



## ***Editor's Note: De-Museumizing Migrations Without and Within***

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**Abstract:** This is the journal editor's note to the Fall 2011 issue of *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, entitled "Contesting Memory: Museumizations of Migration in Comparative Global Context," including papers that were presented at an international conference on "Museums and Migration" held on June 25-26, 2010, at the Maison des Science de l'Homme (MSH) in Paris, co-organized by the issue co-editors Ramón Grosfoguel, Yvon Le Bot and Alexandra Poli, with the support of MSH Director and President of the International Sociological Association, Michel Wieviorka. Appreciating the important comparative studies in the volume regarding the contested representations of global migration history by migrants and officials organizing migration museums, the editor suggests that it may be helpful to maintain a dialectical epistemic framework and vantage point here—using which the seemingly separate categories "museum" and "university" are rendered more or less identical and one in which the identity of the studied object and the studying subject of the studies undertaken is consciously recognized and maintained. In this light, then migration can be experienced and studied in its broader and multifaceted meanings, de-museumized to encompass all migratory experiences without and within.

This, Fall 2011 issue of *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, entitled "Contesting Memory: Museumizations of Migration in Comparative Global Context" includes papers presented at an international conference on "Museums and Migration" held on June 25-26, 2010, at the Maison des Science de l'Homme (MSH) in Paris. Co-editors Ramón Grosfoguel, Yvon Le Bot, and Alexandra Poli—who also served as the co-organizers of the conference with the support of MSH Director and President of the International Sociological Association, Michel Wieviorka—have done an excellent job summarizing the contributions of each au-

thor in the volume in the introduction that follows this editor's note.

My purpose here is to briefly reflect on the contributions and the co-editors' reading of them as well, seeking to further understand the seemingly novel idea of "migration museums" in light of the purpose and mission of the present journal and my own substantive interests as framed by the sociology of self-knowledge and what C. Wright Mills called the sociological imagination—that is, the sociological perspective which enables its beholder to relate one's own and others' personal troubles to larger public issues.

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“It belongs to a museum” is an adage used in popular culture. It can have a double-meaning when used seriously, or sarcastically. Seriously uttered, it means that something is too rare and has too much value to belong to someone or someplace specific and is of a broad public significance, so belongs to a museum for all to see, experience, teach about, learn from, and simply enjoy. When used sarcastically, it is usually uttered when people think something has lost its current, practical use-value and is too “old” in the mundane sense of the word; so it belongs to a museum. In either case, when the object is museumized, it usually leaves the sphere of practical use for what it is, and turns into a more or less inanimate object of greater, or lesser, value, and simply put on display, passive to its surrounding, and for others to use for seeing, learning, teaching, experiencing, and enjoying—more or less.

Applied to people themselves and their inter/intra/subjective experiences of self or others in social life, one may then think of a third, but related, meaning for the adage: becoming “museumized” can have this inter/intra/subjective meaning of one’s or another’s losing a sense of what one or another is or is worth—too much or too little—such that one finds oneself of no practical use or value when it comes to active participation in whatever one is currently engaged in, becoming merely a display object for oneself or others to—more or less—see, teach about, learn from, experience, and/or simply enjoy.

Would one put something, someone, or a self/social experience in a museum, if it is already actively out there, and/or in here, everywhere, if one cares and learns to notice and see it as it is present and takes place everyday, everywhere—world-historically, and in the here and now? Would one then need a museum to show it, to teach it and learn about it, or more or less enjoy it? Does “migration” belong to a museum, for one or another reason?

In addressing the above questions, we also need to recall that the English word “museum” comes from Latin, which itself originates from a Greek word (pronounced as *Museion*) named after Muses, who were regarded as patron goddesses of the arts and literature. “Museion”/“Museum” denote a place set aside for study and the arts and literature.

While today the terms “museum” and “university” refer to different institutions, the identity of the purpose of modern-day museums and that of universities is apparent from the word’s meaning as noted above. You go to both to learn, to “guide”/teach, and to educate yourself or others about something. You may have to pay a fee or receive a wage or salary, but at times it may be free and state-sponsored, using hired or “free” and volunteer work. While there, you can read the literature about artifacts yourself, and/or attend a class, seminar, or workshop, organized by a “guide.” Lectures and learning may be in person, or via audiovisual, or nowadays online, media. Objects to examine may be on the floor, in special rooms such as libraries, in “labs” inside, online, or experienced during field trips outside, accompanied by “tour guides.” Granted, admittance to museums is presumed to be much easier, targeting wider public audiences for education, and universities may be more or less difficult to be admitted into. Museum visits can take at most a day or two to accomplish. University “visits” months, years, or decades. But all these do not do away with the basic commonality of the two seemingly different, and nowadays separately housed, institutions. Moreover, with the advent of the information age and the Internet, both institutions have extended their reach to virtual reality, and offer their resources and services online to an unprecedented extent. Furthermore, some universities now have permanent museum collections, and museums offer permanent teaching and learning resources and facilities.

Museums have historically taken many forms and are now specializing in many fields. So do universities. And, so, a new museum type, or field or concentration of scholarship and research today, has emerged having to do with global migration. As scholars are increasingly becoming interested in migration studies, thanks in part to the deepening and widening reach of globalization today, so we find a new type of museum is emerging that sets its specific goal to educate the public about global migration, as experienced by specific peoples in specific international contexts. The purpose in both migration studies and migration museums is to critically explore and understand the historical processes through which specific migration experiences, forced or not, have taken place, and how various sides involved in the process come to terms with the nature of the migration process, its causes, and its consequences and outcomes—appreciating (or not) what immigrants have lost, found, or newly contributed in the course of their migratory experience. Obviously, as the migration experiences themselves were or still are contentious, the university studies of migration and the museum exhibitions of migration and what transpired are contentious and contested.

But, then, we should still go back to the earlier mentioned double-meaning of “it belongs to a museum” and the question we posed. It now sounds somewhat irrelevant, if not absurd, to think that studies of global migration (including those of migration museums) do not belong to universities, or migration exhibitions and workshops to museums. One way to address this seeming irrelevance in favor of understanding is to ask: can studies of migration in universities, or exhibitions of migration experience in museums be conducted in such a way that teaching or learning about “migration” as an everyday, everywhere, living experience—one that is experienced by “others” and by oneself, including the researcher or

museum curator him/herself—turns into a more or less isolated, frozen, lopsided, inanimate, object “out there,” intellectually or figuratively concentrated on, displayed as a concentration program or exhibition project, and then, second-handedly contested? Can museums and universities have this rather odd effect of turning the subject matters of their study or exhibition into lifeless, rigidified objects of lesser or greater value, frozen inside or outside or across equally rigidified disciplinary boundaries or exhibition styles, and simply put on display to more or less effectively teach, learn from, experience, and enjoy?

The reason for the above introductory notes is to encourage the reader to keep in mind a double-meaning of the nature of contributions collected in this journal issue, *including* this editor's note. On the one hand, the contributions aim to shed light on the nature of what may be called the contested museumizations of migration taking place in a comparative global context, focusing particularly on several Western migration museums. On the other hand, this publication itself is an exhibition of intellectual artifacts, produced by university educated/affiliated scholars who—one may safely argue, depending how far back we go and how we define “migration”—are personally or ancestrally immigrant themselves. I hope that by the end of this editorial note, I succeed in clarifying why it may be helpful to maintain this alternative, dialectical epistemic framework and vantage point being proposed here—one in which the seemingly separate categories “museum” and “university” are unfrozen and rendered more or less fluid, interpenetrating, and identical—ones in which, moreover, the identity of the studied object and the studying subject of the studies undertaken is also consciously recognized and maintained.

The issue co-editors plausibly point out that while studies of migration and of museums proliferate separately, academic

studies of the phenomenon loosely called “migration museum” have been rare—and for this reason consider the present journal issue a first of its kind directly focusing on the topic and containing new studies by specialists on the field. One reason for this lack of research on the topic may have to do with the fact that migration museum as a museum type is rather recent, and its advent itself reflective of the increasing significance of migration in the rapidly globalizing world of the past several decades.

When my colleague Ramón Grosfoguel approached me with the idea of publishing the proceedings of the previously held conference on such a theme—an invitation of which the current volume is now a product—the idea of migration museums was new to me and I found it rather odd that I had not heard of it as such previously, especially given that I am myself a naturalized “immigrant” from Iran living in the US. I can’t say that I am an avid museum-goer, but every now and then, when friends visit us in Boston, we take them to museums, and I have been to some museums in Iran, Greece, and elsewhere as well, ones of the usual nature and character as far as museums are traditionally concerned. I realize that many small or large sections of museums are devoted to displaying the cultural heritage or artifacts of “other” or one’s own cultures and peoples, and that annually people of different cultural or ethnic heritage in the US, including Iranians, take to the streets and hold marches and events celebrating their ethnic and migratory background and cultures and displaying their arts and crafts and customs to people of other backgrounds and traditions.

Reading the rich contributions which then Grosfoguel shared in preparation for editing and eventual launching of this journal issue, however, exposed me not only to an ongoing, and in fact increasing trend in building and organizing such migration museums particularly in the Western parts of the world, but also to the rich and critical

academic studies of the phenomenon as exemplified by the contributions in this journal issue. Having the dialectical epistemic lens on, as described previously, I now saw reading these manuscripts themselves in terms of examining museal artifacts, their authors themselves as academic migrants, and myself, being the issue editor, a curator for their museal exhibition in the form of this publication. Now, not having even attended a migration museum “out there,” I realized I have been living and working in one, that is, the university “museum,” for years. I think this bridging across what seems to be alienated or alienable spaces or categories such as “migration museums” to one’s own everyday and everyplace life experiences is very important, as I hope this editor’s note will make further clear.

Andrea Meza Torres compares the contrasting museumizations of migration in Paris and Berlin and the politics of how building such centers challenges or accommodates the broader national identities in France and Germany. Lia P. Rodrigues explores a similar theme, but this time in the context of the Danish national identity and its “Nordic amnesia” of its racialized history of colonialism. Christina Castellano, comparatively explores Asian, Mexican and African migrant community museums in Chicago and how they articulate their mission with the larger, imagined identity of US as a nation. Estela Rodríguez García studies a similar theme in the context of Spain, and the Cultural Heritage designs in Europe as represented in the Forum Universal de las Culturas in the Barcelona and Catalonia’s History of Immigration Museum. Ilham Boumankhar reports in detail on her study of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Australia, including many photos, one of which appears on the cover of this journal issue—a mock-up of a ship in a large room of the museum, representing the mode of transportation of migrants. Veronique Bragard studies the representations (or lack thereof, as far as Congolese

migration to Belgium and its diaspora therein are concerned) of Belgium's colonial history in Tervuren Museum's exhibition, and Artwell Cain and Stephen Small, in their respective studies, explore the problematic representations of African diaspora in Europe (particularly in The Netherlands and in the United Kingdom, respectively).

The studies report in detail on the conduct of audiovisual workshops teaching and sharing immigration experiences, and whole sets of organizational innovations and challenges, including fiscal budget considerations, in order to make possible for people and visitors to have a museum experience of what it took and is still taking for migrants to move (or be forcibly and violently moved, as the painful history of slavery is concerned) from one place to another. The museum then becomes an agent of its own, linking with the immigrant communities outside, and finding ways of articulating what actually went on historically in the course of migration, the challenges faced and still facing the migrants, and highlighting as well the ongoing politics and contestation of remembering and historical and personal memory construction and representation, especially as emergent in the process of organizing and curating the museum itself.

A whole series of institutions, large or small, are then set up, the sole purpose of which is to represent, amid much contestation over both substance and form as well as organization and budgets, the "true" nature of what went on in the histories of migrations of peoples. What these migration museums do, perhaps with more creative sets of means—audiovisual, tangible, and sensible—than those offered at the universities, is essentially the same as what the authors of these contributions (and the co-editors, and this editor as well) essentially do in constructing particular memories, discourses, retrospectives, prescriptions, and forecasts of the migration experience

worldwide—narratives in which, as noted above, all those published in this volume are also implicated in terms of their own personal or ancestral migration experiences. Having our dialectical epistemic lens in mind, in studying the process of museumization of migration in a comparative global context, in other words, we should be also reflecting, in a world-history context, on our own personal experiences as more or less recently immigrant "professors" and "scholars."

When considering the nature and types of migration museums studied in this volume, it is important to note that they predominantly represent and study a particular form of migration, that is, migrations across national borders, involving movements of people with particular ethnic backgrounds from one place to another, from what they regarded as their old home(s) to what they expect to experience as their new home(s). They give up one set of senses of belonging, to acquire a new set of senses of belonging. The question, though, is to realize this is just one type of migratory experience. Once we limit, consciously or not, the migratory experience to one particular form, we create insiders/outsiders associated with that particularly frozen and typified form of migratory experience. The "native" people who arrived earlier, then begin to feel a sense of entitlement that those newly "arriving" do not (yet) feel. Migration museums, as such, would then be visited by people who feel they identify or not with particular types and histories of migration—forced or not, violent or not, enjoyable or not. However, to the extent that "migration" becomes defined more broadly as any experience of moving from one home to another, from one inner state or self to another, from one family to another, from one group or organization to another, from one university or museum to another, then suddenly the imagination and conception of the migratory experience, of what constitutes migra-



tion, its short-term or long-term history, its micro or macro dynamics, etc., is suddenly unfrozen, such that the concept and the experience becomes inclusive for all. This way, basically, all secondary socializations become interpreted, seen, taught, learned, and enjoyed (or not) as migratory experiences. Then a so-called recent “native” can begin to identify with the experience of a differently experienced migratory experience by other “strangers” because the “native” has experienced the sense of loss, finding, belonging, or stigmatization, stereotyping, humiliation, and outsidership, in his or her own way. So, migration museums can be much more than just displays and/or experiences of cross-national migratory experience. They can be museums of all types of migrations without and within to more to and find new home(s). And, once this broader conception is acquired, then, the objectivation of learning and exhibition places to universities, museums, and particular journal issue publications loses its frozen significance, because now anyone, anyplace, and anytime can see, experience, teach about, and learn from, and more or less enjoy one’s own experiences of migration in one’s life-time.

One can go to “migration museums” out there to learn about and partake in the contested memory of migration experiences in a global context. However, provided that one maintains a non-binary epistemic lens, it should not escape our attention that we can also reflect on our own experiences, as more or less recent (personally and/or ancestrally) immigrant professors and scholars, and migrants of different kinds (and not just cross-national types), on the “museum” floors of our own selves and (for us as academics) universities, the “places” where we also seek to study, teach, and advance the sciences and the humanities. We are, ourselves, also global migration artifacts and textbooks, in need of self-understanding and re-experiencing of the nature of global and world-historical pro-

cesses that have shaped who we are, and how we go about knowing the world and ourselves. I can’t speak about the contributors’ own personal experiences, but can briefly speak about my own, for the purpose of illustration. The advantage of migration museum visits—such as now, as you read this journal—is, after all, to study the migratory artifacts and experiences closely and by direct example.

Recently a colleague of mine kindly invited several faculty members, including me, to share and reflect on our experiences as “immigrant professors” by way of a forum on campus, one that is going to continue via a second forum next semester. I appreciated the invitation and considered the topic very timely and interesting. However, personally, as I expressed this in the forum itself, I had this discomforting sense of being put on display as an “immigrant (professor),” when, ironically, this has never been a part of my self-identity as a person—even though, based on all textbook definitions, I am an “immigrant.” The “personal trouble” of being labeled an “immigrant professor” hit me as both odd, and interesting. I say “again,” because this was not the first time I was confronted with the line of fault between how I experience my self-identity and how others view me. I recall editing another issue of *Human Architecture* a few years ago, one co-edited by Terry-Ann Jones and Eric Mielants (Vol. VII, Issue 4, Fall 2009), when at the time I reflected on the same experience in my editor’s note to the issue, noting that “[w]henver the topic of migration and its studies come up, somehow, as far as I am concerned, the term does not personally ring an identity bell in me immediately. For some reason, the status of being an immigrant to the U.S. does not strike the core of my identity and sensibility. I have always wondered why, given that obviously I am, for all practical purposes, an immigrant from another region of the world (Middle East, Iran in particular) ...” (p. viii).

There, I argued that what explained this discrepancy between the “objective” circumstances of my life, and my “subjective” identification with it (or not) has much to do with the negative connotations associated in the public discourse with migrants as “not belonging” in par with other citizens. The co-editors of the present volume also raise this important point in their introduction when they observe,

... the term “migrant” itself has been contested by “minority” groups that happen to have a long colonial history in the metropolitan society and are today formal metropolitan citizens born and raised in the metropolises but still perceived as “foreigners” and “immigrants.” (p. 2)

In other words, the very term “migration museum” may sound offensive to some because it turns a secondary aspect of their identity as a human being into a primary identity marker, a marker that has at times been associated with otherness and outsidership. They may also find it offensive that particular peoples are singled out as having had a migratory experience, when in their view all have had the experience, depending on how the term is defined, the type of “migration” experienced, and how one defines the spatiotemporal coordinates of the migratory experience. This is how I have been interpreting and experiencing migration.

I think such feelings as noted by the co-editors in the above quote may not be limited to long-established migrant families and persons, but to recent migrants as well, particularly those who have earned citizenship in their “host” nations or institutions. What seemed paradoxical to me—as I had reiterated in my Fall 2009 editor’s note—is that from another point of view and standpoint, I regarded and still regard being a “migrant”—in the sense of not being

bound to any particular national, cultural, spiritual, academic culture and disciplinary tradition, and being in turn “nomadic” and “migrating” across the borderlands of false dichotomizations and binaries—as being crucial for understanding and transforming social and self realities in favor of more just and egalitarian outcomes.

A further complicating consideration is that who is a migrant or not depends on the extent to which we come to realize how much of our subjective realities today have been intricately shaped by diverse cultural, ethnic/racial, spiritual, gendered, etc., elements such that for those who care to carefully observe and study their thoughts, feeling, sensibilities and biographies, they will find that there is literally no way one can find purely “native” or “migrant” selves within. Here, Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of our inner lives being populated with all sorts of selves and representations of people comes to mind. In other words, as soon as one begins to realize the extent to which what one has regarded as his or her “home” identity—be it a religious belief, cultural identity marker, disciplinary or intellectual tradition, theoretical orientation, etc.—is in fact an amalgam of many different ideas from a diverse set of traditions, belief systems, and cultural or aesthetic values, one suddenly may awaken to the fact that one has been, subjectively, a “migrant” all along and never at home with anything specific. It is just that one’s personal, cultural, or ideological amnesia had prevented one to see the fluid and migratory nature of one’s subjective belongings and understandings.

The reason being labeled an “immigrant” and an “immigrant professor” is troubling to me personally, therefore, is less that of being in denial of my own objective identity as an immigrant, and more that of being singled out as if others, the so-called “natives” in particular, are presumed to be any less of a “migrant” than those readily more apparent and on display on the mu-

seum or university sites—and this, in the racialized and xenophobic (in my case also Islamophobic, even though I do not belong to any single spiritual tradition) context of “not belonging” being a negative value associated with the label “migrant” acquires its added significance.

It would therefore be quite limiting to focus our studies of migration and its museizations on macro processes, and especially its cross-national forms, and thereby lose sight of how the contestations of memories of what migrants can contribute to their new home (but in turn be denied acknowledgment for it) can take place in micro dynamics of our everyday academic lives. Exploitations of migrant labor do not take place just on agricultural fields or industrial shopfloors, needing then to be displayed second-hand on separately organized museum stands. These practices can take place on our university floors as well. And the exploitations should not be seen as ones simply belonging to lecturers.

Let me illustrate the above with an example. I know of a full-time faculty who “migrated” to his new university a while ago, where three then-colleagues eagerly approached him with the idea of starting a conference series. Two of these colleagues had been there for decades, and one had arrived a year before. Obviously, they had not initiated such a project until then, and were encouraged by the arrival of the new faculty to his new home to seek his contribution. It happens that the new faculty took the initiative in launching the conference series, always acknowledging, in writing, perhaps more than deserved, the input of his other colleagues in the process. The new faculty coined the conference series’ name, listing its principles, took initiatives in establishing the basic structures of its annual operation, seeking funding supports, and serving as a principal organizer and proceedings editor of four of the annual conferences. Then, given conflicts already underway in the department before even

he arrived—some of which these very same colleagues had drawn him into amid much fanfare and late night sloganeering and don quixotic plotting—when the conference series later acquired an international reputation and a good name, it just occurred to them that the conference series could be a wonderful item on their academic cv’s, associated solely with their own names to support their own promotional, service, and other ambitions. So, with the aid of another faculty who oddly used the excuse of a poster’s design to belittle the new faculty’s many years of work, they took over the project from the fifth annual conference on—to which, the new faculty of course willingly consented to let go of the troubles, amid a personal illness he was undergoing at the time. It just then happened that in the foreword to the published proceedings of the fifth conference series they then organized on their own, when commenting on the nature and background of the conference series, there was no “memory” of the new faculty and his name in sight—and this, despite the fact that in an internal memorandum a year before, announcing the take over, one of these then-colleagues could not avoid reluctantly acknowledging that the “migrant professor” who had newly arrived from another university, had been a co-founder and principal organizer of the series for the previous four years. The “tradition” of the organizing committee of the conference series as spelled out in the foreword to the fifth proceeding simply “lost memory” of the “past” co-founder, principal co-organizer and proceedings editor of the conference series.

Contested memories of migratory experience take many shapes and forms and can happen anytime and anyplace.

It is precisely these sorts of subtler violences, and contestations of memory of migratory experiences—experiences that do not have to always take the form of cross-national migrations—in our everyday, including academic, lives that may escape



our attention in the large halls of our global migration museums and departmental concentrations. We may then build magnificent migration museums and global migration studies for display on our websites and in our departmental posters, but in the very process of living our university lives end up subtly violating (even when apologies are offered) and belittling the integrity of colleagues and their labors for no good reason, in what they had thought to be their new academic homes.

When we speak of contesting memory in the context of establishing and running migration museums, we should therefore not lose sight of the fact that the processes of museumization of migration, on the one hand, and of academizations of migration experience, on the other hand, run the risk of transforming real and living symbolic interactive experience of agencies in everyday life into institutionalized contestations of second-handed, frozen, identities and scholarly projects that are further and further removed from the actual personal and historical experiences of actors in everyday life. So, we end up not seeing the trees for the forests of our academic or museal ambitions and busy-bodied strategic plans.

The question remains, however, as to whether the new advances in digital technologies in the Age of the Internet are making it more necessary, or obsolete, to rely on traditional and highly hierarchical and institutionalized forms of memory and knowledge construction in general, and more specifically as far as the experiences of global migration is concerned. Perhaps the very traditional notions of museum, and of the university, are being increasingly replaced as relics of the past belonging to "museums" with new modes of direct representation and expression via new digital and travel technologies that can make the building of formal museums and universities redundant in time.

In his "The University at a Crossroads,"<sup>1</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos asks:

The idea of a knowledge society implies that knowledge is everywhere; what is the impact of this idea on a modern university which was created on the premise that it was an island of knowledge in a society of ignorance? What is the place or the specificity of the university as a center of knowledge production and diffusion in a society with many other centers of production and diffusion of knowledge? (p. 9)

One can readily ask similar questions in regard to the process of museumization of migration and its consequent contestations as creatively and critically studied by contributors in this volume. In the context of a globalizing knowledge society, what and whose purpose does the museumization of migration in their current forms serve? In what way does the accommodation of historical memory of migration, as such, deprive people of real experience of other cultural heritages and traditions, and of alternative epistemic and knowledge traditions? To what extent the institutionalizations of migration museums and migration studies accommodate or inhibit our abilities to reflect on the museum floors or university campuses within our own intra- and interpersonal lives, and develop the necessary skills and know-how to understand the subtler migratory experiences we undergo everyday, wherever we are?

As an artificial ship in the midst of a great museum hall cannot capture the pain and the suffering the migrants faced in making the journeys from one home to another, the displays of "migrant professors" on campus forums, or belittling of their work after they arrived in their new home, or token inclusion of "other" faculty in de-

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<sup>1</sup> See *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, vol. IX, Special Issue, 2011, pp. 7-16.

partments while not respecting their contributions and integrity, cannot do justice to the complex realities of their subjectivities and to the appreciation of the subaltern voices they intend to contribute to the academic discourse.

Otherwise, both such museums and universities end up serving as legitimating vehicles for the status quo, their real prejudices becoming hidden behind the glamour of “diversity”-friendly and -fronted institutions that seemingly respect and equally appreciate different and pluriversal epistemic traditions and cultural heritages, when what actually passes as “true” memory and knowledge of how they belonged to the places and how their fared in making their contributions are those sifted through the “tolerable” assessments of powers-that-be, busily preoccupied with other important things.