concerning the illicit exportation of cultural property; but that this convention has no retroactive scope." Sarr and Savoy (2018: 21)
 9. Handler (1991) calls this situation "fair play": Indigenous groups have no choice but to use outmoded and Western notions of cultural identity – as these are the dominant, politically persuasive categories – to make their case against the Western museum practice that would retain objects they understand to be rightfully theirs by genealogical connection.
 10. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Poles were participating in Russian, German, American, and English ethnographic expeditions, and classical English-language evolutionist thinkers translated into Polish served as a theoretical base for the developing discipline as well as institutions of ethnography and ethnology. Polish professors who took up chairs in ethnography and ethnology were educated in Germany, France, Austria, and Russia. For a broad tracing of the impact of major political events on the history of these disciplines in Poland, see Jasiewicz and Slattery (1995). In the interwar period, influences came from France (Durkheimians), Germany (historical method), Great Britain (Malinowskian anthropology), and the United States (the Chicago school and Boasian school). See Linkiewicz (2016).
 11. On peasant-based national mythologies, see also Baycroft and Hopkin (2012); Filipova (2011); Hofer (1990); Mihailescu (2004); Peer (1998); Thiesse and Norris (2003). Aaron Glass notes that in North America and other settler colonies, the two museum types were partially fused in the early twentieth century when Indigenous people, no longer a political threat, were appropriated as the source for an authentic, autochthonous, non-European source of national identity/culture (e.g. *American Museum of Natural History* and the *National Gallery of Canada* mounted exhibits of Native objects between 1915 and 1930 to promote growth of nationally distinctive art/design industries). [Personal communication, June 2019.]
 12. Such 'non-Polish' collections in Polish ethnographic museums today were donated by or purchased from anthropologists (race scientists), ethnographers, other scientists, explorers, travellers, collectors, politicians interested in the issue of colonies, Catholic missionaries, and political exiles. See for example Rosset (2015) and Jacher-Tyszkowa (1998). Thanks to Olga Linkiewicz for direction.
 13. There exists almost no literature on colonialism, post-coloniality, or decolonisation as it pertains to Polish or other Eastern European museums (cf. Bukowiecki

- 2019; Bukowiecki & Wawrzyniak 2019; Muthesius 2012; Muthesius & Piotrowski 2017; Piotrowski 2011). General discussion of colonialism and post-coloniality in Eastern Europe – as both a victim and perpetrator – has taken root in the past two decades in academic discourse on the region, offering new concepts but in piecemeal and uncoordinated fashion, and without any impact on mainstream postcolonial literature – see Głowacka-Grajper and Wawrzyniak (2019).
14. I do not mean to suggest the process is resolved; on the contrary, regarding the question of Jewish cultural property in postwar Poland, Cieślińska-Lobkowicz (2009: 143) described the “noteworthy absence of historical and provenance research concerning Jewish movable cultural property looted during the Second World War” in Poland.
 15. For a discussion of the ambiguity of such sites among local communities in the early postwar era, and the gap between legal and personal relationships, see Weizmann (2017). Today the sites may be experienced by local Poles as haunted by Jewish ghosts, see Waligórska (2014). Sendyka (2019) calls for deeper attention to the available vocabulary for the treatment of another’s belongings after mass violence, stressing the need for a term that at minimum retain a sense of trespass, that “reminds us always of loss, and recalls brutal deaths”. She suggests that looting of ‘abandoned’ heritage is currently supported via the endurance in nineteenth-century property law of the medieval feudal latinate traditions of appropriation embedded in the terms *escheated* or *caducary* (along with a Slavic corollary *puścizna*).
 16. Artists who have worked in this vein include Łukasz Baksik (*Matzevot for Everyday Use*), Natalia Romik (*Nomadic Shtetl Archive*), Wojciech Wilczyk (*There is No Such Thing as an Innocent Eye*), among others. For critical considerations of this form of identification, see Lehrer and Waligórska (2013), and Dembek (2019).
 17. The quote inscribed on a nearby wall, next to a similar rattle, reads: “ ‘there is a custom in the countryside, that from Holy Thursday until the end of the week (...) boys race about the village clacking their clackers.’ Buków (near Kraków), 1903.” [In Polish: *jest taki zwyczaj na wsi, że od Wielkiego Czwartku do końca tygodnia (...) chłopcy biegają po wsi z kłapaczkami i kłapią. Buków (koło Krakowa), 1903.*]
 18. The Kraków Ethnographic Museum’s own collection contains original drawings, including one of a grogger [*grzechotka*] (inventory nr. IV/1343), for the renowned Judaica collector Regina Lilientalowa’s book on Jewish children’s culture *Dziecko żydowskie* [The Jewish Child]. Kraków: Nakładem Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności, 1927.
 19. Recent additions to the Kraków Ethnographic Museum’s website offer interpretive material in the direction I am suggesting in relation to another Purim object: a scroll of Esther. See <http://etnomuzeum.eu/zbiory/-88>. Similarly, on 17-18 March 2018 the museum organised a workshop for families focusing not on the traditional Easter celebrations, but focusing on Purim, in association with

- local Jewish organisation Czulent. For one image see: http://etnomuzeum.eu/images/upload/edukacja/Etnokalendarz/03_2018/9.jpg.
20. The doubly-unfortunate imputation is that Muslims alone could not be responsible for overrunning Europe, and thus the Jewish conspiracy must be behind this perceived attack on the Christian heartland. See: JTA (2015)
 21. An article with a video of the incident, and mentioning the extra “reparations” lashes, can be seen here: <https://histmag.org/Kontrowersyjne-wieszanie-Judasza-w-Pruchniku-18609> (last accessed 25 May 2019).
 22. Polish: *Czas Świętowania*.
 23. As noted above, the category of ‘folk’ (*lud* in Polish, translated from the 19th century German idea of *Volk*) was highly political and manipulated by the Polish state. I do not mean to reproduce it uncritically (hence the scare quotes), but along with my co-curators, we often prefer to use the historically appropriate term to the other options like naïve, outsider, or vernacular, each of which comes with its own set of discourses.
 24. It is a salient complication of this category of artwork that it is often unclear whether the victims of Nazi violence depicted are Jews or non-Jewish Poles.
 25. Feldman (2006: 260) also raises the question of “whether or not the Holocaust is best understood solely as a process of destroying Jews through violence, or as an industrialized colonial encounter between multiple social actors, which produced a broad range of contact points.”
 26. Handler (1991) discusses how even Indigenous groups have today adopted – quite fairly in political terms – flawed Western notions of group property in efforts to regain their culturally-significant objects from Western museums.
 27. The term ‘stakeholders’ is itself problematic, as it has economic and business-oriented resonances that work against a more humanistic notion and approach to the museum as a public good.
 28. Or more broadly ‘people-heritage relations’, to encompass ‘intangible’ cultural materials like music, stories, specialised knowledge, ritual practice, etc.
 29. The problem can be particularly egregious in a capitalist system where money is being made by dominant groups’ use of marginalised people’s creations.
 30. Important work is being done in Poland to link the new, local caretakers of Jewish built heritage to living Jewish communities, sharing stories and experiences, and studying history. The work of the Warsaw-based Forum for Dialogue (<http://dialog.org.pl/en/>), for example, works with “the traces of ties that were ruptured in World War Two” and to “facilitate the formation of bonds between Jews and the country of their ancestors” via “people-to-people trust” and “difficult questions”.
 31. A consummate example of such an approach to curating is the recent *Americans* exhibit at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington,

- D.C. (see: <https://americanindian.si.edu/americans/>), which proposes that the difficult conversation is not so much about the genocide and violence against Indigenous Americans, but that “[settler-origin Americans] are all connected to Indians, even though [we] don’t know it” (curator Paul Chaat Smith, personal communication, 24 April 2019).
32. Recent scholarship on the agency and affective force of objects includes: Navarro-Yashin (2009), *Forensic Architecture* (2014), Hoskins (2006), and Bennet (2010).
 33. “Decolonising the Museum: A Teach-In.” <https://brown.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=a9f5b3f4-1ed1-4af9-bd2f-aa01011399e9> (Accessed July 10, 2019).
 34. See, for example, Greenblatt’s (1990) evocative consideration of potential curatorial strategies in relations to Prague’s *Jewish Museum*.
 35. The rise of Holocaust memorial museums, for example, is a phenomenon normalised in many countries for more than two decades, while there exists no museum dedicated to the trauma of colonialism (save for a recent online resource: <https://www.museumofbritishcolonialism.org/> (Accessed 14 June 2019)).
 36. Exceptions include Lawson (2013) and Moses (2012).
 37. The attempts by Jewish Auschwitz survivor Dina Gottliebova Babbitt to obtain the paintings she made of a Roma woman during her time as a camp inmate were rejected by the Auschwitz Museum on the grounds they are today “part of the cultural heritage of the world” Friess (2006). In another case of the heirs of the Holocaust victim Pierre Lévi requisition control of their father’s suitcase, the museum similarly cited a “risk of precedence”, fearing similar suits demanding further deaccessioning of their collections. The museum also stresses “important documentary and educational functions” their collections play (see Riding 2006).
 38. “Comfortable horrible” is Linenthal’s (1995: 267) term for narratives of tragedy that have little social power beyond confirming what “we”, as a pre-determined collectivity, already know, think, or feel. The idea of a “grieveable subject” is from Butler (2008).
 39. “Minoritized individuals belong to groups that as a result of social constructs face prejudices and have less power or representation than other groups” (Smith 2016).
 40. See The Ethnographic Museum in Kraków. 2019. *Terrible Close. Polish Vernacular Artists face the Holocaust*. www.terriblyclose.eu/ and www.luckyjews.com.
 41. See Curating and Public Scholarship Lab. 2017. *My Museum, a museum about me!* <http://capsl.cerev.ca/my-museum-a-museum-about-me/>.

42. See FestivALT. 2019. "FestivALT: Pytając o "Widok zza bliska" (Event). *Facebook*. <https://www.facebook.com/events/302698633768909/>.
43. See FestivALT. 2019. "Alternative Tour of the Ethnographic Museum". *FestivALT*. <https://www.festivalt.com/event/alternative-tour-of-the-ethnographic-museum-2/>.
44. See FestivALT. 2019. "Every Museum is a Story: A conversation with the Museum director". *FestivALT*. <http://www.festivalt.com/event/every-museum-is-a-story-a-conversation-with-the-museum-director/>.

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Preface by Arjun Appadurai. Afterword by Roger Sansi.

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