

A Shared Authority? Museums Connect, Public Diplomacy, and Transnational Public History

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Museums Connect stands at the intersection of public history and public diplomacy. Museums Connect sponsors partnerships between American museums and non-American museums and their communities.¹ The one-year projects are intended to be mutually beneficial, reciprocal in nature, and engage new communities for both museums in their respective countries. Established in 2008 as a reconceptualization of the International Partnership Among Museums (IPAM) program (1980-2007), since its creation sixty-one Museums Connect projects have been funded with a dual purpose: public history and public diplomacy.²

Museums Connect is administered by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and the program's primary source of funding is the United States Department of State's (DOS) Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). AAM describes the program's intentions as follows: "The Museums Connect program strengthens connections and cultural understanding between people in the United States and abroad through innovative projects facilitated by museums and executed by their communities. The program's mission is to build global communities through cross-cultural exchanges while also supporting U.S. foreign policy goals, such as youth empowerment, environmental sustainability and disability rights awareness."³ Individual museums in the United States and abroad are free to originate, create, and apply for Museums Connect grants. If selected by a peer-review system that includes museum professionals, past

¹ Museums Connect was known as Museum and Community Collaborations Abroad from 2008-2011. Hereafter it is referred to by its current name.

² See Appendix for a complete list of Museums Connect projects.

³ "Museums Connect: Building Global Communities," American Alliance of Museums, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/international/museumsconnect>.

participants, and AAM staff with oversight from ECA, the participating museums are given latitude to operate the programs according to the performance-based outcomes agreed upon during the application and selection phase. Grants are awarded between \$50,000 and \$100,000 with a 50% cost-share from the participating museums. Because the program's main-funder (the Department of State) and administrator (AAM) are American, each grant is administered by a "lead" American museum that is responsible for the grant's financials, compliance, and periodic reporting. Although some changes to the grant program have occurred since its inception—including a reduction of project lengths from two years to one year and a name change to Museums Connect in 2011—the principles and mission of the program have remained consistent.

Three case studies in my research provide three different contexts to analyze the Museums Connect program. "Being We the People" between the National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan and the National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania analyzes Museums Connect operating alongside an abundance of American hard power. The two projects between the Ben M'sik Community Museum, Casablanca, Morocco, and the Museum of History and Holocaust Education, Kennesaw, Georgia, highlight two university museums using Museums Connect for public history pedagogy at the university level. And "The International Legacy Youth Leadership Project" between the Apartheid Museum and the Nelson Mandela House Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, Alabama, explores Museums Connect between museums and communities with shared histories. In analyzing these case studies I argue that despite an inherent tension built into the program different moments of exchange, shared inquiry, and dialogue emerged that promoted more equitable power relationships both between the museums

and between the museums and their communities: similar public history contexts, shared histories, comparable-sized museums, and reflective practice by museum staff (especially in the United States). These three case studies, thus, provide multiple opportunities to explore the complex power dynamics of Museums Connect and what they reveal about the theoretical implications of Michael Frisch's concept of "a shared authority."

Frisch expressed changes in the way that historical knowledge and corollary ideas of expertise and authority are understood in museums and public history theory and practice. However, my research challenges the utility of Frisch's assertion that a museum's or public historian's authority is inherently shared when implemented in Museum Connect's transnational public history context. In a program that serves the double purpose of public history and public diplomacy and primarily funded by the U.S. Department of State (DOS), the power dynamics between the participating museums are skewed in favor of the Department of State-assigned American "lead museum." These museums are responsible for the projects' finances and control reporting to the program administrator at the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and DOS. Moreover, in selecting youth as the particular community of focus for the program, the DOS ensured that the relationships between museums and these communities would remain, for the most part, traditionally didactic. Indeed, the most equitable power relationships revealed by the three case studies in my research were between the groups of students on both sides of the projects.

Using a transnational lens to interrogate the theory and practice of museum engagement with their publics in a domestic context illuminates as well as questions some of the basic assumptions underpinning ideas of shared authority and public history. In considering the multiple agencies of the different publics involved in each grant, as well as those excluded, my

research also provides a new forum through which to consider the assumptions of the public sphere that underlie the democratic discourse of the “museum as forum” and ideas of a shared authority. To understand the nature of the transnational public spheres created by Museums Connect, my research evokes Nancy Fraser’s reconceptualization of the Habermasian public sphere. According to Fraser, Jürgen Habermas’s conception of the liberal public sphere, grounded in the modern nation-state, “stresses its claim to be open and accessible to all.” In Museums Connect this notion of the public is constructed to target specific groups according to the Department of State’s strategic goals and increase the ability of the museum to measure the projects’ effectiveness. This has the impact of including certain publics while at the same time creating “formal exclusions.”⁴ Thus, the underlying ideology of Museums Connect, emergent from a liberal notion of “the public” so central to American democratic rhetoric, “stresses the singularity of the bourgeois conception of the public sphere, its claim to be *the* public arena in the singular.”⁵ Alternatively, Fraser posits multiple, competing, stratified, and unequal publics, a public sphere borne out in Museums Connect projects, where certain publics are elevated while others are relegated and excluded. The exploration of these relegations and exclusions in the case studies highlights certain conditions that both reduced and accentuated the differentials between these publics. And although they operate in a domestic rather than a transnational context, public history practitioners can learn from these factors in attempting to engage marginalized or historically powerless communities in their own work. In the “Being We the People” project between the National Constitution Center (NCC) and its students and the National Museum of Afghanistan and Marefat High school students, for example, the reflective practice of the NCC

⁴ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

staff, who adopted the role of facilitator rather than knowledge giver, inadvertently reduced the differential between the Marefat students and the National Constitution Center. This provided this historically marginalized community the ability to negotiate its minority status vis-à-vis the nation while simultaneously speaking for the nation during their trip to Philadelphia. In contrast, the use of American public history faculty to teach public history methodologies in the two projects between the Ben M'sik Community Museum and the Museum of History and Holocaust Education accentuated power differentials between the two museums and resulted in negotiations of the project activities in Casablanca.

Vergangenheitsbewältigung

“Public debate within a country on a problematic period of its recent history”

“International” and “transnational” has implications for not only how Public Historians conduct their work but also the work they produce. Working alongside international partners can radically change the stories we choose to tell and how those stories are presented. The cultural contexts in which we frame our work are altered or even expanded. New meanings are attached to particular events that might have different meanings when national boundaries are crossed or even dissolved through the abandoning of national framings of the past. For American public historians, conducting work in an international context is imperative to expanding our national horizons and becoming informed to not only the practices of our global partners but also fulfilling our missions as public practitioners to reach the public audience for history through collaboration.

I currently live in Wiesbaden, Germany while I am working on my doctoral degree from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. During my time in Germany, I have collaborated with German museum professionals, public practitioners, and university affiliated faculty to conduct projects relating to indigenous people both in the United States and globally. These projects have included exhibitions, oral history projects, and project reports. This work enabled me to gain experience in working in a different culture context both in my working relationships with other professionals but also to see first hand how another culture understands and seeks to interpret a past that has been part and parcel of my own nation’s history.

Indigenous history is long overdue to be approached through a transnational context. Working alongside scholars of indigenous history in different global contexts can help

us to understand cross border experiences of colonialism. These experiences are vital to decolonial public history practice, both within the United States and globally. As Amy Lonetree discusses in her book *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, public historians should seek to decolonize spaces of public history through consultation with indigenous peoples. This means consulting with indigenous people globally to seek to understand how nation states have practiced colonial eradication to gain territory. It is important when doing this work to recognize that not all peoples experience colonialism in the same way. For example, I worked as a consultant on an exhibition in Frankfurt, Germany on indigenous peoples of North America, the Sami people of northern Scandinavia, and the Nenets of what is now the northern part of the Russian Federation. While we can make large generalizations and arguments about how colonial powers do the work of colonizing, we should not make assumptions about how indigenous people are both incorporated and also resist the structures of colonial power. That is a major implication of doing transnational work and should be something that is resisted by public historians is making generalizations or assumptions that when you are talking about a group of people across nation state boundaries.

My colleagues and I were able to present large framing questions that led visitors to explore how systems of colonization work world wide by discussing these groups within the same physical space we also had to be careful that visitors did not get the wrong idea thereby damaging claims to sovereignty by these individual groups. Another very important takeaway from this particular project was that we were able to metaphorically tear down the current national borders in visitors minds, the possibilities for understanding the movement of people, land ownership, and the creation of borderlands were expanded.

Another pitfall of doing transnational work is to always seek to compare groups across national boundaries. This could be especially damaging for indigenous people and their claims for sovereignty globally. While each context for indigenous people can tell us more about the structures of colonialism, each context is a different struggle against a contrasting power. I think one of the more powerful purposes of doing transnational work is that indigenous people do not have to be framed in the context of the national boundaries that for many have caused the traumatic histories but can actually be seen as the greatest claim for sovereignty is to be recognized on this global scale. I think as public historians we should see the power in this of not only joining with international partners but also to frame how we discuss indigenous people in exhibitions, public programming, in the digital, and the many other platforms in which we communicate to the public.

This is another struggle with doing transcolonial work is the scholarly work that has to be done to understand the context that you are stepping into. Stepping outside of my work on indigenous studies in Germany, I also worked with a consulting firm in Mannheim, Germany on telling the traumatic histories of National Socialism and corporations in Germany. While I understood the context of indigenous people and had a strong background that enabled me to speak with expertise, I do not have a background in Germany history or the history of the rise of the National Socialist German Workers' Party. I had to learn quickly not only the history but also the vocabulary of how German peoples today think and speak about World War II.

This is the crux of what makes public history in an international context so difficult but also so important. Much of the work that I do in public history is built on the study of memory and the evolving national understanding of histories. It is only through growing up and/or living in a culture that we gain a comprehension of how a culture remembers and does not remember its

history. As David Lowenthal famously stated, “The past is a foreign country.” When doing public history in an international context, the past in a foreign country is foreign. This is particularly difficult in the context of contested or traumatic histories where the nation in which you are working in is not your own. In the United States, working on indigenous history carries a weight of responsibility to our indigenous people. Do we feel the same responsibility when we are working in an international context? One thing I was in constant conversation with myself as I did this work in an international context was that I did not want to lose my self-reflexivity in my work. In many ways this is much easier in an international context because you come from a different cultural context and the colleagues and work itself can and will be different than your previous lived experience.

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Moving Beyond the National:
New Perspectives on International and Transnational Public Histories

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For public historians, the term “international” can mean a variety of things - the historical event that they interpret may take place in multiple nations, their curatorial approach may be borrowed from another country, a museum may have an international audience and is thus responsible for interpreting the history in flexible and multi-cultural ways, or the themes derived from their respective historical event may be globally applicable.

The Holocaust is an international historical event that has transnational relevance. I will be discussing how the meanings of international and transnational public histories shape the work of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, focusing specifically on the Museum’s Education Initiatives division. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum “strives to ensure the permanence of Holocaust memory, understanding and relevance, while envisioning a world in which people confront hatred, prevent genocide and promote human dignity.” However, because the Holocaust did not take place on American soil, American students often have trouble finding its relevance in their own lives. I would venture to guess that most public historians, not just those studying the Holocaust, struggle with relevance. How do we as public historians help our audiences find relevance in our respective histories? How do we draw out major themes from international historical events that can help us make connections to our own past? Can historical relevance be taught and, if so, how?

Transnationality is the idea that the lessons and experiences of one country may prove useful in another. At the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, we are exploring approaches to

helping our audiences find relevance in the Holocaust, which for us means drawing connections between the Holocaust and American history. We can look at broad themes that are dually applicable, such as discrimination and dehumanization. We can also look at the policies and practices, both de facto and de jure, of American chattel slavery, post-Reconstruction Jim Crow laws, and the American eugenics movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that later informed Nazi racial ideology.

How can students engaged in comparative analysis of common themes in both Holocaust studies and American history (discrimination, racism, dehumanization, democracy) make stronger connections and find deeper relevance by visiting American historic sites of conscience and/or trauma that have no direct territorial connection to the Holocaust? And, if so, can we create tools for teachers and students to use when visiting these sites to help connect these themes? We hope to study the education and interpretive techniques of authentic historic sites related to the Holocaust in Europe in order to learn inform our own practice.

Through its teacher education programs and classroom resources, USHMM provides teachers with a framework for teaching about the Holocaust - one grounded in the history and applicable to several subject areas. The Museum's resources draw on its vast collection to offer teachers a broad range of media from which to choose, including timelines, diary entries, podcasts, oral testimony, and the Holocaust Encyclopedia. In 2016, USHMM launched a citizen history project called **History Unfolded**. Students and educators help to discover how their local newspapers covered the Nazi threat in the 1930s and 1940s, how Americans reacted, and what it means for us today. Students participate in hands-on research in their local libraries and computer labs, learning historical content and practical historical research skills. Their findings inform our upcoming exhibition regarding American responses to the Holocaust. Through History Unfolded

we have already begun to explore a transnational approach to helping our audiences find relevance. We have given teachers the tools to help their students draw local connections to international stories through archives. Now, how can we go a step further to give teachers the tools to help their students draw local connections to international stories through *historic sites*, offering resources for learning in an informal setting?

Before we ask students to engage in comparative analysis, I must address one aspect of this practice that is potentially problematic. The core piece of the Museum's pedagogical approach is the Guidelines for Teaching About the Holocaust. The guideline most relevant to this topic is to avoid comparisons of pain.

A study of the Holocaust should always highlight the different policies carried out by the Nazi regime toward various groups of people; however, these distinctions should not be presented as a basis for comparison of the level of suffering between those groups during the Holocaust. One cannot presume that the horror of an individual, family, or community destroyed by the Nazis was any greater than that experienced by victims of other genocides. Avoid generalizations that suggest exclusivity such as "The victims of the Holocaust suffered the most cruelty ever faced by a people in the history of humanity."

In exploring these comparisons, we must be careful never to stray from this guideline. Teachers often avoid academic comparisons for fear that they will break this guideline. USHMM may be able to provide further clarity about how to distinguish between academic comparisons of history and those of suffering. We must constantly ask if the comparisons that we can make are responsible.

We are drawing on the work of scholars such as Theodore Rosengarten, whose body of research was based in studies of race relations and the American South and grew to incorporate the Holocaust. “I’d use my knowledge of one to illuminate the other by comparing the policies and results of radical racism in two different environments.”

For public history as it relates to the Holocaust, we may look at the theme of discrimination and how it is used in Holocaust sites in Europe. The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam’s mission is to bring “the life story of Anne Frank to the attention of as many people as possible worldwide with the aim of raising awareness of the dangers of anti-Semitism, racism, and discrimination and the importance of freedom, equal rights and democracy.” Could those same themes not be explored at American historic sites like the Whitney Plantation Museum and Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site as well as the many unpreserved sites of historical trauma that pepper the American landscape in the Southeast and beyond?

Are there methodologies being used by international authentic sites of conscience relating to the Holocaust that are transferrable to American sites of conscience unrelated to the Holocaust? We hope to create a lesson based on sound pedagogy drawn from international sites of conscience related to the Holocaust. This lesson or tool will help educators use local site visits to enhance themes taught in their Holocaust courses, furthering students’ abilities to find relevance in these themes. Taking a transnational approach to helping our audience find relevance in the Holocaust is part of a larger trend in the globalization of public history. It’s about finding patterns across boundaries of time and geography to help our audiences think historically and find meaning in the past. It’s about taking one aspect of an historical event and finding where that theme emerges at different points in the past.

“Moving Beyond the National: New Perspectives on International and Transnational Public Histories”

Prologue

In October of 2009, members of United Auto Workers Local 442 gathered in a meeting space inside the Electrolux plant in Webster City to hear a special announcement. The plant would be closed, they were told, and their jobs most likely moved to a new facility in Ciudad Juarez. The union members had less than an hour to take in the news before returning to their shift. “We’ve done a lot of good for the community when we’ve been here. It’s just a shame to see it come to an end,” said Paul Erkisen, Local 442’s president who represented workers at the nearly sixty-five year old plant.⁶

Obdulia was seventeen years old, married, and with a small baby when she first went work in a maquiladora in Tijuana, Mexico. “When I get of work at 5:00 in the afternoon I go straight to pick up my boy, then I go buy something for him to eat. As you see, I have to put aside a part of my salary to buy milk for my son and vegetables for stewing, to eat with beans and tortillas. My money almost never goes far enough to be

⁶ *Globe Gazette*, 7 March 2011.

able to afford any meat. I go home to cook...and give my husband something to eat. The poor guy comes home dying of hunger.”⁷

In the early twentieth century, Newton, Iowa was heralded as the “washing machine capital of the world,” with five factories producing either machines or parts. Newton was the historic home of Maytag, an iconic American brand. After being acquired by appliance-maker Whirlpool in the early 2000s, a group of executives announced that Newton’s historic campus would be closed, its factory shuttered. Many of the jobs from Newton would be relocated to Reynosa, Mexico. “It’s tough,” said Melinda Kirtley, a twenty one year veteran of the plant. “My father put his 30 years in here, and several uncles and cousins. My brother has 29.6 years in. Tough. It’s tough. I just want to move on, what else can I do?”⁸

A skilled seamstress, María Remedios Escareno Pérez went to work in a maquiladora in the mid-1990s so that she could apply for medical benefits through Mexico’s state healthcare system. Decades earlier, in 1961, she made approximately \$35.00 U.S. dollars a week sewing garments. In the maquiladora, Pérez hoped to make a good impression and earn more income by completing three times as much work as

⁷ Norma Iglesias Prieto, *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladoras*, trans. Michael Stone with Gabrielle Winkle (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985, trans., 1997), 33-34.

⁸ *Newton Daily News*, 27 October 2007. “The Town Maytag Left Behind,” *CBS Evening News*, 18 October 2007, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-town-maytag-left-behind/>

asked. After completing nearly two hundred garments that week, “they paid me 90 Pesos (\$9.00 U.S. dollars) and I cried.”⁹

Statement

Over the past decade, several factories run by large, multinational corporations have left Iowa (and other Midwestern states) and reopened as maquiladoras in the Mexican cities of Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, and Reynosa. The closures of these factories, and the subsequent loss of full time jobs, have left many communities in the Midwest in states of economic uncertainty. Stories of job loss and deindustrialization in Iowa have been frequently chronicled in the national media – from National Public Radio to *The New York Times*. Popular media coverage has been decidedly one-sided, however, as it usually limits discussion to how only Americans are impacted by the new global economy. This proposal seeks to go beyond a study of how cities and communities in the United States are affected by factory closures by placing factory closures in the Midwest within a larger globalization context, so that we can better examine the historical dimensions of trade, capitalism, and labor.

Opening a Discussion

In terms of our working group discussion, it may be best to frame a discussion for this project as this: *What does "collaboration" look like when expanding the geographical scope of public history practice? What are challenges that arise from international collaborations? What are the possible solutions?*

⁹ Martha A. Ojeda and Rosemary Hennessy, eds. *NAFTA from Below: Maquiladora Workers, Farmers, and Indigenous Communities Speak Out on the Impact of Free Trade in Mexico* (San Antonio: Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, 2006), 104.

To broaden our understanding of globalization and establish a better context for looking at its effects on people and place, I would like to create a digital exhibit that would connect the histories of communities in Iowa (and possibly the Midwest) with the histories of cities now associated with the maquiladoras. In terms of globalization, there several interesting questions. How did these seemingly disparate communities (e.g. Webster City, IA and Ciudad Juarez) with their own unique historical qualities come to intersect with one another? Is there a way for people impacted by globalization on both sides of the border to tell their own stories? What would these stories tell us about historical changes to labor and capitalism? Can a dialog be created between these different communities and cities?

The idea behind a digital exhibit is to trace the historical developments of globalization, while also allowing those impacted by it to present their own histories through interviews, photographs, or presentations of material cultural. In reporting on the deindustrialization of the upper Midwest, journalists often come into a closing factory town and create photo essays focused on boarded up storefronts, drug use, and poverty.¹⁰ Similar stories come out of American reporting on life in the maquiladoras. These stories tend to offer a voyeuristic look at depressed communities or exploited workers without discussing the major problems of globalization.¹¹

With the issue of globalization being of central significance, this project idea will be informed by a number of scholars whose work is based on issues of capitalism, inequality, and

¹⁰ <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/28/iowa-brendan-hoffman-factory-electrolux/>

¹¹ David Harvey has argued that a significant part of the new global economy is the rise of flexible accumulation, where production is no longer centered in a historical home, but can occur in multiple locations. Wages are diffused to a point that they have no real impact on the communities that support the production process. David Harvey, "Flexible Accumulation through Urbanization Reflections on Post Modernism in the American City, *Perspecta*, Vol 26, 251-272.

labor. Among these are David Harvey, Joyce Appleby, Roger Hayter, and Richard Saull. I hope to add to this list by engaging in our working group.

A project that seeks to document and intersect the historical and present-day conditions of maquiladora workers and deindustrialized communities in the United States is going to have a number of potential problems. Where laid-off factory workers in Iowa publically lament the loss of good paying jobs and share their stories of economic hardships in newspapers or through other media, workers in the maquiladoras rarely have a public option to vent their social, political, or economic frustrations. Many times, the jobs that leave the U.S. for Mexico reopen behind guarded security gates, where a recorded voice of dissent can be met with the loss of employment.¹² Because of this, there is a significant ethical question to even beginning such a project. How does one record the life histories of maquiladora workers and ensure their safety from retaliation? Here, I have two ideas (and am seeking other suggestions), both of which involve a standard public history practice of establishing relationships built upon respect and equality.¹³ The first idea is locate workers interested in the project and supply them with prepaid phones that would allow them to communicate in some form of anonymity. The second idea is to limit interviews and project participation to workers who currently reside in the United States but who have experience with the maquiladoras (this also opens another problem concerning documentation status and the need for anonymity). In whichever idea, anonymity is key and I believe it more prudent to utilize ethnographic methods when talking to Mexican

¹² Many critical works of globalization and the maquiladoras also point out that women workers face physical and sexual harassment by their supervisors if they speak out against their employers.

¹³ In practicing public history with marginalized communities, I have often relied upon the methods of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

(Mexican American) respondents instead of traditional oral history techniques (which often seek out identifiable characteristics such as names, family members, and locations).

Working with deindustrialized communities in Iowa will be less problematic from an ethical standpoint, but will still require care. In the last Presidential election, for example, anti-immigrant rhetoric collided with feelings of anti-globalization to create a dangerous mix of right-wing demagoguery. Many of the small communities in Iowa that have seen factories leave for Mexico supported national candidates in 2016 who espoused such ideas (it should be pointed out, however, that these same communities supported Obama in 2008 and 2012). Given the disappointing rise in anti-Mexican sentiment, I am concerned about what I will hear from respondents.

The recent Presidential election does, however, provide a fertile research agenda. Since the election was largely decided on the votes of a small number of counties in the upper Midwest that are suffering deindustrialization, the national press has given a great deal of coverage of the plight of American workers. Much of this coverage has privileged the white working class men and women of Iowa, while avoiding how all working people throughout the country have endured lower wages and even unemployment. An exciting part of this project is that it can help demythologize the white working class by placing them within a larger examination of global capitalism and labor.

Goals for Working Group Participation

This project is still in the planning stages at this point. By early summer, I and others hope to apply for a digital-focused grant to make the project a reality. I am hoping that through early collaboration with the group, and at the conference, that I will be able to focus this idea into something more manageable and nuanced. I believe that taking public history to a transnational

level – to demonstrate the interconnectedness of history, labor and capitalism – is a worthwhile endeavor, and I am committed to helping it happen.

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DEMOCRATIZING GLOBAL PUBLIC HISTORY: UNESCO'S MEMORY OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME AND TRANSNATIONAL MEDIATIONS OF CONTESTED NATIONAL PASTS

UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme provides an important but understudied framework for considering public history in international and transnational contexts. In 1992, after the destruction of the National Library in Sarajevo by Serbian nationalists, UNESCO launched its Memory of the World Programme as a measure to mitigate against the risks of "cultural amnesia." The program's founders sought to provide a catalyst for preserving what could otherwise be destroyed or go missing as a result of armed conflict, social upheaval, theft, or negligence. The Memory of the World Programme therefore traces its origins back to highly charged circumstances of war and violent political conflict, precisely the conditions that give rise to struggles over historical memory.

The Memory of the World Register is not a physical archive but rather a curated list, comparable to the more prominent UNESCO World Heritage List, which recognizes sites associated with cultural heritage. In contrast, the Memory of the World Programme (hereafter MoWP) signifies the recognition of a compendium of documents, manuscripts, photographs, audio and other media recordings, as well as entire archives and library collections, which are deemed to be "archival holdings of universal value." Examples of registered documents include older historic materials, ranging from the Magna Carta, to a collection of historical Silk Road maps preserved in Iran, to the documentary heritage of West Indian laborers who worked on the Panama Canal. In addition, the Register includes more recent materials, such as archives of the Asian-African Conference held in Bandung Indonesia in 1955 and the 21st century Language Archive, which preserves sample digital recordings documenting 102 contemporary languages.

The program's General Guidelines defines the Memory of the World as "*the documented, collective memory of the peoples of the world – their documentary heritage*" [1]. Nomination of an archive or set of documents involves a lengthy process, and applications

may be prepared by institutions, organizations, or community-based coalitions, as well as government agencies. Selections by UNESCO are made after multiple rounds of review by regional and international committees. The current list, which appears on the program's [website](#), includes 301 documents from over a hundred countries all over the world, and the Register also includes comparable lists recognizing significant holdings and materials on a regional and national level.

The MoWP presents challenges and opportunities to public historians, archivists, and heritage professionals. For example, the Register includes various forms of human rights documentation, such as Anne Frank's extant diaries, the Warsaw Ghetto Archives, and the Documents of the Nanjing Massacre. In light of the ongoing phenomena of historical denial regarding both the Holocaust and the Nanjing Massacre, the Register's inclusion of such human rights documentation suggests another mode of recourse for historians and other groups who have been battling against such revisionism. That is, the international recognition of a UNESCO designation can be helpful both to catalyze new public-history activity on a local level, while helping to counter historical distortions that circulate in respective national and regional contexts, as well as in virtual environments.

An example of this process unfolded in South Korea concerning the inscription of the "1980 Archives for the May 18th Democratic Uprising against the Military Regime." The archives document a pivotal event in modern South Korean history. On May 18th, 1980, university students and other residents of the southwestern city of Gwangju came out in protest against the nationwide imposition of martial law. The new military government dispatched special force paratroopers to Gwangju to suppress the protest, and after ten days of popular resistance, the military crackdown resulted in the deaths of 165 citizens in and around Gwangju, along with thousands injured and 76 people who went missing. The events metonymically known as "May 18th" or "5.18" would play a formative symbolic role in galvanizing the democratization movement that later culminated in the shift from authoritarian rule to democratic elections in late 1980s. Regarding the significance of the Uprising, Stanford historical sociologist Gi-Wook Shin has written, "It was arguably the single most important event that shaped the political and social landscape of South Korea in the 80s and 90s" [1]. Notably, it was only in 1988 that what had been known as the "Gwangju Riot" was officially changed to the "May 18th Democratic Uprising."

Regarding the process behind the 5.18 Archive's inscription, the UNESCO application was submitted by a committee comprised of public historians and local residents in Gwangju, with the effort spearheaded by Dr. Jong-chul Ahn, a South Korean public intellectual who had headed a bureau in the National Human Rights Commission and had long been involved in helping to document the popular memory of the 5.18. Beginning in 2009, Dr. Ahn and researchers at the 5.18 Research Foundation and Chonnam National University met with local organizations of victims and bereaved families to collaborate on the assembling of materials. In the eventual UNESCO application, documentation of events surrounding the 5.18 Uprising included a total of 858,904 documents and items, including printed and handwritten documents, photographs, audio-recordings, publications, and items of material culture. This compressed process was possible because the application built upon the work of various agencies and individuals, who had been preserving and collecting relevant documentary evidence for decades.

The memory of that event is still controversial, and during the period of preparing the application, the committee in Gwangju refrained from openly publicizing their bid for inscription. However, word eventually leaked to the press, and a far-right group raised a vocal opposition, lobbying UNESCO directly and reviving accusations that the Gwangju Uprising was a "North Korean plot of insurrection." It should be noted that South Korean historians and their counterparts from abroad have empirically debunked this conspiracy theory of North Korean involvement, yet that characterization continued to circulate among South Korean far-right groups in their attempts to discredit the 1980-era popular resistance. After undertaking its own review, the MoWP International Advisory Committee reaffirmed its endorsement of the 5.18 Archive, dismissing the right-wing allegations. Ultimately, the UNESCO committee reached a unanimous vote for inscription of the 5.18 Archives to the Memory of the World Register on May 25, 2011. In the category of human rights documentation, the archive of the 5.18 Uprising would become the first MoWP inscription in Northeast Asia. On a local level, the UNESCO designation helped secure funding for new institutions, such as the creation of a newly built central repository for 5.18 documentation in a historic downtown building, including a permanent exhibition, human rights library, and research facilities.

In the face of competing knowledge claims regarding national histories, international

recognition by UNESCO can afford a compelling space for intervention. Notably, in Gwangju, the effort for MoWP inscription was coordinated *not* by a national agency but was initiated through grassroots collaboration among public historians and civic groups, later with support by local city government. While conventional national archives have long been regarded as official repositories for preserving documents, UNESCO's MoWP may open an avenue for local community-based groups and individuals to challenge the traditional state monopoly over the institutional power of creating authoritative archives with reach on an international scale.

[1] "Memory of the World: General Guidelines to Safeguard Documentary Heritage," <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001256/125637e.pdf>

[2] Shin, "Introduction" in Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang, eds., *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), xi.