



Innocent Luxembourg?

Colonial Aphasia in Luxembourgish Musea

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Summary

In this study, the National Museum of Natural History as well as the National Museum of History and Art are examined in order to see how the twenty-first century Luxembourgish museum landscape contributes to the construction of a national identity as well as collective memory influenced by colonial aphasia.

Surprisingly, the first thing to see is that even if Luxembourg has never been a classical colonial empire, Luxembourgers were entangled in colonial expansion everywhere in the world. Not only did many Luxembourgers join colonial armies or support missionary works in Africa, but also a lot of Luxembourgers migrated to the Belgian Congo where they obtained the same legal rights as Belgians themselves. This history and entanglement, however, is not being commemorated in public. The National Museum of Natural History is directly connected to colonialism because of the provenance of its collections as well as the portrayal of scientific racism. The National Museum of History and Art has less connections to colonialism in terms of the variety of its collections. Instead, the National Museum of History and Art is structured by ideas that are rooted in colonialism, constructing a national identity where people of colour are excluded from the collective memory.

In the National Museum of Natural History the attitude towards decolonization is regarded as irrelevant, where the focus lies on science instead of provenance. In the National Museum of History and Art the attitude is more neutral. Black heritage has not been included into national history until this day. In the latter, there is, however, a will for change since the museum is planning an exhibition on the entanglement of Luxembourg in colonialism. Thus, each museum is missing an integrated and balanced view on Luxembourg's racist past and by this contributes to colonial aphasia, which is a difficulty speaking about this contested past. This concept of colonial aphasia best captures the reality of the silence of colonial history.

Although the museums analysed are in the possession of objects that could narrate this history, the Luxembourgish colonial past is ignored and overlooked.

The combination of the construction of Luxembourgish identity as well as the aphasic situation in the Luxembourgish museum landscape creates a mnemonic hierarchy in which the history of people of colour is regarded as less important, promoting a neutralised Luxembourgish collective memory in which the dark pages of history are not being addressed. The national identity shapes the Luxembourgish collective memory in a way that it supports the idea of Luxembourg as a peaceful and neutral nation. Instead of making colonial history accessible to the public, it seems that conflict is avoided and silence is preferred.

This is especially troublesome in a society struggling with racism. The colonial past has been unmastered and swept aside. Museums seem to feed a problematic proposition, namely that the only way to move forward is to forget. The museum landscape is influencing the visitor in the perception that people of colour are not part of the collective memory and national identity which has a negative impact on hegemonic power relations. It is thus important that museums reshape a more inclusive self-image. Alternative ways to represent colonial history and reshape colonial structures are being proposed in the policy notes of this research.

At the same time, one needs to acknowledge that there are positive signs and a will to change. The National Museum of History and Art is planning to host a temporary exhibition on Luxembourgish colonial history and is considering including colonial history into its permanent exhibit. Central to this perspective is a need for diversity and inclusion which is only possible if people dethrone themselves and put themselves in the place of others.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

Museums played a significant role when I grew up. Not only did I accompany my parents to museums but I also took part in children's workshops offered by them on a regular basis.

Museums were thus always part of my life. However, during my studies, my view on museums drastically changed. During the courses that I attended, we discussed the colonial legacies of museums and were shown how museums were still predominantly made by and intended for white people. I kept stumbling upon the idea of the museum as an exclusive space over and over. Not only did I read more about discussions of colonial heritage in the news but I was also confronted with it in popular films such as the Marvel action film, *Black Panther*, in which a scene shows the difficulty of speaking about violent colonial histories and how people of colour are being discriminated against in museum spaces. I began contemplating whether this also applied to the museums of my home country, Luxembourg.

While I was a kid, I never realized that all of the workshops I took part in were solely focussing on Western culture, nor did any of the museums I visited show any Black heritage. The trust that I put into museums began to crumble. I began being particularly concerned of how relevant colonialism was in Luxembourg as I consider it as one of the main influences of racism. I consoled myself that Luxembourg must have been innocent in colonisation since otherwise we would have learned about it in the national curriculum. However, with the increasing attention that the relation between racism and history has gotten in the popular news, I began to question my view and began discussing it with friends. I could not believe that a country, surrounded by classical colonial empires such as Belgium, France or Germany would not have any connections to colonialism. There was just no possibility that a country of a size such as Luxembourg existed isolated from any external colonial influences.

The Black-Lives-Matter movement has provoked a revival of the discussion on colonial heritage. Disputed colonial collections have long been a taboo and still are in some countries in Europe (Beurden, 69). The movement has shown that “racism has not finished dividing all of humanity” (Calmes, 7). This shows that coloniality is still contributing to the experience of our daily lives (e.g: Wevers, 3; Turunen). Alice Procter, art historian and founder of the “Uncomfortable Art Tours” even states that “there is nobody alive today whose existence has not been shaped by colonialist, racist forces” (Procter, 7). Museum critics have used the above mentioned scene from the Marvel production as a reference to criticise the museum as being a space predominantly made for caucasian people (Message). This not only brings the discussion about the provenance and restitutions of colonial artefacts to a wider audience, but also shows the exclusion of people of colour in the museum sphere. Whereas the curator of the museum feels enough at ease to be drinking coffee, the black visitor is constantly observed by the security staff. This shows that there is not only a need to decolonize museum collections but also the way museums are organized, getting rid of colonial structures of Western supremacy. Not only were museums founded against the backdrop of colonialism as they are often filled with objects from former colonies but also through the representation of racial hierarchies, of which Luxembourg is not an exception as I will demonstrate in my research.

In 2007, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) defined a museum as “a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment”(ICOM). So, apart from being cultural institutions where people can access knowledge, museums are also defined as social institutions where complex exchanges and negotiations are taking place. Because of the trust that people put in museums, on the one

hand museums can function as places where social affiliations can form, on the other hand they also carry the potential of disseminating racism which can be triggered by ‘colonial aphasia’, a difficulty speaking about colonial past. According to dr. Vazquez Melken, professor of sociology and diversity, museums have contributed to colonial aphasia. Museums often present their exhibitions as an universal heritage while they are in fact often narrated from a Eurocentric point of view.

According to Melken, by showing objects from other countries, museums have long defined their visitors in opposition to ‘the other’ (Melken, 2). Museums “are representing the others as the other side of the colonial difference, classifying them, speaking *about* them, but not serving them and considering them as spectators (Wevers, 2). One way this is done is through the collections that they entail and their presentation. Alice Procter thinks that much emphasis is put on the way cultural objects are made or their aesthetic look. Because of this, museum spaces are often criticised for being highly superficial (Procter). However, the deeper history of the provenance of the objects is often neglected. In fact, “publications rarely address the frequently dubious provenance of colonial objects and acquisition practices among colonial officials, soldiers, missionaries, scholars and others” (Van Beuren, 69). The provenance of colonial objects in Luxembourg was the subject of an article in a national newspaper in 2019, where Michel Polfer, director of the National Museum of Art and History as well as Régis Moes, curator of the same museum, were questioned about the return of colonial cultural assets. While by showing some of the colonial heritage that can be found in the museum, the article has been introducing the topic, an extensive analysis has never been published (Wirth).

However, the history of ‘Black Europe’ and the colonial entanglements of Luxembourg is largely absent from collective memory in Luxembourg. Hence, the role that Luxembourg has played in colonialism is mostly obscured and if not, it is narrated in musea

from an Eurocentric perspective (Van Beuren, 69). In an article about Luxembourgers in Congo, journalist Pierre Halen writes that one “must fight against nostalgia about ‘a lost paradise’” (Halen, 46). This familiar nostalgia can be found in testimony articles such as “La fin du Monde Colonial” in the *Luxemburger Wort*. In this article, Jean Calmes, son of a civil servant in the Belgian Congo recounts his childhood in Luluabourg, today known as Kananga. The narration resembles a description of a heavenly childhood describing it as “a small world that lived in peace” (Calmes, 6) without taking into account the suffering of African cultures. Instead, the description is glorifying the colonial past, telling about how children were able to get in touch with local culture as they were taken care of by African nannies. This portrayal was, however, far away from what the real life of Congolese people consisted of. A reason for this might certainly be the apartheid in which Luxembourgers lived, but by glorifying this past and not providing more information about how suppressed people experienced this past, the press is engaging and reinforcing the denial of Luxembourgish complicity in colonialism. There are of course other articles, such as Nathalie Lodhi’s *RTL* series, called “Colonial Complicity”, that provide a less glorified image of this past. However, even though the series does mention the character of Nicolas Grang as the first Luxembourger to travel to Congo, it does not take into account that he “fought a lot in order to ‘pacify’ the region” (Moes, 115). This is in sharp contrast to the representation of other contested histories such as the looted art by Nazis during the Second World War. These events are on the other side largely commemorated whether through exhibitions in museums, events or in the education of young people.

This difficulty of speaking about colonial history, to which Ann Laura Stoler refers to as ‘Colonial Aphasia’, has been shaping the portrayal of ‘Black history’ in many museums worldwide. The presence of diversity is however crucial in museums because of their role as constructors of national identity (Weiser) and collective memory (Anderson). While the

relationship between citizens and states has drastically changed in recent years (Giddens), the importance of identity and collective memory in a world of globalisation where people try to find their place, has remained. In this construction of identity, museums are being used to connect citizens with the state as they take on the role of creating trust. This is why, in this study, museums are chosen as a subject because it is in these places that visitors try to construct a collective memory of a Luxembourgish past and by this shape their national identity.

In this thesis, I will show that the Eurocentric structures rooted in colonialist ideas remain not only dominant in museums of countries that have been classical colonial empires but also in countries that have no official legacies in colonialism. In fact, the implication of European countries in colonialism has been left out of the narratives of most Western museums. While museums have long helped in shaping and are still shaping what Edward Said defines as ‘the self and the other’, most of this history is obscured, some would even say that it seems to be forgotten (Bjil, 441). I will demonstrate that the concept of a cultural inability to remember colonialism in a historically accurate way also applies to Luxembourg. Officially, Luxembourg did not possess any colonies itself, but during the colonial period which I refer to as the period from the country’s independence until the year Congo was declared an independent state (1880-1960), many Luxembourgers participated in the colonisation led by neighbouring countries. Many of them participated in colonial armies such as the Dutch KNIL army (Kolberger & Bosma, 555) and missionaries as well as scientists and explorers participated in colonial projects in Africa, Asia and South America.

This thesis builds on and contributes to work done on decolonising museums. It takes into account prior research works that have been published about the topic of colonality as well as decoloniality. Although studies in countries such as Germany, France, Belgium or the Netherlands have examined the decolonization of museum practices in classical colonial

empires, there has not been focus on decolonizing museums in Luxembourg nor countries that have not officially possessed colonies. As such, this research provides additional insights into how decolonizing museums in countries that were no classical colonial empires could work.

In order to demonstrate that in the Luxembourgish museums the dismembering of the colonial entanglements of the Natural History Museum as well as the organizational structure of the National Museum of History and Art is contributing to the aphasia that dominates the national discourse of the colonial past, I will analyse what the entanglements of Luxembourg in colonialism consisted of before looking at how these structures remain present in the contemporary Luxembourgish museum sphere. My main question for this research will thus be:

How does the twenty-first century Luxembourgish museum landscape in the National History and Art Museum and the Natural History Museum in Luxembourg contribute to the construction of a national identity as well as collective memory influenced by colonial aphasia?

This question enables me to write up policy notes which can potentially be used by the concerned museums. Compiling policy notes regarding a sensitive topic is no simple matter. Every case must be considered on its own as there is no one-size fits all approach on how to handle contested legacies. The policy notes should therefore be regarded as recommendations that can always be further developed.

1.1 State of the Literature: Decolonising Museums

To get an overview of the concept of decolonizing museum practices the literature review is divided into two parts. First I will begin with the concept of museums as non-neutral and social institutions before examining how these institutions have been or possibly can be

decolonized. The literature review will end with an overview on the discussion of the effects that colonial legacies have on the contemporary population. While much has been written regarding the decolonization of musea in post-colonial empires, where alternative ideas of dealing with colonial objects were proposed (Brenner, Kraft, Lähdesmäki), in contrast, far less has been written on the colonial past and its presentation in the two museums that I am going to analyse. This is why, the comprehensive literature review of this research is going to focus on approaches to decolonize practices in museums in countries that have been classical colonial empires. A comparative analysis can show whether these findings also apply to the Luxembourgish museum sector and provide potential alternative ideas on how to decolonize Luxembourgish musea.

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has rethought the role of a museum as “a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM). Dr. Vazquez Melken, professor of sociology and diversity has challenged this idea of the museum as an inclusive space that is conceived for anyone. In his book *Vistas of Modernity - Decolonial Aesthetics and the End of the Contemporary*, the organizer of the Decolonial Summer School in Middelburg, explains that museums should not be seen as neutral institutions. Contrary, they should be seen as western tools of civilization which cannot be separated from coloniality.

When addressing the decolonization of museums, it is most important to define what is meant with the term. In the publication of decolonizing museums, l'Internationale Online defines the term as follows: “resisting the reproduction of colonial taxonomies, while simultaneously vindicating radical multiplicity” (L’Internationale Online, 5). According to them, museums need to recognize the power that they have and resist colonial structures. This

intention risks however to be counterproductive as the term ‘decolonization’ suggests that there is a possibility to return to a pristine state before colonialism, which is according to Miranda Lowe, curator of the Natural History Museum in London, simply impossible (Imbler). However, it is by addressing this past and recognizing how it is still present in today’s structures, that one can move forward.

Over the past decades, different initiatives have been taken to decolonise museums. As a consequence of economic, political as well as cultural globalization, European museums have fallen into a crisis where colonial and western-centered structures are being challenged. Museums have begun rethinking their practices as well as their collections. As a result of the crisis of museums that the decolonial discourse has caused, research has been done on the complexity of this decolonial discourse. While much of the decolonial discourse has focused on whether repatriations should be made (Sarr & Savoy), others have analysed alternative ways of exhibiting the past (e.g. Das, Dawson, Falk, Hondius, Jain, Karp).

While some research such as the Sarr-Savoy report which was commissioned by the French President Emmanuel Macron has concluded that every colonial artefact requested by the country should be returned, focussing on the aspect of repatriation, other books examine alternative ways of displaying colonial heritage such as Alice Procter’s *The Whole Picture*. In her book, the art historian shows that during the uncomfortable art tours which she has led, she has recognized that “there is a real, urgent appetite for these stories” (Procter, 8). This not only shows the relevance and interest in contested histories, proving the point in researching on this topic but also provides ideas of how alternative stories can be told. The efforts partaken in these works are aiming towards building a bridge between the former colony and its colonisers of which some approaches are more successful than others.

The call for decolonisation of museums comes in pair with a decolonisation research agenda and debates from various academic disciplines and decolonial approaches. These approaches evaluate how colonial legacies live on today in the museum sphere. Research connects the issues of decolonising museums with its influence on current problematics such as racism. They show that there is a connection between the intellectual frameworks through which museums are seen and the construction of exclusion. In Kylie Message's book *Museums and Racism* which is part of her series *Museums in Focus*, the professor of public humanities, examines how museums have responded to public debates about racism. To do so, she first examines what role museums are playing in people's everyday life and what the cultural institutions mean to them. In this she found out that this question has only begun being asked to a broader audience since 1990 in some museums. Most of the answers that were given were different to the recommendations written in reports made by museums. This shows that museums often have different conceptions to what visitors expect. Additionally, Message shows how the complexity of language has raised challenges for museums in the inclusivity of their visitors. This also relates to Wayne Modest's research publication called *Words Matter*. In this publication, which can be seen as a policy note for museums concerning the use of words, Wayne Modest examined the sensitivity of language in the portrayal of diverse cultures. In this publication, the professor of material culture and critical heritage studies shows that language is constantly in transition. As society is in constant change, so are the meanings of language. While the objects that are being portrayed in museums are timeless, the descriptions are not. Besides offering an extensive guidance on the use of words that can be used in the policy notes at the end of each case study, the publication shows the urgency of repeatedly revising museum practices which also applies to the two case studies of this research.

Rosa Wever's "Decolonial Aesthesis and the Museum" and Jos van Beuren's "Decolonization and Colonial Collections" showed the impact of museums on racial hierarchies. While Jos van Beurden examines the complexity of decoloniality and how decolonisation is more than just repatriation, Rosa Wever uses a colonial framework to examine the role that museums play in the erasure of other worlds, of other ways of seeing. It shows that even though museums are considered as neutral institutions, they function as an expression of modernity and by that of colonial power. By this, museums produce a certain type of spectatorship which is influencing how the world is being experienced and by this build on Edward Said's concept of orientalism about how 'the other' is being perceived. Edward Said's book *Orientalism* represents the first phase of postcolonial theory. In this book, Said analyzes the construction of the Orient and the 'exotic' Other. The literary professor argues that the 'other' is mainly controlled by text and image through which a hierarchical texture is constructed. The other is depicted as being sensual, mysterious as well as cruel and as being other than human compared to the Western self-image.

This goes with Wayne Modest and Markus Balkenhol's chapter "Caring for Some and not Others" which is part of the book *Museums and the Politics of Care in Post-Colonial Europe*. In this chapter, the role of the museum is being put in the centre of societal trends at large, showing how race is playing a role in the construction of cultural heritage. While the article is focussing on Dutch museums and the politics of taking care in the Netherlands, the situation can be compared to the situation in Luxembourg. The chapter shows how politics and especially right-wing populists argue that colonial history is "a thing of the past, a history that has little if any relevance for contemporary Dutch society" (Balkenhol & Modest, 2). This is however, anything but true as the research shows. In fact, the portrayal of colonial history or the act of taking care of history is highly political. The discursive practice shows who and what is deserving to be taken care of. The way museums take care of certain

histories thus coincides with the idea of nation building - whose stories are worth taking care of and whose not or even who belongs to the nation and who does not.

As already shown in Wayne Modest' *Words Matter*, the hegemonic structures of language and representation have had an impact on postcolonial exhibitions. Das and Lowe, founders of 'Museum Detox', a network for people of colour working in the museum field, have addressed these issues and applied it to natural history museums and their connection to imperial history. In their research, they have found out that the cultural context in which specimens were collected and the scientific distinction of race have contributed to perpetuating racism. While the shift has more and more gone to a focus of inclusion and education in the so-called 'new museology', the authors criticize that many natural history museums tend to leave out their racist history and by this are contributing to "perpetuate covert, structural racism" (Das and Lowe, 7). This goes with research that shows how natural history museums have been contributing to structural racism (e.g. Antonelly, Browne, Das, Davis, Fredericksen, Imbler, Marks).

Through perpetuating racism and otherness, museums have contributed in building national identities and collective memories as shown in Wayne Modest and Markus Balkenhol's chapter "Caring for Some and not Others". While this research focuses on how ethnographic museums such as the Tropenmuseum were framed as superfluous, it shows how there are conflicting processes in memorializing the past. This can also be compared to the commemoration of the Second World War in Luxembourgish musea, which is largely commemorated, showing to which audience the museum addresses to. In Annie Coombe's chapter "Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities", the professor of material and visual culture goes even further, demonstrating the impact of museums on the construction of national identities. In this chapter, which was written in 1988 when a renewed interest in ethnographic museums came up, she shows how much museums played an

important self-appointed role within educational programs made by the state, promoting “the concept of a homogeneous national identity and unity” (Coombe, 57). She shows how since the beginning of the 19th century, visits to the museum were counted as an integral part of the curriculum. This goes with the structuralization of Luxembourg in which children are regularly visiting museums as part of the national curriculum.

Older publications such as Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism” show how national identities have been formed through the implication of museums which is also what Yankholmes and Mc Kercher found out in their paper, regarding the motivations of visiting slavery heritage sites. In their research, they found out that “the closer a connection one has to a heritage site, the deeper and more personal the meaning becomes” (Yankhomes & Mc Kercher, 29). This also applies to artefacts displayed in the museum. It shows that the more history people get about the provenance of objects, the more they can relate to it, proving Alice Procter’s point that there is an interest of people in alternative stories. By neglecting the display of provenance, the museum is thus contributing to a collective memory that is separated from Black heritage, preventing visitors from relating to it. This goes with Pemala Pattynama findings in her essay “Cultural memory and Indo-Dutch identity formation”, namely that there is no identity without memory (Pattynama, 178). It is only through memory, which is partly constructed in museums that a collective memory is built. Other works such as Johanna Turunen’s essay “A Geography of Coloniality: Re-narrating European Integration” which is part of the E-book *Dissonant Heritages and Memories in Contemporary Europe* agree to this. In her essay, she shows how much the European Union as a transnational institution played a role in disseminating colonial legacies. She proves that colonialism, apart from affecting the former colonies themselves, also had an impact on the lives of (post-)migrants as well as the constitution of modernity in Europe.

1.2. Mnemonic Landscape, Collective Memory and Colonial Aphasia

To research approaches on decolonising musea in Luxembourg, I brought together the concepts of national identity and colonial aphasia to see how both influence each other in regard to the presentation of colonial history in museums. For the construction of a theoretical and conceptual framework several problems arose because no unified terminology exists in the field of conflict studies. Because of this, various debates have had to be brought together in order to construct a more unified framework to be applied in this research. The different concepts that are part of this framework are being described below.

The centre of the research on the formation of national identities has been dominated by the concept of collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs, a French philosopher and sociologist was the first pioneer in addressing the nature of collective memory. He proved that the social fabric, which is in a constant flux, determines how and what people are being remembered. Hence, according to his theory there is a distinction between history and collective memory where the collective memory is part of the present and history belongs to the past. However, he argues that “the past is organically anchored within the collective and thus within the present; the past is thus actualized, acted out and re-presented by the person” (Narvaez, 54). Thus, the collective memory can be seen as a social construction that is formed through collective mnemonic practices of which museums play a part in. Recently, the idea of collective memory has been reshaped in the studies of mnemonics (Olick & Robbins). This translation is based on the idea that links between the politics of commemoration and politics exist. The mnemonic shows that a certain hierarchy of what should be remembered and how, exists.

This hierarchy of forgetting is influenced by amnesia and nostalgia. The process of amnesia describes a loss of memory while nostalgia can be understood as a longing for a

period in the past. Because these two concepts only describe a static situation, one that does not take into account the external influences, Ann Laura Stoler introduced the concept of aphasia. In this concept, both categories of memorability are intertwined. The issue of aphasia is not generated by absence nor ignorance but it describes a difficulty speaking about an unmastered past, a past that is not incorporated in the collective memory because of its traumatic nature. The concept of colonial aphasia is relevant to describe how the past of Luxembourgish colonial entanglement is absent from Luxembourgish imaginaires. It can not be claimed that information about colonial complicity was absent from popular literature. Today, newspaper articles such as the RTL series “Colonial Complicity” pick up on this past and try to bring it closer to its audience. However, these articles are often very superficial as they only portray the histories of certain individuals and do not elaborate on history that is much more contested. Other works such as Régis Moes’ book about Luxembourgers in Congo go much deeper into this history. Even if this might be related to the fact that the book is a scholarly work, this might also be because there is a difficulty in commemorating such a dark past and by this, popular media does not know how to address it. This is also reinforced by the scholarly books that students are using in high school. While the history of colonialism is indeed addressed, the complicity of Luxembourgers has never been part of the national curriculum. It has been systematically avoided and kept out from the pedagogic map (Langini, 10).

Discourses about colonialism and racism in Luxembourg are characterized by denial, rejection and ignorance. Even though the country is taking care of its image of a rich and social benefactor country in the Third World (1% of the gross national income is invested in public development aid (Chamber of Commerce)), its colonial history is often neglected. This mentality of helping others is close to the one of colonisation of the 1950s (Moes, 16), surprising even more the fact that the entanglements of Luxembourg in African colonies,

which I will show in the second chapter of this thesis, seem to be forgotten. At the beginning of the 1970's the then foreign minister Gaston Thorn even defended the country's implication in colonialism stating that it would not be obliged to provide any development aid because of repatriation for colonial exploitation as Luxembourg did not own any colonies (Pauly, 25).

Paired with the concept of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, it shows how European imperialism in the scientific as well as artistic and historic museology is still contributing to discriminatory and racist interpretations of 'the other'. This shows how power structures are still being shaped which John Falk and Lynn Dierking show in their book *The Museum Experience Revisited*. It makes clear that there is a need for museums to rethink how to portray this past as it translates on how society is thinking about races, showing that there is a colonial present and that colonialism has not ended in the twentieth century. In fact, the imperialism that emerged during colonialism has found new forms and is not only visible in the presentation of museum artefacts but also in the structure of their practices.

The decolonizing practices of the museum are analysed through the curatorial practices of the chosen museums. It is the concept of new museology which tries to decolonize museums in terms of sharing authority and promote inclusion. While there has only been little analysis of museum practices that challenge decolonization, I will refer to a publication by L'internationale Online which takes in alternative approaches of decolonizing museology. In this study, museums will be understood as mnemonic institutions that not only perform but also simultaneously create collective memory, referring to Benedict Anderson's study of nationalism in the context of museum practices.

To detangle the portrayal of colonial history in museums, I refer to Astrid Van Oyen's article "Towards a post-colonial artefact analysis". In this article, she argues that most artefacts were used in fluid, multidirectional interactions. By doing so, the imbalance within

post-colonial studies can be redressed. This shows that there is no one-way in telling stories and provides me with ideas on how the presentations of artefacts in museums can and should be re-evaluated.

1.3. Research Questions

For this research, museums have been chosen because they are seen as landscapes of remembrance where people try to construct a collective memory of Luxembourg's past. To examine how the collective memory of Luxembourg's colonial past has been shaped by museums, I will examine the presentation of colonialism in the two national museums of the country. The central question to this study is thus as follows:

How does the twenty-first century Luxembourgish museum landscape in the National History and Art Museum and the Natural History Museum in Luxembourg contribute to the construction of a national identity influenced by colonial aphasia?

Through this question, I hope to be able to grasp how the mnemonic landscape of the museum is contributing to the collective memory of a country and with it its identity and the continuation of colonial patterns. Complementary questions to the central research question are: What are the colonial entanglements of a country that did not own any colonies themselves? Are museums representing the colonial entanglement of Luxembourgers in their exhibitions? How are they presented? What idea of national identity and collective memory do the museums transmit? How much is this presentation influencing the contemporary population in the construction of a collective memory and national identity? Is it relevant for the present population to display colonial history in Luxembourgish musea? What are the organizational constraints with colonial heritage in the field of Luxembourg's museums?

1.4. Case Studies, Sources and Methods

For this research, two case studies were chosen which have an important role in constructing collective memory because of their status of national museums. Additionally, the National Museum of History and Art and the National Natural History Museum are among the oldest museums of the country, which makes it even more interesting because they were founded during a time when colonialism has reached its highest point and an international period of decolonization began (Blakemore). The methodology used in this research paper is inspired by previous works that have already been done in the field of postcolonialism which all have in common the liberation of oppressive power relations. One of the sources that have inspired this research is the work of the historian and philosopher Michel Foucault of whom one work has focused on discourse analysis. In his work, he points out that power relations are being expressed through language. According to him, discourses can reproduce, construct or even transform structures of social reality. This shows that through the power of directing the mindset of people to see what they should see, museums have the power to regulate collective memories.

Because the ideas and concepts of Foucault are critical by nature and try to critically examine the practices of knowledge producing bodies, it is essential that they are being combined with practical analyses such as the methodology of analysing exhibitions (attachment 1). In this methodology which is widely used in the field of museology, different groups of questions are being asked concerning how the analysed museums and their exhibitions are being experienced. Each of the six groups of questions addresses a different topic, helping me to not let my own frame of reference interfere with how museums are actually dealing with colonialism. Firstly, the history of the museum is going to be analysed. This general approach will show whether the analysed museum has a direct connection to

colonialism. Moreover, the first impressions of the building will be analysed, showing the influence that the architecture and presentation of the museum has on its visitor. Next to this, questions about the content of the museum will be taken into account before analysing the visitor of the museum. This section deals with questions such as who the targeted audience of the museum consists of and how he or she is being directed through the museum. Finally, there will be a conclusion of how the museum is shaping the identity and collective memory of Luxembourgers and by this potentially contributing to colonial aphasia.

Next to the methodology of analysing the exhibition, it is also important to research the effects the current portrayal of colonial history in Luxembourgish museums has on its visitors. For this, an online survey was conducted that was being sent by a hyperlink to different potential respondents such as visitors and non-visitors of both of the museums (attachment 2). A total of 78 surveys were fully completed. The survey which was created using SurveyMonkey included 10 questions regarding the respondents' knowledge about Luxembourgish colonial heritage and how they perceive the portrayal of this history in both museums. The results of these surveys will help me in answering my sub questions whether the colonial aphasia that I argue museums are contributing to, has an effect on the present population and whether it is relevant being displayed in Luxembourgish museums.

To study the organizational constraints with colonial heritage in the field of Luxembourgish museums, formal and informal interviews were taken with individuals working in the museums that were chosen as case studies. Because qualitative research has the potential to examine the “socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship of researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 14), it will provide me with information about the organizational constraints with colonial heritage in the field of Luxembourg’s museums. Both museums were first contacted by email where a summarized description of the research was provided. After having

received an agreement, interviews were conducted with field workers. For the MNHA, Régis Moes, who works part-time as a curator for the museum, made himself available for questions and for the MNHN it was Patrick Michaely, head of communication of the museum who was available for questioning. Both interviews were taken either by phone or by video call and were recorded by note-taking.

The book *Exhibiting cultures : the poetics and politics of museum display* by Ivan Karp as well as Wayne Modest's talk "Matters of Care Opening Session" and Sarah Kraft's *Acknowledging the Colonial Past: Display Methods of Ethnographic Objects* will provide me a theoretical framework on what I can ground my policy notes upon. Moreover, several books such as Alice Procter's *The Whole Picture* , Moritz Holfelder's *Unser Raubgut* and Gert Oostindie's "The slippery paths of commemoration and heritage tourism: the Netherlands, Ghana, and the rediscovery of Atlantic slavery" give alternative ways of exhibiting colonial heritage, which will be useful regarding the policy notes that each case study will end upon. By doing so, the imbalance within post-colonial studies can be redressed. Additionally, comparative research, analysing how other museums that are in the same position as Luxembourgish museums are exhibiting their colonial past, will provide me with ideas of what the best practices of museums are in regard to colonial objects, showing what has proven itself as successful and which methods have not.

1.5. Outline of the thesis

The thesis will be introduced with a section tracing back the history of Luxembourg's colonial complicity which will be based on the works that previous researchers have already done such as Régis Moes or Marc Thiel. While the research is not focussing on the historical past of colonialism, I will only give a brief introduction of what the different colonial entanglements consisted of in order to see whether some of these stories are being recounted

in the museum sphere. Additionally, these colonial entanglements provide alternative stories which museums could be telling and are therefore used to construct the policy notes for the two museums which function as my case studies. Moreover, it will help the reader in understanding how colonial objects have gotten into the museum. In the third chapter of the thesis, I am going to look at the Natural History Museum of Luxembourg and see whether the museum has connections to this history that I have proven exists by then and analyse how this history is accessible for the grand public. I will end both of my case studies with policy notes, giving alternative propositions about how to make their museums more inclusive. Whereas in natural history museums, the non-European world was represented at large and in art museums, Western identity was constructed (L'internationale Online, 124), in my second case study, I am going to focus on the structures of the National Museum of History and Art. I will analyse if the way the museum is organized might imitate colonial structures and see whether this might have an influence on the current population. In the last chapter of the thesis, I will then recapitulate what I have found out and see how both museums are contributing to colonial aphasia and see what the consequences of this is for the current population.

Chapter Two:

Luxembourg and ‘Colonialism without Colonies’

To analyse the remnants of colonialism in the context of Luxembourgish cultural heritage, an analysis of the past is central. Even though Luxembourg did not own any colonies and was thus not considered as a classical colonial power; colonial products, paintings, images, stories and imaginations were omnipresent during the 19th and 20th century as I will show in this part of the thesis. In this chapter, I will give a short overview of what the involvement of Luxembourg in colonialism consisted of. This will show how colonialism has influenced, racialized and sexualized images either when Luxembourgers returned to their home country after having lived in a colony or by reproducing the images that were prevalent in Europe at that time. This will not only provide historical context on which I will ground my research on but also provide information on what the colonial heritage in Luxembourg consists of and how colonial objects came into the museums of the country or why they did not.

Moreover, the historical context will give an idea of how present this topic is in contemporary public debates. This will prove, how this past is commemorated by the grand public, showing whether colonial aphasia exists and why it is important for museums to engage in the discussion about colonial complicity, since even countries that were no official colonial powers, “participated in colonialism through the replication of a racist and dehumanizing worldview” (Lüthi et al, 2).

2.1 Colonial Entanglements

Despite its geographical position, Luxembourg has always been a country of massive emigration. Most Luxembourgish emigrants “view[ed] the new country as their own and accept[ed] the displacement of the locals” (Wagener et al, 2) connecting them with colonial imaginaries. While during the 1840’s many Luxembourgers emigrated to America, more

precisely the region of Chicago, others departed for expeditions that are closer to what one would define as colonial. Thereby Luxembourgers from the Northern part of the country left their home in 1843 for Guatemala, accompanying Belgian colonizers to the bay of Santa Thomas. In 1889, a few Luxembourgers founded the colony “San Antonio de Jraolola” in Argentina, whose population was already at 800 people after one year (Wagener et al, 4). Others left their country to install themselves in Brazil or the Belgian Congo, on which I will elaborate further.

During the end of the 19th century, a few thousand Luxembourgers even emigrated to Argentina, where they tried, without any success, to install a Luxembourgish colony at San Antonio de Iraola. Even though these countries had already been declared independent, colonial companies were working closely with local authorities to develop agriculture in regions where Indians were living. Moreover, many Luxembourgers engaged themselves in the Dutch colonial army in Indonesia or in the French colonial wars on which I will elaborate further in this chapter.

There are also many companies that are reminiscent of the complicity of Luxembourgers in colonialism. Most of them were founded between 1920 and 1930. One of these companies was GRANDUCOL, a firm which owned a large cotton fabric in Mozambique. This particular company is an interesting case regarding the colonial complicity of the country because the firm of GRANDUCOL was previously owned by prince Félix de Bourbon-Parme, husband of the Luxembourgish Grand-Duchesse Charlotte (Moes, 83). Even if Prince Felix was not cited as a shareholder of the company, his brother Louis de Bourbon-Parme as well as his brother-in-law Adolphe de Schwarzenberg, however, were. Moreover, Prince Felix as well as the government regrouped several Luxembourgish colonists under their patronage in the colonial circle that was founded in 1925. While the aim they stated was to lift “the moral and material well-being of those of our compatriots who live

in the regions most remote from that constitutes the existence of their race, under skies very often atrocious where isolation, nostalgia and this indefinable evil, proper to the uprooted, grab them by the throat like a beast” (Cercle Colonial Luxembourgeois, 15), others think that their main aim was to arrange jobs for Luxembourgers in the colonies (Wagener et al, 4). The colonial circle was present in the public in the form of exhibitions, testifying that the implication in colonies was greater than people today might know. An article published in a local chronicle even stated that “although our country has no colonies, Luxembourgers are adventurous: driven by the fear of long journeys, we find them in the colonies of France, Belgium, Netherlands” (Congrès des Coloniaux, 3).

This implication of Luxembourg in colonialism also extended onto its younger population. During the colonial age, it was common for Luxembourgers to pursue their studies in so-called colonial universities, of which the colonial university in Antwerp was most frequented. In these establishments, young students were instructed to “geographical, economical, ethnic, commercial, legal, administrative and social” knowledge in order to “provide the colony of Congo with all the personnel it may need”(Congrès des Coloniaux, 3). This influence on the young population extended well beyond the scholarly influence of colonial universities. In fact, many young Luxembourgers were confronted with colonialism on their daily basis through propaganda methods of missionaries on which I will further elaborate.

All of this shows that even if Luxembourg might not have been a classical colonial power, this does not mean that it was not implicated in colonialism. This entanglement was a lot more known in the past and Luxembourgers were proud of it, as Albert Calmes claimed in 1959 about Nicolas Grang that “it is an honor for our country that a Luxembourger appears, on African soil, among the pioneers who gave their lives to open the equatorial regions to civilization” (Wagener et al, 4). Colonial pioneers such as Nicolas Grang were, as I will show,

no individual cases: Edouard Luja, Georges Augustin, Maurice Pescatore, Nicolas Cito, Jean-Jules Linden, Charles Schaefer, Nicolas Bové, Mathias Treinen, Nicolas Ernest Barblé, Frantz Majerus, Beissel were a few out of many. Today, the naming of pastries such as “Mourekapp” or “Negerkuss”, the line “de Schwaarze kritt eis ni” (meaning: ‘the Black man never catches us’) in a song performed by children for Santa Claus day or the children’s game ‘Wien fäert de Schwarze Mann’ (‘Who fears the black man?’) testify to this day of the racist colonial archive of images and knowledge, providing the basis of a modern and cosmopolitan Luxembourg.

2.2. Colonial Armies

For colonies, an important category of Luxembourgish immigrants were those people who left their home country to serve as soldiers in colonial armies. During the nineteenth century approximately six million men were serving colonial armies overseas (Bosma, 555). Among these were also many Luxembourgers that were posted to colonial garrisons. From 1810 until 1913, almost 1200 Luxembourgers were engaged in the Dutch colonial army in Indonesia. This number can only be estimated since Dutch military sources state a smaller number compared to documentation, mentioning 1.129 Luxembourgers. According to Bosma, this might be due to the fact that some Luxembourgers might never really have joined the army for various reasons, even if they were registered (Bosma, 560). Others argue that the number might even be higher since some soldiers were unsure of their nationality due to the political alterations of Luxembourgish borders (Bosma, 561). Nevertheless, it is not surprising that so many Luxembourgers were engaged in the Dutch colonial army in Indonesia, since during this period Luxembourg was treated as a province of the Netherlands, until 1839, when Luxembourg was declared an independent state.

Luxembourgers were not the only soldiers fighting for a colonial army of a country other than their own. In fact, a substantial number of soldiers in the Dutch colonial army came from Switzerland, France, Germany and Belgium. This was also common in other colonial armies, such as the French one who enlisted many young men from countries that did not own any colonies themselves. While the number of Luxembourgers invested in the Dutch Colonial Army might be small compared to the amount of people from other countries, the percentage is extremely high, considering the size of the country. Bosma states that during the 1870's, the population of Luxembourg was less than 200'000, of which probably 20'000 men were considered to be healthy enough to participate in military service. 350 of these men decided to join the Dutch army embarking for the Dutch Indies, which was 1.75 percent of their age cohort. Comparing those 1.75 percent to the Netherlands of which 1.5 percent young Dutch men (Bosma, 557) served in the colonial army, one realizes that although Luxembourg did not have any colonies, it provided a greater share of its young population to colonial armies than countries such as the Netherlands did, without taking into account the Luxembourgish recruits who joined the French Foreign Legion.

In opposition to other militaries like the Scottish serving for the English colonial army, Luxembourgers served in general for shorter periods of time in colonial armies. The time that Luxembourgers for example served in the Dutch colonial army was shorter than the period their Dutch comrades did (Bosma, 557). This was due to the motivations that led them to join the colonial armies. After the Napoleonic era, the population of Luxembourg was undergoing rapid growth, which led to high rates of unemployment. Many Luxembourgers were thus forced to look for job opportunities elsewhere. Most of them were not interested in pursuing a colonial career but in earning enough money to return back home, which is why they were described as "life-cycle migrants" (Bosma, 558). Another reason why many Luxembourgers emigrated to the 'new world' was because of their fear of being drafted for

military service. “Entire families turned their backs on their homeland to withdraw them from military service” (Wagener, et al. 3). A big part of the Luxembourgish population, however, as we have seen, pursued military services for other countries.

When Luxembourg became a de facto independent state in 1890 and transformed from its rather hybrid state of being part of the German Confederation and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, “the political status of Luxembourg as a supplier of soldiers to the Dutch colonial army changed entirely” (Bosma, 558). After the Great War (1914-1918), there were no Luxembourgers enlisted in the Dutch East Indies. The number, however, rose after this but without ever achieving the same state that it was before the independence of Luxembourg.

In the study *Congo tentoongesteld*, anthropologist Maarten Couttenier analyses how the museum in Tervuren has acquired war booty through colonial militaries. According to Régis Moes, historian and curator of the National Museum of History and Art, most colonial objects appropriated by Luxembourgers have gone to this museum. Maarten Couttenier found out that around 1900, 40 percent of the museum’s collection was characterized as ‘war related’. This shows the implication of militaries in the presence of colonial artefacts in museums. Other books show how colonial generals and soldiers were ordered from above to confiscate and obtain cultural objects in wars and raids (Cohn, Van Beurden). For example, soldiers offered a bonus for capturing a flag.

2.3 Luxembourg’s involvement in Belgian Congo

One entanglement in colonisation that is probably most known is the complicity of Luxembourgers in the Belgian colony of Congo. This topic has recently been more addressed by the popular media because of the rising interest in Black history. This section of the history will also be the most interesting to analyse, since many colonial objects being part of

museum collections in Luxembourg can be traced back to the Belgian colony of Congo. One reason for this, is that numerous Luxembourgers emigrated to the African country, even more than to any other colony.

In a speech at an international colonial congress in 1938, Mathias Thill, president of the Luxembourgish colonial circle declared that the Belgian Congo was a colony that belonged a little to Luxembourg (Moes, 13), showing that even though the country was not officially linked, many Luxembourgers had an attachment to a colony that was known to be violently ruled by Belgian colonizers. This attachment to the colony could be seen in the number of Luxembourgers working and living outside of their home country. Despite the country's small size, approximately 2 Luxembourgers out of a thousand were colonizers in the Belgian Congo in 1960 (Moes, 16; Lodhi; Halen). Even though this constituted a very small percentage in the colonies themselves, this was a high percentage for a country that at that time had a population of 314.889 (Heintz et al.) of which 600 (Moes, 16; Lodhi) were living in the Belgian colony.

The massive immigration of that time was encouraged not only by companies but also by legislation. From 1922 onwards, what Régis Moes considers to be the highest point of the Belgian-Luxembourgish relation, Belgian authorities began accepting foreigners to participate in its colony, giving many Luxembourgers the opportunity to enter the colony of Congo. To become a colonial state official, either a Luxembourgish or a Belgian nationality was needed. The increasing migration of Luxembourgers to the African country was also promoted by the abolition of customs between Luxembourg and Congo and the legal status of Luxembourgers put them in the equal position to Belgians themselves. The abolition of customs might be one reason why many colonial objects from Congo ended up in Luxembourgish museums. Advertisements in Luxembourgish newspapers additionally recruited Luxembourgers to the colony, making it even more attractive (Pauly, 25). The

propaganda did not only focus on adults but also expanded on schools where people from Brussels advertised making careers in Africa or visits were made to the African museum of the white fathers of the Marienthal in Luxembourg on which I will elaborate later. From the 1930's onwards, it was even conventional for young Luxembourgers to go to the Colonial University of Antwerp for their studies (Mukuna).

The interest of Luxembourgers in leaving their country for the African colony was not only motivated by the propaganda material that at that time was omnipresent but also because of the economic situation in Luxembourg. The financial crisis of the early 30's and the unemployment that resulted from it, made the Congo ever more interesting for Luxembourgers. High job positions awaited them. Since it will not be possible for me to go into detail of all the individual people that left Luxembourg for Congo, I will only focus on a small selection of people testifying the roles that Luxembourgers played in colonialism. Nicholas Grang, who was the first Luxembourger to embark to Congo in 1882 was implicated in brutal expeditions led by the explorer Sir Henry Morton Stanley and was nominated by Léopold II as Stanley's military post commander. He was described as a man of "good vigor and had confidence in success" (Cercle Colonial, 19). On the other hand Maurice Pescatore, director of the ceramic factory, Villeroy & Boch is described as a "colonial predator" (Wilhelm, 64). His idea of white supremacy is making itself clear in his writings describing the country:

"The vast empire which fell to it, so rich in untapped treasures, would require to be developed, an indigenous population three times that which is present there, and an elite of colonists who would come to settle there, not temporarily and ruining the colony, but with the more general idea of finding a new homeland, by rationally exploiting the common heritage" (Wilhelm, 64-65)

Other Luxembourgers such as Nicolas Cito recruited by Léopold II for the construction of the Matadi-Léopoldville train line in which more than 5.000 African workers died (Hoffmann & Moes), testify of the implication of Luxembourgers in the most dreadful activities in the Belgian colony. Of course, not all Luxembourgers were implicated in harmful activities. Georges Augustin for example, a captain, participated in anti-slave trader's campaigns (Lodhi & Thiel, 390). Many Luxembourgers did not work in high-ranking positions, some worked as pharmacists, engineers (30-40% of Luxembourgers living in Congo between 1880 and 1908 worked in the construction of train lines (Moes,86)) or as simple workers and craftsmen. When the colony of Congo became an independent state and the Congolese population resisted against the oppression of the white colonizers, most Luxembourgers came back home, bringing along cultural artefacts.

Much research concludes that Luxembourg has been a complicit in the colonisation of Congo, where people from Luxembourg had the same rights as the Belgian colonizers themselves (e.g. Bosma, Calmes, Lodhi & Moes, Hoffmann, Pauly, Thiel). Nathalie Lodhi's online article shows that not all Luxembourgers have been innocent in suppressing African people. She mentions Nicholas Grang as the first Luxembourger to leave for Congo. There, he worked as a lieutenant and was, according to Régis Moes, responsible for the death of many. Historian Régis Moes explains that many Luxembourgers left their home country for career reasons as they were hired by international companies present in Congo to supervise Congolese staff. The Eurocentric view from which these stories have been narrated are however not placed in the actuality of contemporary times. No attention is paid on how this colonial entanglement is part of Luxembourgish history and identity. In fact, many papers talk about an end of the colonial era such as Alain Calmes' article "La fin du Monde Colonial", which means 'the end of the colonial world', implying that the consequences of colonisation cannot be experienced today.

2.4. Missionaries

Missionary activities were central to the work of European colonialism as it provided colonizers a sense of justice and moral authority. It legitimized colonial efforts as “religion was seen as a way to ‘civilise’ people outside of Europe and the US” (Luckhurst). The term “mission” relates to religious as well as cultural expeditions in order to promote Christianity in a foreign country. Even if “contrary to colonisers, missionaries have only rarely been chased when the decolonization began” (Moes, 466), one needs to take into account the missionary works that were partaken in Europe to fund the works abroad and disseminate colonial ideas back home. While in 1870, “Christians were an insignificant minority” in Africa, by 1970, Christianity had become the dominant religious culture in all African societies (Gray, 59). This was due to the propaganda methods of missionaries that were also present in countries that were no colonial empires. Luxembourg was no exception in this. In fact, after the First World War, 315 of 758 priests of Luxembourgish nationality were stationed abroad (Moes, 468). The propaganda made by missionaries in Luxembourg played an important role in sensibilizing the public and in collecting donations that financed the religious colonisation. “The white fathers of the Marienthal, the monks of the Sacré-Coeur from Clairefontaine or Jesuits as well as the influence of the Luxemburger Wort” played an important role in disseminating colonial ideas because in those days religion played a much more important role in people’s everyday life than today. In this section, we will get to know what the links of Luxembourgish missionaries to colonialism consisted of and how they have contributed to bringing colonial heritage into the country.

Régis Moes found out that Luxembourgish missionaries did not have a geographical preference for their missionary works, so they could be found all over the world. Just after Congo was declared a Free State in 1885, catholic missionaries began travelling to the African country. Despite its catholic state (in 2008 73 per cent of the population declared

themselves of Christian religion (Borsenberger, 6)), in the beginning only a small number of Luxembourgish missionaries travelled to Congo. This might be related to the insecurities of Europeans, tropical diseases but also the absence of administration that dominated the African continent. It is only from the beginning of the 20th century onwards that Luxembourgish missionaries left their country for Africa. Despite the large presence of Catholics, studies of missionaries are limited (Moes, 34). It is therefore impossible to get clear information about a precise number of colonial heritage that missionaries brought to Luxembourg.

One important aspect of missionary works was the funding not only of religious infrastructures in Luxembourg but also of missionary works abroad. Missionaries were present in the daily life of Luxembourgers, favouring the willingness of donations of the Luxembourgish population. Throughout the year, many activities were organized by religious organizations such as bazars, visits to the African Museum of the white fathers on which I will elaborate further at a later stage, the monthly magazine “d’Weiss Patren an Afrika” (see figure 1) by the white fathers in which they talked about their experiences in Africa, the sale of images representing ‘pagans’ known as ‘Heedekennecher’ to young students, projections of propaganda films, etc. (Moes, 468). All of the propaganda material as well as the belief of Luxembourgers led to Luxembourg being the 6th donor nation in the world in 1950 (Moes, 469). Propaganda material was not only useful in terms of funding but also played an important role in disseminating colonial images. Until the 1970’s many churches contained a collection trunk in the form of an African child whose head made a whipping movement each time when one made a donation (Moes, 42). In some smaller villages such as Kayl, this was even the case until 2000. Sales of ‘exotic’ objects made at missionary bazaars brought colonial heritage closer to the public.

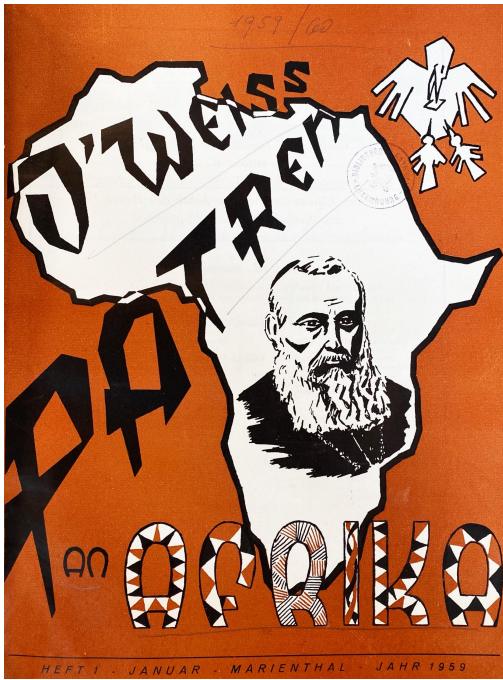


Fig. 1: Cover of the two-monthly magazine “d’Weiss Patren an Afrika” from 1959

Missionaries played an important role in the collection of colonial heritage. According to Jos van Beurden, missionaries “massively confiscated and destroyed traditional religious objects” because they had no respect for other religions other than their own (Van Beurden, 33). Most of the objects that they collected were sent to their home countries in Europe. These objects were either used for funding when the objects were sold at exhibitions or displayed at home for the instruction of new missionaries or displayed to the public. Missionaries set up museums such as the African Museum of the white fathers in Marienthal on which I will go into more detail in the chapter about the Natural History Museum. When the number of religious vocations diminished, the competition with other organizations forced some missionary museums to shut their doors. Their collections were either sent back to the headquarters of their orders, sold to collectors or were offered to other museums. In fact, they were rarely sent back to their country of origin (Van Beurden, 35).

2.5 Colonial Heritage and Colonial Aphasia

How colonial objects arrived into Luxembourgish museums can be roughly estimated.

Objects were purchased by private collectors, by trading houses or art dealers as well as the acquisitions of expeditions in Africa or South America. Due to the assumed urgency to ‘rescue’ as many objects as possible before the extinction of the respective culture, many methods of appropriation were taken into account (Heidt, 11). For Maurice Pescatore, director of the Villeroy & Boch factory, the exploitation of the colony was a simple means to an end in terms of economic profitability. In his eyes “the colony allows the metropolis to enrich itself” (Thiel, 20).

While in foreign countries, collecting guides were published by museums in order to complete their collections, such guides cannot be found in Luxembourgish archives. Lores from that time, however, testify that there was an urgent call from enthusiasts to collect objects in order to be able to open a museum. An article from 1933, said that when in 1845, a small group of Luxembourgers came together, they discussed the urge to collect antiquities and to find suitable accommodation (Kellen, 124). This plan must have borne fruit quickly since a report from 1861 stated that “how many archaeologists we saw leaving the halls of our museum, not just satisfied but amazed at the results achieved in such a short time” (Kellen, 124). In 1890, Prof Van Werveke even stated that the National History and Art Museum may perhaps be the richest museum that a provincial society has ever brought together (Kellen, 125).

According to Régis Moes, curator for the National Museum of History and Art, Luxembourgish museums do not have many colonial artefacts because of the young age of the museum sector. In 1945 the museums were not prestigious enough to attract donations of big collections. Therefore, many objects collected by Luxembourgers in the colonies ended

up in foreign museums such as the ethnographic museum in Tervuren, the Royal Museum for Central Africa. While this museum has been under increasing attention because of its connection to colonialism, the museum started with decolonizing its collections in the 1970's when the museum returned 114 objects to the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, "the dr Congo lacked experts to examine the items returned" (Van Beuren, 71) which concluded that many of the objects returned had no cultural or historical value to the country.

As analysed by Walter Benjamin, the collection of things has to do with organizing the world into a coherent story. According to him "collectors perceive their environment as a chaos that needs to be controlled so that it makes sense" (Sauvage). This relation of meaning and object was not only the primary function of museums but also of collectors during the colonial age. This also applied to Luxembourgers who left their home for the colonies. Collecting objects was a sign of social prestige since those objects came from geographically faraway lands.

There are, however, small collections of objects that have remained in the Luxembourgish museums, notably in the Natural History Museum and the National History Museum on which I will elaborate further in the third and fourth chapter of the thesis. In a colonial understanding, museums were roughly divided into two groups: museums of fine arts and natural history museums. In Art museums, Western identity was constructed, preserved and transmitted whereas in natural history museums, "the non-European world was represented at large" (L'internationale Online, 124). The colonial heritage that remains in both of the museums have arrived into the museums because of donations that did not only come from private Luxembourgish collectors but also through gifts made by foreign donors.

With the end of the Second World War, the atrocities of the Holocaust and decolonization, a political reorientation began in Europe. Imperial powers such as France,

Germany or Great Britain were pressured by activists to deal with their violent past.

Luxembourg on the other hand, tried and mostly managed to escape this collective process by insisting on its neutral status and the fact that it had not owned any colonies - as did many other countries in Europe as well (Loftsdóttir&Jensen, Wekker, Jain).

The contested histories of colonialism “raise unsettling questions about what it means to know and not to know something simultaneously, about what is implicit because it goes without saying, or because it cannot be thought, or because it can be thought and is known but cannot be said” (Stoler, 123). Many thus refer to the implicitness of Luxembourgers in colonialism as a forgotten history, a ‘collective amnesia’. Amnesia or forgetting are, however misleading terms in describing the portrayal of Luxembourg’s complicity in colonialism, because the topic is not absent from scholarship and popular literature. In fact, very little of the histories that I have shown in this chapter about Luxembourgish complicity in colonialism, has been or is actually forgotten. Articles from popular media in magazines such as Forum, RTL, Tageblatt, Wort or Reporter.lu are the result of the recent attention that the Black-Lives-Matter movement has gotten, causing a worldwide rethinking. This attention has also been utilized by social activist groups in Luxembourg such as Richtung 22 who are currently working on making information about the complicity of Luxembourgers in colonialism and racism more visible and accessible for the grand public. It is thus, “not a linear history or one that was formerly obscured and is only now emerging from light to darkness” (Stoler, 133). In fact, it has repeatedly moved in and out of focus and has more than once been represented as a ‘forgotten history’. This is visible in the works of Régis Moes and its extensive research about Luxembourgers in the Congo in 2012 or in the documentary *Letzebuurger am Kongo*, produced by Marc Thiel and Paul Kieffer in 2001.

By saying that ‘we’ have forgotten our colonial past, one is referring to the cultural memory of this past, the one that is created by institutions such as museums. The term

‘colonial aphasia’ first introduced by Laura Ann Stoler is thus as I think, much more convenient. Luxembourg’s colonial past is much more “a dismembering, a difficulty speaking, a difficulty generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and concepts with appropriate things" (Stoler, 125). It may be displaced, hidden but it is not forgotten.

Chapter Three:

Colonial Collections and Scientific Racism in the National Museum of Natural History

“Natural history museums are more racist than anyone will admit” (Imbler) tweeted Danny Birchhall, web editor of the Wellcome Collection in 2016. Since recent years, more people have recognized this, among them Professor Alexandre Antonelli, director of Kew Science department. He states that whereas in many cultural fields, a re-thinking of the portrayal of racist history has undergone, this shift has been a lot slower in the field of natural history museums. Natural history museums thus played an important role in the dissemination of colonial narratives as empires were created not only by exploiting people but also in the way science was taught, analyzing the Luxembourgish National Museum of Natural History as a museum of a country that was supposedly not involved in colonialism, an interesting case.

In this chapter, I will show how the National Museum of Natural History represents the colonial past, that I established in the last chapter, in its exhibitions. The representation of this past has a significant impact on the construction of a collective memory since it shows whether people of colour are included in the narration of scientific progress or not. To do so, I will first see if the way science is taught in the National Museum of Natural History is connected to colonial narratives of western supremacy. Additionally, I will analyse whether there are colonial objects in the museum and see whether their colonial provenance is made visible or if it is not. To do so, I will look at three examples of how the museum is connected to colonialism. All of this will show me whether the museum is contributing to colonial aphasia that is dominating the national discourse. This analysis will help me in constructing a policy note, showing alternative ways of teaching science in a more inclusive way.

Natural History Museums position themselves often as what Das and Lowe call ‘hard science’. This positioning involves the separation of science and history. Science museums solely focus on the continuing process of discovery of the natural world and how humans can

protect it. However, by focussing on the scientific aspect of their collections, natural history museums contain stories that are not being told. They have always showcased objects that have been ‘collected’ from other countries as a way to glorify the empires and to showcase the wealth of natural resources that they believed were worth exploiting. The way these objects were collected, however, were mostly violently appropriated. Enslaved people helped European explorers to collect natural specimens and bring them to Europe. Even if during the last years, more museums have recognized their racist past, this problem has a lot less been addressed in more covert colonial entanglements. Decolonization of natural history museums is still not widespread. One reason for this is that “it raises uncomfortable questions and in part because it is difficult” (Imbler). In this section, I will demonstrate that even a natural history museum in a country that has not been a classical colonial empire, is displaying colonial heritage and disseminating colonial narratives.

3.1. Scientific Racism

The idea of creating a Natural History Museum in Luxembourg goes back to 1854 and is attributed to the Luxembourgish natural science society. The museum was first located in a classroom of the highschool Athenée and transferred to a barrack in Pfaffenthal when the high school reclaimed the room in order to transform it back into a classroom. The leading motif of the museum was “to instruct by the eyes and then to instruct by recreation” (Ferrant, 27). This was due to the fact that at that moment, most of the population did not have any interest in natural history.

During the nineteenth century, states everywhere in the world tried to “reestablish the relations of power between the State and the people, through the use of cultural and leisure activities” (Sauvage), notably museums. Museums were used to civilize the population in the values of the bourgeoisie. They offered safe alternatives to pubs and bars that people

frequented during their leisure time. The objects were presented in a less scientific manner than they are today in order to raise the interest of the Luxembourgish population. Since colonial expansion forged the development of scientific disciplines, natural history museums were of particular interest. Colonial expansion led to the development of several scientific disciplines such as archaeology, ethnography, anthropology and natural history. While before this, objects were selected for their rarity, representative objects were progressively given priority. These objects were characterized by their 'exotic' character, things that could not be found in Western nature. Natural history museums thus played an important role in the dissemination of colonial narratives as empires were created not only by exploiting people but also in the way science was taught, analyzing the Luxembourgish National Museum of Natural History as a museum of a country that was supposedly not involved in colonialism, an interesting case. Even if, compared to other science museums that have been founded in the mid-eighteenth century, the museum can be seen as a relatively young institution, the museum has long been disseminating colonial racist ideas.

Colonial heritage does not solely limit itself on the objects that were violently appropriated but also on the ideas that legitimized them. In the National Museum of Natural History, a lot of emphasis is on Charles Darwin (see figure 2). The discourse about his findings however does not incorporate the negative impact Darwin's findings had on racial segregation. With the publication of Charles Darwin *On the Origin of Species* in the second half of the nineteenth century, racism and imperialism were justified with a 'scientific' explanation. Evolutionary development changed from simple to complex forms of life and was depicted as evidence of progress. "Scientific essentialist ways of thinking" (Das and Lowe, 6) were only discredited when Nazis shared their plan, known as the 'Final Solution' where people were killed based on their eugenic origins. It is after the Second World War that "the scientific study of human heredity had to be thoroughly reinvented" (Marks, 97). While

Darwin himself was not involved in the creation of interpretations of his theories - leaving out this impact, however, is looking away from “an authoritative biological backing for eugenics, colonial belligerence, and western notions of racial superiority” (Browne, 1), reproducing a Eurocentric view. This is confirmed in the anthropological study by Dawson. He proved that people of colour notice the consequent ignoring of the history of scientific racism in natural history museums (Dawson). In consequence, they felt less welcomed in the museum.

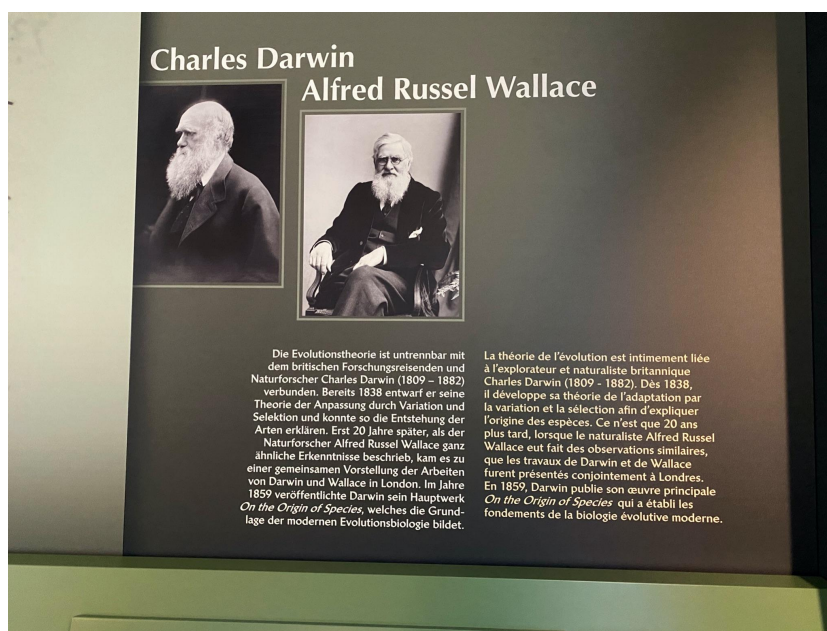


fig. 2: Presentation of Charles Darwin in the permanent exhibition of the Natural History Museum

3.2. The Edouard Luja Collection

Besides neglecting the negative impact that scientific findings had on racism, the museum has also been directly connected in colonialism concerning its collections. The core collection of the museum is formed by the donation of Edouard Luja (1875-1953), a natural explorer and botanist who lived for a long time in the Belgian colony of Congo. Today, 450 types of insects are accounted to direct donations made by Edouard Luja (Tonnar, 24). Luja was a son of a Luxembourgish architect and completed his apprenticeship in horticulture in Brussels,

Orléans, Nancy and in the Royal Botanical Kew Gardens in London. At the age of 23, which at that time was a high age to begin being an explorer, Luja departed for Congo as he was instructed by the company “Horticole Coloniale” who had connections to Luxembourg, to collect bulbs and seeds for the Parisian World Exhibition in 1900. This was not a unique case. Different European countries hired natural explorers to collect natural artefacts as a way to glorify the empire and show its superiority in museums or world exhibitions (eg. Antonelly, Browne, Das, Davis, Fredericksen, Imbler, Marks). Besides the Natural History Museum in Luxembourg, Edouard Luja also donated a part of his collected specimens to the Musée du Congo Belge at Tervuren, today known as Musée Royal de l’Afrique Centrale. The relevance of Edouard Luja to the Natural History Museum in Luxembourg is notable as the museum celebrated its reopening in 1946 with a tribute exposition on Edouard Luja (Tonnar, 24).

Edouard Luja did not only work in the Belgian Congo but his discoveries of the Robusta coffee, a variety of coffee bush resistant to a parasite brought him to Indonesia as well as Brazil where he worked in coffee plantations. While he was claimed to be playing an “international role of science” (Société des Naturalistes Luxembourgeois, 379), giving him national recognition, his complicity in slavery was swept aside. Explorations by Edouard Luja were scientifically motivated, however contrary to the anthropological nature of many other explorations led at the same time they disseminated racist imperialistic ideas as their collection was merely legitimized by science. Not only were the indigenous companions of his explorations that helped him in the finding, collecting and the excavation process unnamed in the museum (Van Beurden, 31), but he also promoted massive collection of indigenous objects as he made clear in a letter to Victor Ferrant, the director of the Natural History Museum, in 1909: “it always hurts me not to be able to take all these beautiful objects. The abundance is such that in one day, I could gather enough to fill a whole museum” (Moes, 119).

Today, when visiting the museum, no connection to Edouard Luja is made visible. There are no signs showing on whom the foundations of the museum's collection is based. The connection of Edouard Luja and the museum was only displayed in a temporary exhibition in 2016. The exhibition *Exposition de photographies d'Edouard Luja au Congo et au Brésil* to which the museum points when talking about the portrayal of racism in their institution, showed photographs of Edouard Luja's explorations in Congo and Brazil. The exposition was an addition to *Orchids, Cocoa and Hummingbirds - Luxembourgish naturalists and plant hunters in Latin America* that was displayed in the museum at the same time. Even if the exposition that is not anymore accessible today, was a temporary step into the right direction in acknowledging the colonial past and making the connections of science and racism accessible to the public, it was displaying a 19th century narrative as can be seen in the description of the exhibition.

Exposition de photographies d'Edouard Luja au Congo et au Brésil:

Et c'est peut-être grâce aux personnages bien mis en scène et aux paysages soigneusement sélectionnés que les photos regorgent de pleins de détails insoupçonnés qui nous font revivre aujourd'hui le séjour des explorateurs et le monde qui les entourait (MNHN)

And it is perhaps thanks to the well-staged characters and the carefully selected landscapes that the photos are full of unsuspected details that make us relive today the stay of the explorers and the world around them.

Non-western people, or more particularly Congolese citizens are retained as 'the world around' the explorers, as 'primitive people' without technology. It is only thanks to the photographs of the Luxembourgish explorer, that it is possible today to have an idea of history from that time. Congolese citizens are considered to be part of the world around the

explorers as if they would not be capable to exist on their own. The description of the exhibition also “encourages modern day tourists to relive the experiences of colonial explorers, treasure hunters and archaeologists” (Tucker, 8). Visitors are encouraged to encounter untamed nature themselves and act as explorers. This relates to a colonial imaginary, that it is the responsibility of Western people to explore ‘the other’.

Moreover, the photography exhibition portrayed colonial history in a glorified way. The photographs that were shown in the exhibition do not portray any negative impacts of colonial rule on indigenous people. In fact, they are removing violence from the colonial project, one as what Wayne Modest would refer to as ‘feel-good colonialism’ (Matters of Care Opening Session).

These particular attitudes, images and stereotypes are rooted in the colonial legacy of the myth of the unchanged and uncivilized other. This idea is very common in the display of natural history museums, which is also the case in the Luxembourgish Natural History Museum. Gandhi explains that there is a “persisting Western interest in the [...] production of what we might call exotic culture[s]” (Ghandi, 59). Thus, even though the museum has a direct connection to colonialism through Edouard Luja, it does not portray it and if it does, it is portrayed in a nostalgic way, one that is reminiscent of the ‘glorious findings’ that were made by Westerners, without taking into account the suffering of those that helped explorers such as Edouard Luja.

3.3. Other Natural Colonial Objects

Next to the connection to Edouard Luja, the museum is also in the possession of many other objects that are rooted in colonialism. As a journal from 1934 mentions, ‘exotic collections’ were donated to the museum either by foreign museums such as museums from London or

Vienna (Ferrant). Others were donated by Luxembourgish private individuals. Among those donors were Xavier de Wael, a member of the “Union Belge”, colonie belge de Luxembourg (Industrie.lu) and Nicolas Funck, a botanist, explorer and zoologist. In this section, I will analyse the role that provenance research is playing in the National Museum of Natural History and see whether the museum is displaying provenance that is linked to colonialism. When asked whether the museum has objects from the old African Museum of the White Monks on which I will elaborate later, Patrick Michaely, head of communication of the museum, could not give an answer. In this section of the chapter, I will therefore have a closer look at what objects in the National Museum of Natural History have connections to colonialism besides the ones that have been donated by Edouard Luja and see whether some of them might indeed come from the African Museum of the Marienthal.

One object that can probably be considered the most prestigious natural artefact is a Quartz (see figure 3), donated to the museum by Prince Henry of the Netherlands in 1865. Even if the mineral was not gathered in a colony itself, it has indirect connections to colonialism because of the man that donated the rock crystal. As I have shown in the chapter about the colonial history of the country, Luxembourg has always had a strong connection to the Netherlands. Not only were many Luxembourgers involved in colonial armies but there were also Dutch members of the royal family that governed the country since Luxembourg was associated with the Netherlands in a personal union. Prince Henry of the Netherlands who was the governor of Luxembourg between 1850 and 1879, played an important role in the trading along the Congo River. In 1877, he “accepted the post of Honorary Chairman of the African Trading Association, an enterprise which had 'his special sympathy'” (Wesseling, 498). Besides this, he was also known as Prince Hendrik, the navigator. It was Prince Henry who was the only Orange who has ever visited the Dutch East Indies, what is now Indonesia (Zonderop). Even if there is no official documentation about the objects that the prince has

collected during his travels overseas, one can be certain that he brought many objects with him. While the rock crystal was not gathered in any Dutch colony but in France, donating it to the museum was a well-thought-out move. By expanding the collection of a museum, Prince Henry was indirectly glorifying the empire since the possession of unique natural artefacts such as the quartz made a significant impression when visiting the museum.



fig. 3: Quartz from Mont-Blanc massif donated by Prince Henry of the Netherlands in 1865 displayed in the permanent exhibition of minerals in the Natural History Museum.

Besides mentioning Prince Henry as one of the main donors of the museum, the leaflet of 1934 also speaks of Frère Apollinaire Marie, a French missionary and natural historian who was active in Colombia, as one of the main donors of the museum. While not much of his life is known, it is known that he founded the *Revista de la Sociedad Colombiana de Ciencias Naturales* in Colombia where he extensively collected plants and insects until around 1946-1947. Today, his botanical specimens can be found all over the world, as it was Frère Joseph Héribaoud of the *Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrésiennes* at Clérmont Farrand who distributed his specimens to museums such as the Natural History Museum in London.

Next to him, many other specimens with colonial provenance such as minerals were donated to the museum.

The museum is currently exhibiting many gemstones as well as minerals that were obtained in colonies. During the colonial age, the exploitation of natural resources was very common which is why many museums are in the possession of gemstones and minerals obtained in previous colonies. In fact, colonialists saw the territories that they discovered as “places with unlimited resources to exploit” (Mc Quade) without taking into consideration the long-time effects that such exploitation would have. Today, the National Museum of Natural History is exhibiting one part of these natural artefacts in their permanent as well as in their temporary exhibition *From Dark to Light*. In these exhibitions, the museum is putting a lot of emphasis on the scientific context of mineralogy. While on the website’s information page about the exhibition the relation of minerals and exploitation is not mentioned, the exhibition does include a section on the problematics of the origin of minerals. In the section with the title “Do it.. But with respect”, visitors can attain knowledge about the problems of slavery that are closely related to the extraction of precious and semi-precious stones. The title, however, can be considered as extremely misleading and inappropriate. While scholars such as Wayne Modest have published guides on the importance of language, this title has not been well-thought of. Instead of explaining the ethical issues connected with the collection of mineral stones which the content of the displays are about, the title gives the impression that it is okay to exploit people when it is done with respect.

Additionally, while observing visitors in the exhibition for around 30 minutes, I realized that most of the visitors did not give any attention to it which might be related to the placement. The information about the ethical issues is placed at the end of the exhibition, close to the stairways where people can exit the exhibition. When I asked a family consisting of three people if they had seen this information, my guess was confirmed. They told me that

they didn't notice it and thought that it was additional information about who contributed to the exhibition. While the placement and the title of this topic is unfortunate, one needs to recognize that the museum is opening up about the provenance of certain objects and publicly recognizing that some of their collections come from the colonial age.



fig. 4: Section about the provenance of minerals in the temporary exhibition from *Dark to Light*

However, this acknowledgement is only the case in the temporary exhibition located on the highest floor. On the ground floor, where a permanent section is dedicated to minerals, no information about the ethical issues of mineral collections is given. In this section, much more emphasis lies on the historical aspects of the displayed objects. Visitors get information about the collectors of the shown stones, of which some of them had connections to colonialism such as: Alphonse Schoetter, Franz Majerus, Alexander Safiannikoff, Professeur Jacques Thoreau. It is also in this section, where the quartz donated by Prince Henri is on display. Even if the information about the collectors mentions their connections to colonialism, there is no additional information about the negative impacts that colonialism had on the culture that the stones came from.

The problematic relation of the museum to provenance research is a lot clearer when talking about the African museum of the White Fathers. While it is not possible to find out whether the museum does contain objects that were exhibited priorly in the African Museum of the White Fathers since neither the head of communication of the museum itself nor the remaining fathers were able to provide me with information about the remains of it, one can assume that this is the case since the museum included many natural artefacts. It is from 1895 onwards that the novitiate of the White Fathers for German-speaking missionaries was installed in the Marienthal. One reason why the monastery was installed in Luxembourg instead of Germany is because it allowed them to rejoin the congregation which was illegal during the time of the Kulturkampf (between 1872 and 1878, a conflict between the government of the kingdom of Prussia and the Roman Catholic Church took place). During the colonial age, the monastery was commonly known as “the recruiting house where young people [were] trained in the tough job of missionaries” (Wilhelm, 65). While the motivations of ethnographic museums varied from one museum to another (Van Beurden, 64), all of them served as a propagation device for the overseas rule and why ‘the other’ needs to be dominated. The exposition of such a ‘living village’ would transport its visitors to another world, one that is primitive and exotic. By showing the differences in technologies and traditions of African people to the West, visitors were able to marvel upon their own technological progress, reinforcing the idea of white supremacy. Thus, the display of colonized cultures emphasized the power and the prestige of Luxembourgers in regard to ‘the other’. Between march 1941 and September 1944, the monastery was looted by Nazis who took along many things that were untraceable after their departure, such as a saber of General Yussuf which has been undetectable since then (Ehret, 30). Today, there is not much known about the remaining objects of the museum. However, one can deduce that some of the objects made their way to the Luxembourgish National Museum of Natural History. As can

be seen on a photograph of the museum (see figure 5), the museum included natural artefacts of stuffed animals which were probably transferred to the closest museum when the monastery was shut down. While there is no actual proof of this, it shows that the museum's priority does not lie on provenance research as they were not able to tell me whether they are in the possession of artefacts coming from the African Museum of the White Fathers.

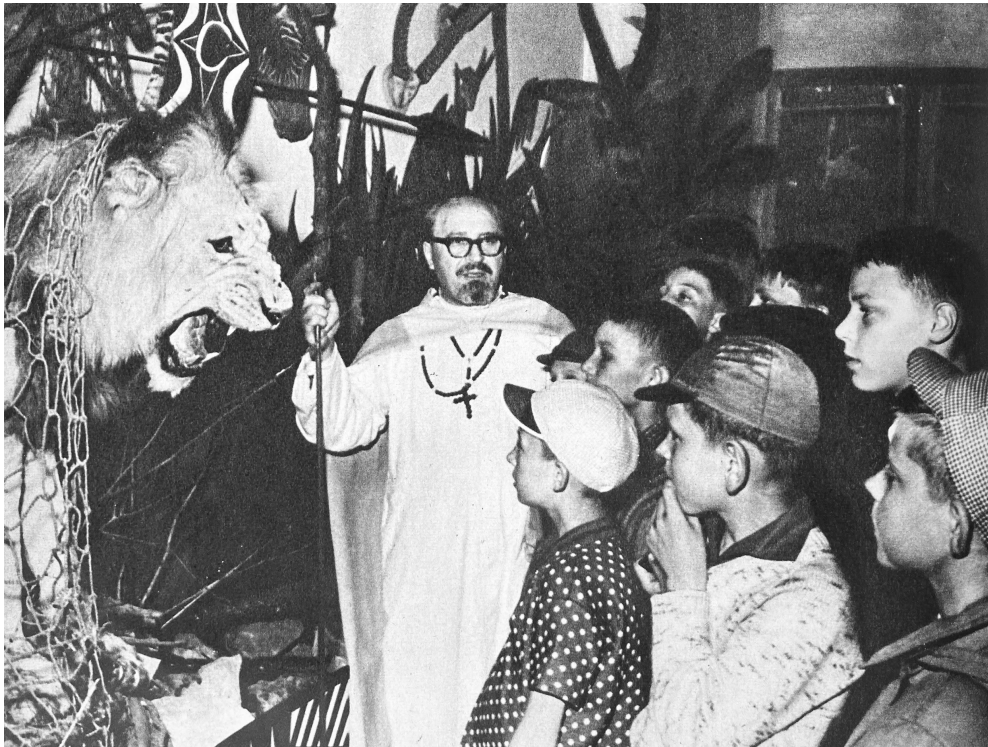


fig. 5: Monk Becker with students at the Africa Museum in Marienthal

Even if certainly, there are other natural history museums that have more extensive collections rooted in colonialism, the Natural History Museum in Luxembourg nevertheless contains a small collection of objects that have connections to colonialism - either because they come from a colony or because they were donated by someone that was connected to colonialism. The portrayal of this kind of history is, however, largely swept aside. By looking more closely at the donors of those objects, one can connect the relations of the objects with the implications of Luxembourgers in colonialism, shown in the second chapter of this thesis. Many objects displayed in the Natural History Museum of Luxembourg came to the museum

either brought by engineers that worked in the colonies themselves or through donations made by missionaries, explorers or even royals of countries where Luxembourgers participated in their colonial armies. It is however only by looking more closely and with a critical mind that one can connect these objects with colonialism, since the museum itself does not put much emphasis on the historical aspect of how they came into the museum. Instead, the museum puts a lot more emphasis on the scientific aspects of them. While this is understandable since the museum is primarily an institution focussing on sciences, it is also important that the museum recognises the contested history attached to the objects on display and makes this information available for the grand public since “the collections [...] didn’t exist in a happy world in isolation to what else was going on” (Imbler).

3.4. Conclusion

The analysis of the Natural History Museum has shown that the institution as well as its collection has entanglements to colonialism. These entanglements do not only include the colonial objects owned by the museum, its connection to colonialism through botanists such as Edouard Luján but also the contemporary portrayal of science which connects to colonial structures of white supremacy. Even if the museum did not publicly invite people to collect colonial objects, the roots of its collection go nevertheless back to colonialism, the same as many other natural history museums. As this case study shows, despite the fact that the colonial past is not absent, there is a difficulty in addressing this past. This is by no means a singular case, in fact, this is problematic in commemorating contested history in general, especially history linked to violence. However, because of this absence, the museum is contributing to colonial aphasia, which has consequences for not only the in- and exclusion of postcolonial immigrants living in Luxembourg, but also race, gender and sexuality in general.

Some museums have taken strong actions regarding the decolonization of their institutions, including not only the repatriation of objects with contested history but also a rethinking on the organizational level of museums in regard to who is telling what and how. This approach, however, has less been confronted in the National Museum of Natural History in Luxembourg or natural history museums in general. This is because as I have shown in scientific museums, narratives are less focused on the history of the objects and more on their scientific aspects. Famous institutions with a lot more public attention such as the American Museum of Natural History in New York have already recognized this and dealt with this criticism by holding exhibitions on these topics, such as an exhibition on the statue of Theodore Roosevelt, whose person was strongly connected to colonialism (Imbler). A lot less activism, however, has been going on in smaller institutions even if according to Sabrina Imbler, smaller institutions “have a better shot at enacting demonstrable change than large, entrenched ones” (Imbler).

However, even if overt racism is condemned by the grand public, it is also important that covert, less obvious, racism is confronted since one way to create an empire is the way science is taught (Imbler). While Luxembourg is often presented as a multicultural country because of the high percentage of immigration (269 thousand out of 626 thousand inhabitants are foreign nationals in 2020 (STATEC)), this does not coincide with what the National Museum of Natural History displays.

Instead of making the provenance of their objects accessible to the public or being open about the negative impacts of scientific findings on racism, they have a difficulty speaking about it. Colonial history is instead being portrayed in a nostalgic way which is reinforcing structural racism that is omnivalent in the country as research has shown. During a debate called “Being Black in Luxembourg”, the results of a report made by the European Union Agency for fundamental rights were presented. The results show that people of colour

are experiencing structural racism in Luxembourg more than any other country of the 12 Member states that were surveyed (during a 12-month period 50 % of the respondents felt that they had been discriminated against because of their country of origin) (Erang).

While Sven Clement, president of the political party “Piraten” ordered that the Luxembourgish colonial past in the Belgian Congo should be dealt with as this would be, according to him, one of the roots for structural racism in Luxembourg (Hoscheid), the National Museum of Natural History has many missed opportunities of where this colonial history could be made visible. In the next section, I will therefore propose reflections and ideas that the museum or any comparable natural history museum could use regarding their colonial collections.

3.5. Policy Note

First of all, it is important for natural history museums to publicly recognize their colonial past and to show the context in which the work of scientific coloniality was done. “Acknowledging the origins of these collections is a critical step in bridging an existing gap between natural history collections and non-white audiences” (Das and Lowe, 12). By acknowledging the connection of coloniality and modernity, according to Johanna Turunen, one can move beyond merely analysing postcolonial heritage (Lähdesmäki, 186). This will allow a shift of focus from former imperial states to a much broader context of the contemporary world as a union and will transform the museum as what Wayne Modest defines as a site of ethics and care (Matters of Care Opening Session), giving it an additional purpose. Colonial entanglements of natural history museums are a lot less obvious for their visitors not only because they are less thematicized in the public compared to national museums but also because natural museums tend to focus less on the historical aspect of their

natural specimens. It is, however, important for museums to change this since “in the scientific context, a key expression of continuing colonial thought is the denial of the colonialist history of science” (Das and Lowe, 7). The museum could attempt this change in including information about provenance similarly to how they have already addressed it in their exhibition on photographs of Edouard Luja or the exhibition *From Light to Dark*. Although, they should try at making this information more visible and more attractive so that it gets more attention.

One way to do so, would be to host alternative tours around the museum, similar to the tours that Miranda Lowe and her black history tours, Jennifer Tosch and her Black heritage tours or Alice Procter in her Uncomfortable Art Tours, have done. The popularity of these tours as well as the rising interest in hearing more personal stories about provenance during tours that Patrick Michael spoke about in the interview that I have held with him, predict a potential success. In these tours, also regular visitors of the museum, could get to know the history of the museum better and from a different perspective.

Another way, would be by including history about provenance along the permanent exhibition of the museum such as Das and Davidson have done in their exhibit called *Displays of Power*. In this exhibition, labels were added, giving visitors information on where the specimens came from, why it was collected and how it got into the museum. While for this exhibition, the feedback stated that the exhibition does not go far enough because of the neutrality of the tone in which they were written, smaller museums such as the Natural History of Museum could get more creative since larger institutions have in general less freedom (Imbler).

Because “other worlds are objectified, consumed, and often rendered as spectacles” (Wevers, 3), museums have to focus a lot of their attention on the tone in which they describe their objects. During collaborations on how to decolonize museology, Wayne Modest,

director of content of the National Museum of World Cultures has realized that there are different languages and different ideas of race across the world (Matter of Care Opening Session). This also relates to a talk that Jennifer Tosch has given during a university lecture about the black heritage tours that she is giving. Language plays an important role in the presentation of contested history as Benedict Anderson has shown in his concept of imagined communities. Language has the potential to build unity which as a consequence also has the potential to construct 'otherness'. As so, it is best to talk about 'enslaved people' instead of 'slaves', since people that are enslaved are foremost humans. Words like 'slaves' have the potential to be reductive and reproducing "the violence of slavery on a linguistic level" (Zorn). Language is thus an important work in restoring identity and making museums more inclusive.

Recognizing its colonial past is evidently going to make museums vulnerable for repatriation. While Patrick Michael is certainly right in saying that there will be no country claiming back a stuffed tiger as the museum does not possess any objects that are of high cultural or historical value to an indigenous culture, it is important that the museum is dealing with this thematic and not dismissing it as something of no concern as decolonization does not necessarily mean repatriation. Since by brushing aside the potential of repatriation, the museum is reproducing imperialistic ideas of Western hegemony. Even if the museum is already partly making their collection accessible online on the Global Biodiversity Information page, it is not including all of the objects that have roots in colonialism such as the mineral stones. However, it is only "through tens of thousands of items loaned each year, hosting thousands of scientific visitors to use the collections and via online data repositories" (Gretchen, 1372) that negotiations with countries of origins can start. Making their collections available online so that everyone can get access to it will help in building relationships with marginalised groups and do justice to their histories, practices and values.

While speaking of decolonising museum spaces, one is also always being confronted with the repatriation of artefacts which was recommended in the Sarr-Savoy report. Repatriating natural specimens to countries of origin will have a potential advantage for a more diverse scientific knowledge and develop more equitable experiences (Dawson, 13). Indigenous scientists will potentially add a different viewpoint on the objects, showing that “there is more than just a natural science story to be told.” (Gretchen, 1372)

Moreover, on the organizational level, it is important that natural history museums get the necessary variety of staff that is needed to make research on the provenance of colonial artefacts. This is one thing that can certainly be improved on. On the question of whether the museum has employed staff that is particularly responsible for provenance research, Patrick Michaely responded that they do not have anyone employed for this singular purpose.

One way to do so without exceeding the museum’s annual budget is by including volunteer programs. In the master thesis, called *Decolonizing Natural History Museums Through Volunteer Engagement*, Sarah Brenner shows that volunteer programs have great potential in the decolonization of museums. This is for one part due to the strong connections that volunteerism in the Western world has to inequity and white privilege. There is thus a great potential that many might be interested in attaining this kind of program. Some museums have already started incorporating volunteer programs in their process of decolonizing their institutions such as the Museum of Natural History in Arizona. In their program, they give educational opportunities through lectures focussing on cultural sensitivity or by making online resources accessible for their volunteers. While the Natural History Museum could indeed organize lectures and collaborations with other institutions such as the University of Luxembourg or universities that are close to the border, they could have a reciprocal benefit of it. The museum could attain different viewpoints on their

presentation of colonial history and digitize their collection, while students can get more practical experience

Even if all of these changes can be seen as a progress, critics such as Miranda Lowe do not think that one can fully decolonize a museum, because of its foundations that have been built on the backbone of slavery and colonialism (Imbler). She thinks that museums would need to rebuild their institutions from the ground up. However, in order to be an inclusive space that does not exclude any history and with that any culture, practice politics of museums should not be driven by fear of losing control over both the history dominated regions as well as the world and its exploitative environment. Instead, natural history museums should see the objects that they contain as a potential to portray decolonial stories to the public.

Chapter Four:

Colonialism and the Construction of a National Identity in the National Museum of History and Art

Museums not only served as a utilitarian instrument for educating the masses about scientific progress but also, maybe even more important, what Foucault describes as ‘an instrument of the disciplinary society’ (Foucault). Museums have helped in building “first and foremost an imagined political community” (Anderson, 6). Through imagined communities, a sense of community and belonging, natural to humanity, is given to the people. This idea of national belonging is constructed through the promotion of a common heritage made by museums. French Historian François Hartog wrote in his book *Régimes d'historicité* that almost everything has become a common heritage. This means that the tangible and intangible heritage of what previously was considered to be part of ‘the other’ has become part of everyone’s heritage. Because national museums are the places where this common heritage is kept and shown, it makes them important agents in the dissemination of colonial ideas and collective memory and by this also in the construction of national identities.

Museums were proclaimed as serving the collective good of the state in educating the masses about culture and history as they show objects previously held in the domestic walls of the elite. The way these objects were and still are presented, plays an important role in creating images of ‘the self and the other’ (Karp, 15). In a nation that does not share a long, common history as well as language, building a national identity is even more important. Luxembourgish is only since 1984 accepted as the official language, besides French and German. So what Anderson defines as a nationally ‘imagined community’, is a more complex matter than it is in other countries (Reckinger et al). This is why the construction of a national museum is playing an even more important role in creating a national identity.

The roots of the National Museum of History and Art go back to the 22th April 1839, when the governing council donated 97 roman coins to the Athenaeum. The museum itself considers 1845 the beginning of the museum because it is since then, that members of the *Société archéologique* began collecting archeological objects and coins. However, it was only in 1922 that the government bought the future location, the building Collart-de Scherff, located at the Fishing market in the centre of the capital. Apart from a prestigious coin collection that has grown over time, an article from 1933 points out that the museum was also known to be in the possession of ethnological collections which were brought by Luxembourgers from faraway lands. It is only at a later stage that works of art were added to the museum's collections.

The power imbalance, once installed through colonisation is however still very much part of how European societies and museums are organised. With the new museology, a more critical movement has recognized that not only the collections of museums are not neutral but also, as Sumaya Kassim states, the history shown in Western museums is “structured to protect white innocence” (Kassim), shaping collective memories as well as national identities. This resulted in a new ‘Zeitgeist’, namely the one of decolonizing not only collections but also Eurocentric structures.

I will show in this chapter how the new zeitgeist is present in the National Museum of History and Art in Luxembourg. I will first analyse how objects linked to colonial history are represented in the permanent exhibition of the museum after which I will analyse how the museum is building a national identity that is structured in colonial ideas. This will help me in answering my sub question of how colonialism is still present in the National Museum of History and Art and what impact this has on the contemporary population of Luxembourg. The chapter will end with a policy note in which I make suggestions on how the representation of Luxembourgish colonial history could be improved. Based on museum

practices in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, I will share my ideas on how to decolonize the curatorial practices of the National Museum of History and Art in Luxembourg.

4.1. 'Hidden Treasures': Colonial Objects in the Museum

The basis of the collection of the National Museum of History and Art was formed, after in 1927, the Historical Section of the Grand Ducal Institute decided to give its collection in the custody of the State. Régis Moes states that this has remained, the colonial artefacts are not owned by the museum itself but by the 'Section Historique' of the 'Institut Grand-Ducal'. The museum has thus been serving as a storage of these objects for almost 100 years (Wirth), partly shifting the responsibility of the objects away from the museum. Contrary to the National Museum of Natural History, where many objects of its collection have been collected in prior colonies, the National Museum of History and Art owns a lot less objects coming from former colonies.

However, both museums have similar problems with the provenance of their objects. In the interview I have had with Régis Moes, the curator of the museum speaks about the difficulty of tracing back the provenance of certain objects that are part of the museum. Many of them were purchased during a time, when provenance was less important. Some of the objects purchased by the museum come from French Galleries that have disappeared since then. The invoices that are in possession of the museum do not include any information about their origins and how they got into the galleries that sold them to the museum. This neglect of colonial legacy and the immediate referencing to the difficulties of provenance research is nothing new. According to Mason and Soynor, museums "may consider they simply do not possess the material culture about a given topic because they are used to look at their collections through a specific disciplinary lens" (Mason and Saynor, 9). Even if some

objects can be traced back to colonies, references to colonial complicity in Luxembourgish history have completely disappeared from display as I will show in this section of the chapter. These include objects made by people from Africa, as well as depicting colonial images.

Contrary to other national museums such as the Rijksmuseum, the Luxembourgish National Museum of History and Art does not have an extensive collection. Nevertheless, it is in possession of collections donated by royals. In fact, gift exchanges by colonial administrators, local rulers and commanders were part of a “system of services in which obligation and liberty intermingled, and honour, rivalry and reciprocity dominated” (Van Beurden, 31). One of this collection was remitted to the museum by Grand Duke Adolphe. The collection was brought from Africa by captain Spring and donated to the Grand Duke in 1897 (Kellen, 123). These objects were for a long time part of the more prestigious part of the museum’s collection, as they were among the objects portrayed in the museum’s book *Trésors*. Overtime, the colonial history disappeared from the museum and colonial objects moved to the depots where they have remained since then. All references to the colonial past have been removed from display. Other museums such as the Mauritshuis were accused of trying to erase colonial history when a replica of a bust of Johan Maurits was brought into the depot. This caused a public turmoil in which the Dutch Prime minister had to step in (Monteiro). However, the transfer of colonial objects to the depot has gone unnoticed in the Luxembourgish public. This removal of display might be unintentional as it is not considered as historical revisionism or erasure, instead it might be trying to make the public space less racist (Spirinelli).



Fig. 6: axe from the african collection of the Grand Ducal Institute

Apart from armours, the museum is also in the possession of African sculptures such as a Dogon Figure (figure 7). The popularity of dogon art, as a result of the upcoming of Jazz music and the popular ‘revue nègre’ of stars such as Sidney Bechet or Josephine Baker, expanded in the 1930’s from France into the world. In the first half of the 20th century, the dominating perspective of African Art, however, was influenced by colonialism. The ‘discovery’ of Dogon sculptures made by a population that priorly lived isolated from external influences was possible because of the “exhibitionary complex” (Bennet). This built a connection between the exploitation of colonies and the collections of Western museums. The deftly carved figural sculptures “became a muse for the imaginations of European and American audiences” (Davis). Disregarding their centuries of intercultural networks in Africa, people of colour were imagined as being primitive and isolated from civilization. As a result, Dogon people were robbed from their cultural identity and, at the beginning of the 20th century, European museums were progressively filled with African objects (Spektrum). The works of the primitive peoples inspired western art, artists such as Pablo Picasso or Ludwig Kirchner were inspired by the reduction of the West African wooden sculptures.

According to Davis, Dogon sculptures are thus a primary example of how ethnographic collecting has generated transformations and perceptions of indigenous cultures.



Fig. 7: Dogon Figure (19th-20th century)

Aside from objects coming from the African continent brought to Luxembourg partly by colonizers, the museum is also in possession of objects that have been disseminating colonial images. These objects were all fabricated by Villeroy & Boch, a Luxembourgish manufacturer of ceramics. As shown in the second chapter of this thesis, Maurice Pescatore, director of the ceramic factory, was involved in the Belgian colonies. His ideas of white supremacy were also found in the objects that the company he directed from 1898 until 1915, manufactured. One of these ceramics can be found in the museum's collection (see figure 8). The tobacco pot made by Villeroy & Boch around 1928 is an imitation of traditional African art in the colonial era. The tobacco plant was brought to Europe by Columbus where it was very popular until the health damages of smoking were pointed out and tobacco became more

and more obscure. Hitler thought that tobacco was the “revenge of the red man for the fact that the white man brought him the schnapps and thereby ruined him” (Proctor). This idea of racism is also depicted in the tobacco pot made by Villeroy & Boch: an innocent child is portrayed collecting toxic waste in a bin. While people have moved beyond the depiction of African people as subhuman caricatures, the object made by the Luxembourgish company is an example of how people of colour were seen and portrayed.



Fig. 8: tobacco pot made by Villeroy & Boch (+- 1928)

While Michel Polfer, director of the museum states in an interview that they “have no reserves full of treasures that [they] don't show to anyone [and] most of the collections turn out to be odds and ends at first glance” (Wirth), this is only partly true. While the objects shown do not have any particular monetary value, they contain symbolic values. None of the objects are available online so that there is no accessible information about their existence. I only heard about their existence thanks to the interviews that I have led with Régis Moes, and by doing more extensive research in museum catalogues from 1989. The curator of the museum is right in saying that the objects currently do not fit in any exhibition that the museum is currently showing and are therefore kept in the archives. But nevertheless this does not explain why the objects are not accessible online.

Overall, even if the museum claims to not have many objects rooted in colonialism, there are many objects that offer the museum the possibility to portray the colonial complicity of Luxembourgers. Because none of the objects are currently on display, I cannot speak about the way they are presented in the museum. However, by hiding these objects in the archives of the museum, the museum is influencing the visitor in the perception that a Luxembourgish colonial or racist history does not exist. By visiting a national museum, visitors expect to learn about the history of the country. Here they think that colonialism and racism has not played any role. This shows that the “contemporary narratives of modern Europe are still inherently products of the same cultural processes, power relations, and discourses of Western hegemony that were used to legitimate colonial rule” (Lähdesmäki, 187). National museums are deciding what is shown and whose stories are told and, in this case, the National Museum in Luxembourg is displaying the history of Luxembourg as being foreclosed from any colonial influences, building the perception that Black history is not important.

4.2. Constructing a nation

In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said argued that colonialism and power imbalances are not only constructed on the basis of economic or military force but also on culture as well. Not only did representations and images justify imperialism as well as scientific racism, but they have also had an impact on nation building since they have dominated the imaginaries of both the colonisers and the colonised. The power imbalance that was once installed through colonisation is, however, still very much part of how European nations are constructed. The presentation of the hidden treasures mentioned above, show in which spirit the National Museum of History and Art operates. In ignoring the colonial past, this discourse of silence has, however, consequences in the representation and shape of a Luxembourgish collective memory as well as identity.

In general, people think that museums of former colonial powers are keeping colonial objects of great historical and cultural value and need to conduct serious research on their provenance, preferably in cooperation with colleagues from the former colonies. Thus, for many, decolonizing the museum means what Sabrina Imbler defines in her article as “the process of removing or contextualizing racist depictions and, where possible and practical, repatriating artifacts” (Imbler). Therefore, the emphasis on victimhood is often connected with expectations of repatriations (Oostindie, 69), even if epistemological and ontological structures in the organization of museums exist.

With the new museology, a more critical movement known as the ‘critical turn’, has recognized that not only the collections of museums are not neutral but are involved in the construction of the representation between the self and the others (Said). In the attempts to decolonize museums there have been two tendencies: one focussing on the politics of representation and identity and the other as an epistemological solution, introducing the ‘south’ as a category (Cocotle). The movements of decolonizing museums are based on the idea that museums have to move towards the recognition of cultural diversity, “the necessity for everyone to become free from colonial structures of thinking, representing, valuing and feeling” (Deen, 11). Decolonizing museums is thus a practice to make museums more inclusive, since many people of colour still do not feel welcomed in museums, as the film scene of the movie *Black Panther* has referred to.

In general, many consider the decolonization of museums as an acknowledgement of the past. Tosch describes it as “a ‘revolutionary act’ as we are declaring war on historic hegemony, again by continually shifting our gaze” (Tosch, 8). The term thus refers to the fluidity of mnemonic structures. Because, according to Halbwachs, collective memory is constructed through an active social process which is constantly changing by the different representations of history, cultural diversity can be attained through decolonization. It is thus

both a resistance of colonial taxonomies as well as a vindication of radical multiplicity (L'Internationale Online, 5).

The museum presents itself as a national museum, suggesting that it presents what the national identity of Luxembourg consists of. As shown in a study by Pille Runnel, visitors of national museums see the site as a place for reflection of identity and national past (Runnel et al., 72). Benedict Anderson's theory underlines this, showing how museums have contributed to the idea of a collective memory. This implies that the museum displays what it 'means to be a Luxembourger'. As shown, even though the museum is in possession of colonial objects and black heritage, these artefacts are being stored in the archives of the museum and are not on show. Thus, the presentation of the museum as a national institution, as well as the silence about colonial heritage, suggests that people of colour are not part of the national identity of Luxembourg.

Sumaya Kassim shows that most museums do not question this idea of the nation. Instead, they "tend to narrate change in terms of how well the museum is doing in terms of its outreach, its impact, and the nation's capacity for tolerance and liberal values" (Kassim). If there is no public demand for the museum to react to colonial history, national museums tend to not address it, and by this uphold the power that they claim to dismantle. The decolonizing zeitgeist thus finds itself in an infinite circle. Because of the aphasic situation in Luxembourgish society, there is no public demand for museums to include Black heritage in their exhibitions so, people are not aware of the contested history which to the exclusion of people of colour in society.

However, it is also important to pay attention to what space one is included. There have been many attempts to include marginalised identities into spaces that were still predominantly white, risking an "identity reductionism" (L'Internationale Online, 12). Thus,

people of colour were only able to enter the museum system on the condition to perform 'the other'. This is also visible in the structure of the National Museum of History and Art. When asked why the museum has no colonial artefacts on show, the curator of the museum explained that none of the objects would fit in any of the exhibitions. By this, the museum is being selective and is excluding aspects that they are not pleased with. African objects are positioned as something different, something 'other'.

This exclusion is also visible in the portrayal of Luxembourgish art in the museum. While the museum claims to promote Luxembourgish art, this is only the case for one part of the population. Migrants that have moved to Luxembourg are not included in what is defined as 'the nation'. Sibila Lind shows this exclusion in an article where she interviewed five citizens about their experiences as people of colour living in Luxembourg. One of the respondents was Lolo, a woman in possession of a master in artistic education. While her work has been recognized all over the world, in Luxembourg, she had to take on a job as a cleaning lady because of the lack of support in her works as a result of her skin colour. Even if one could see "art not only as a symbol of power but also as a medium of dialogue" (Holfelder, 16), the inclusion of artists and artworks in the National Museum of History and Art is repeating colonial structures of inclusion and exclusion based on nationality.

The infrastructures of the museum also play an important part in the dissemination of epistemological and ontological structures. Museums often position Western objects such as Greek white marble statues in well-exposed high-ceilinged spaces whereas African objects are placed in dark and gloomy rooms. In the case of the Luxembourgish national museum, it is not possible for me to analyse the way the objects are displayed, in general, however, the building of the museum itself has an impact on the perception of the visitor. In his essay "The Exhibitionary Complex", Tony Bennett took on Michael Foucault's theories about the impact of space on the perception of people. He argued that architecture has the power to guide the

conduction of people in certain spaces, including museums. Museums, especially national museums, were serving as an apparatus of visibility, of seeing and being seen (Rito). Citizens were self-regulated and controlled by being exposed to each other. This also applies to the architectural influence of the National Museum of History and Art in Luxembourg. The building of the museum has a consistent aesthetic, it visually connects modernity to the past, as the museum incorporates the old building that was completed in 1939 and the new ensemble, inaugurated in 2002. The stone cladding facade gives the impression of the museum as a monolithic block, giving a sense of being a perfect neutral canvas. The design of the museum is inspired by an aesthetic of the 1950's American abstract art, "reflect[ing] a belief that minimalism and starkness somehow imply a greater moral worth" (Procter, 183). The architecture of the building stands for national pride, moral superiority as well as neutrality. This is also visible in the interpretations associated with the objects on display which are presented as facts and truths, creating a certain myth while leaving out different interpretations.

The choices made by the National Museum of History and Art show a quite uncritical image of the Luxembourgish identity and collective memory. Luxembourgers are presented as a neutral and a predominantly white population.

4.3. Conclusion

Not remembering the colonial past in the National Museum of History and Art has consequences for the in- and exclusion of postcolonial immigrants living in the country. By ignoring history and not thematizing colonial structures, the museum is contributing to the notion of colonial aphasia, as if colonialism never happened. This has a massive impact on inclusion and exclusion not only of people of colour, but also race, gender and sexuality in general. Some even state that "coloniality's effects can be detected in almost every sphere of

our lives” (Lähdesmäki, 187). The presentation, or in this case, neglect of colonial history is articulating a broader dense discussion that is happening outside of the museum world.

On one hand, ignorance and defensive positions are perfectly understandable because knowledge of colonial complicity can no longer be actively accessed. For example, most Congolese that are living in Luxembourg have only immigrated in recent years, so there is no active community to remember the victims associated with the colonized population.

At the same time, the denial of colonial complicity is paradoxical because of the omnipresence of historical and cultural witnesses, as I have shown in the section about the colonial objects in possession of the museum. This neglect of colonial history as well as exclusion of Black heritage is visible in contemporary society. In Buschrodt, a small village in the western part of Luxembourg, a street was named after the commander Nicolas Grang. In 2020, the municipality decided to rename the street because of the colonial history attached to Nicholas Grang. During an interview, Régis Moes stated that he is currently writing an article about this contested history because many residents of the municipality were complaining about the change of name. On one hand, this might be because they are either not aware of this history, but on the other hand, it might be because they are proud of the achievements of the Luxembourgish commander born in this small village.

While historian Régis Moes thinks that the complicity of Luxembourgers in colonialism has no impact on structural racism today as most part of the Congolese living in Luxembourg only immigrated in recent years, activists such as Sandrine Gashonga explain that the white supremacy ideas of colonialism can still be felt until this day. Because of the labour migration agreements made between Luxembourg and Portugal, which excluded citizens of the Portuguese colonies of black Africa and South America, forgetting to incorporate the Cape Verde Islands, “the majority of afro-descendants are from the Cape

Verde Islands" (Mukuna). Because of this, many Luxembourgers still assign people of colour with labour workers and as less worthy. This also coincides with the results of a debate about "Being Black in Luxembourg". During this conference, the results of a report made by the European Union Agency for fundamental rights were presented. The results show that people of colour are experiencing structural racism in Luxembourg more than in any other country of the 12 member states that were surveyed (during a 12-month period, 50% of the respondents felt that they had been discriminated because of their country of origin) (Erang).

What is often portrayed as a moral debate about guilt or bad conscience of individuals or as a sham battle against political correctness, however, is much more a political, deeply democratic debate. In the political field, it has only been recognised in recent days that racism exists in a multicultural country, with a high percentage of immigration (269 thousand out of 626 thousand inhabitants are foreign nationals in 2020 (STATEC)) such as Luxembourg (Hoscheid). Sven Clement, president of the political party "Piraten", thinks that the Luxembourgish colonial past in the Belgian Congo should be dealt with, as this would be one of the roots for structural racism in Luxembourg (Hoscheid).

Colonial aphasia is reinforcing structural racism in the small country. By not addressing this racist past and not including it into the collective memory, one is trying to not be reminded of the injustices that certain individuals, and with them also the country, built their wealth upon and swap aside the feeling of guilt.

Johit Rain, a Swiss sociologue, claims that "Democracy is not only an institutional process, but also a powerful process of constructing 'culture'" (Jain, 53). By deciding what is shown and what is included in Luxembourgish history and discourse, cultural institutions are deciding who is included and who is not. This goes with Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism'. Because the museum is not including Black heritage into its exhibition, it is

separating Luxembourgers from ‘the others’. By this, the museum is helping in defining a European self-image. The self, or in this case the Luxembourger, is codified as the true human while the ‘other’ is portrayed as less human, as not worth to be remembered.

Re-examining the historical aspects of a country’s complicity and its connection to museums show how colonial history has shaped its national cultural identity. Through the denial of the violent history of colonialism, however, racism is actively repeated. Fabio Spirinelli, former PHD history candidate at the University of Luxembourg claims that, if public education would have taught more about colonial regimes, the public debate about racism might be totally different (Spirinelli). Today, inclusion in the museum sphere has become more relevant than ever in a society where ethno-nationalistic politics are rising. Since colonialism is about racial hierarchies, the way it is presented remains relevant in today’s society. The increasing segregation and structural racism across Europe and more precisely Luxembourg testify how the imbalance of commemoration is taking a toll on democracy. There is thus a “need to make visible the more concealed involvement with colonialism” (Lüthi et al, 2).

However, there is a will to change, as mentioned by Régis Moes. In 2022, the National Museum of History and Art is planning a temporary exhibition about the participation of Luxembourgers in colonialism. How this exhibition will challenge the idea of a Luxembourgish national identity remains to be seen. As the exhibition will only be temporarily available, the museum is, however, yet failing to include colonial history in a permanent exhibition, as part of the collective memory and national identity.

4.4. Policy Note

Multiculturalism has become one of the buzzwords in describing Luxembourg, a country where over 269.000 people of the 626.000 population are immigrants (Hoscheid). However, this multiculturalism and the complicity in colonialism is not present in the narrative of the National Museum of History and Art. With the increasing attention that the Black-Lives-Matter movement has raised towards heritage institutions, a new approach of taking care has emerged. Museums are expected to engage closely with their communities, be more inclusive and delegate decision-making power relations. Instead of repeating colonial supremacy by maintaining epistemological and ontological structures that justify colonial endeavour, national museums should question themselves which society they want to serve. National museums have to develop new scopes that fit the contemporary zeitgeist of their audience in order to not end up as ‘shrines of nostalgia’ (Pieterse, 164). Postcolonial museums need to unmask and inverse power relations (Smith, 435) and check for blind spots by looking self-critically from postcolonial and migrant fringes. In this section of the thesis, I will give ideas on how a national museum such as the National Museum of History and Art in Luxembourg can not only decolonize its collections but also stop repeating colonial structures of western supremacy.

First, it is important for the museum to make research on the provenance of their objects and make this information available online so that everyone anywhere in the world can have access to it. This gives indigenous cultures the possibilities to review the collections online and re-evaluate the objects. Many museums have a certain fear of making their collections available online since it opens them up for requests of repatriation. But this also has the potential to change the “view of the Museum as the owner of objects to custodians of those collections, with an obligation to the peoples who created the objects and stories, and to their descendants” (Shoenberger). Working together with local communities helps the

museum to determine how objects of their culture are respectfully treated. Inquiries for repatriations are inevitable. However, museums should rethink the availability of cultural heritage. Objects do not only have to be available for the Western part of the population, but also for the descendants of those who have manufactured the objects. This also prevents museums from sharing wrongly interpreted information, a common issue in museology, as the documentary “Decolonising the Curatorial Process” by Dr. Orson Nava has shown. In one of the case studies featured in the film, activists and scholars from the Maasai reviewed the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford and found out that many catalogue descriptions and display labels included misinformation. This benefits both the museum and the indigenous people. Additionally, making the information available online is cost-efficient as people do not have to travel for that sole purpose. However, it is clear that decolonizing museums can also generate contradictual limits. By ‘giving a voice’ to indigenous subjects and afro-descendants, Black culture is again often turned into themes, some would even say “museum fetishes” (Cocotle). There is a possibility that new labels are produced through a simplification despite wanting to break with stereotypes. So it is important that recognition goes beyond the level of the exhibition.

Giving people of colour a voice is, however, not the only process that needs to be made to fully decolonize the museum. As artist and curator Shaheen Kasmani explains in her presentation “How Can We Decolonize Museums”, this effort may replicate colonial behaviours. By “inviting indigenous people into the museum to help the institution improve its exhibitions... [it is] exploiting people of colour for their emotional and intellectual labour” (Shoenberger). Therefore, it is important not only to review interpretations but also to review how and by whom this history is presented in order to decentralize the Eurocentric view.

The information attached to the different artworks plays an even more important role, they are far from being neutral but instead should be seen as a political act (Shoenberger).

There is an ongoing discussion on the question of subjectivity in museums which is based on the language of presenting and the idea that we cannot judge the past with the lenses of the present. Wayne Modest speaks about an urge not to judge as it is entrapped in colonial judgement because it is underscoring the judgement of the coloniser (Matters of Care Opening Session). Therefore, museums need not only to be careful about the tone of their labels but also from which viewpoint the interpretation has been made. For the writing of labels, there are techniques that promote inclusion and exclusion (Karp & Lavine, 185). Because the audience is often considered as a passive recipient, trusting the information told by the museum, the role of the label writer is of high importance when speaking about inclusive storytelling. Labelling and cataloguing structures need to be overhauled. It is important that objects from a different culture than the museum itself, are not narrated from a fixed and orientalist view. One needs to recognize that objects have multiple, fluid and disconnected meanings that are not a priori nor stable (Van Oyen, 89). In her essay about label-writing strategies, Elaine Heumann Gurian demonstrates that changing the role of the visitor from a passive reader to an active one can help to make the museum more inclusive. One example of this takes place in the Decorative Arts Museum at the Louvre. The labels are written in different reading levels. The same information is written in different tones to get everyone to understand the label and reduce the notion that all visitors need to have a college-fluency repertoire (Karp & Lavine, 186). Other museums such as the Mauritshuis museum or the Rijksmuseum have taken on a similar strategy when putting up interpretations from different perspectives than conventional ones (Monteiro, Nieuw Licht). Additionally, black culture such as African art should be contextualised with information about the artist and the artwork in the same way as White art is.

Next to this, it is also important for museums to integrate information about provenance or trigger warnings. The tobacco pot depicting an African child is one of the

objects that needs a trigger warning or a note explaining the racist idea that it is depicting. Some Luxembourgish museums such as the Villa Vauban already use trigger warnings when showing objects with racist ideas. In the mobile application of the museum, visitors can get more in-detail information and are warned of a human image that is no longer justifiable nowadays. An example is a bust depicting an African Woman made by Villeroy & Boch.

It is important that a national museum shows the diversity of the country's history and not only a glorified past. The National Museum of History and Art could make use of the colonial past of Luxembourg by making an exhibition on the personalities that were involved in colonialism. While museums are conventionally considered as places that collect and display objects, an alternative approach is to present them as "places that collate and share human experiences" (Faherty). Personal stories and individual characters can offer many opportunities to make the exhibition more interesting. By focussing on storytelling and trying to get the different personalities to come to life, the experience of the exhibition would be more interesting for visitors, as it gives it a more familiar character.

Additionally, stories can "stimulate the imagination and offer reassurance, they provide moral education, they justify and explain" (Yiannis, 9). They help to make the unbelievable believable, which is important for people unaware of any implications of Luxembourgers in colonialism. The museum could for example elaborate more on the life of Claus Cito, a Luxembourgish sculptor whose uncle Nicolas Cito was involved in the construction of railroads in the Belgian Congo where thousands of people lost their lives. Charlotte Wirth guesses that it is only because of the wealth earned by colonial work of his uncle that he was able to afford studying art. The museum is in the possession of many of his works since he played an important role in the country's art history.

Since technology is becoming one of the most important aspects of modern society (Charr), the museum could let visitors engage with colonial history by using technological

devices. Because the museum's ability "to make exhibitions that fought against the dominant narrative [is often] hampered by what the museum had previously collected under this prevailing mindset" (Shoenberger), technology is a great tool for sharing information virtually. This not only avoids borrowing colonial artefacts from other museums because most of the colonial artefacts owned by Luxembourgers were donated to foreign museums (Wirth), but also makes the exhibition more attractive, especially for a younger audience. People increasingly consider leisure as quality time, making long exhibitions requiring lots of reading less appealing (Roles). Multimedia exhibitions allow visitors to navigate through vast amounts of information at their own pace. Visitors of the exhibition could interact through video screens with the people from the past and question them by touching different choices. Since "technology can act as a useful conversation starter" (Charr), it offers visitors a chance to step into a dialogue with unknown colonial history.

With these ideas, the national museum could become what Mary Louise Pratt defines as a 'cultural contact zone', meaning that it would become a place where different cultures collide with each other. Through storytelling, descendants of colonial oppressors would get to know better how 'the other' experienced this past. People of colour could get a better understanding of the intentions of colonists, since they were not all deliberately bad as shown in the chapter about Luxembourg's colonial complicity. More importantly, a new collective memory and national identity could emerge. It is, therefore, important that national museums recognize their power as learning communities instead of impenetrable centres of self-validating authority (Shoenberger).

Chapter Five:

Conclusion

In this research, I have shown how the two national museums of Luxembourg are presenting the country's entanglement in colonialism and how this presentation affects the contemporary population. The mnemonic landscape in which the Luxembourgish collective memory is being shaped, creates systems of what is being remembered and thus also of what and who is not remembered. On the basis of this research, some alternatives were proposed. These regard the issue of how museums can become more inclusive spaces where collective memories also cover remembrance of violence and conflict. The conclusion below will try to describe the larger context while looking at what the meaning of this research exactly is and will give propositions for further research.

5.1 Mnemonic Structures of the Museums and the Collective Memory of the Nation

I have shown how far Luxembourg was involved in colonialism by giving brief information about the connections of the population to the Belgian Congo, missionaries as well as colonial armies. This context chapter helped to show which history could be represented in the national museums and also proved that Luxembourgish colonial entanglement was by no means a singular, individual case. Further research needs to be done, but one can assume that this is the case in all other countries that have not been classified as classical colonial empires.

Following the context chapter, the two museums that have been analysed have different subjects, narratives and messages and approach colonial history in their own way. Because of this, a rich pallet of research results has been created. It is interesting to see how

these approaches relate to each other and what the consequences of these mnemonic structures have on the nationality of Luxembourg.

The Museum of National History and Art as well as the Natural History Museum do not include any history of Luxembourgers in colonialism in the narrative of their exhibitions. While the Natural History Museum mentions that some objects exhibited have an origin in former European colonies, it is not paying attention to the violent nature that dominated the age of colonialism and the appropriation of the objects that can be found in the museums today. Despite the end of formal colonialism, this shows that some colonial ideas are still embedded in the contemporary presentation of European history. So, the mnemonic structures of the museum are shaping the collective memory of its nation. On the one hand, the Natural History Museum is disseminating a neutral engagement by mentioning the provenance of their objects but leaving out the negative consequences on the suppressed culture. On the other hand, the National Museum of History and Art has a more silent approach, namely the one of not addressing the history and keeping the objects stored in the archives of the museum. Additionally, the museum is promoting a colonial view on the Luxembourgish national identity and is engaging with what Edward Said has defined as the othering of the self as the true human. Colonial history is left out of the collective memory as well as the portrayal of contemporary culture of Luxembourg. By this, both museums are contributing to colonial aphasia.

In both museums, it seems as if a violent past, which Luxembourgers have contributed to, has never existed. This goes with Wayne Modest and Markus Balkenhol's research on "Caring for Some but not Others". While the past of the Second World War is being largely commemorated in Luxembourg, there is no trace of the violence and atrocities made by Luxembourgers during the colonial age. The choices both museums are making are highly political. By excluding colonial history into the narratives of their exhibitions, they are

deciding who is included into the imagined community of the nation and who is not.

Furthermore, the Luxembourgish collective memory is shaped in such a way that it supports the idea of Luxembourgish national identity as a peaceful and neutral population. The reality however is far more diverse and problematic.

Both museums seem to follow the idea that the only way to move forward is to forget. While, of course, societies must be able to forget in order to move on, this should not be made as a consequence of an inability to address this past. After all, the aphasic situation excludes stories and even people from the Luxembourgish collective past. An alternative approach for both museums would therefore be to accept the history of violence as one of its own, as one of Luxembourg. One needs to recognise that democratic culture also includes making historical heritage, colonialism, racism and migration. While the topic of coloniality in Luxembourg's museum landscape seems to be a taboo subject, the unwritten story of colonial complicity is instead being amalgamated and brought to life in activist and artistic projects of many subcultures. Art collectives such as the *Richtung22* invest in this story and work on making this history more available for the public whereas official institutions such as the two national museums yet fail to do so.

While, in the past, museums were created to legitimise racist ideology, it is important for them to change this, as they are responsible in shaping the collective memory as shown by Halbwachs. By ignoring their racist history, they are continuing to share racist ideology. However, it is only by addressing the colonial past, that they can prove how "the museum is able to find a new social purpose outside the colonial frame" and show how Western culture can adapt to a societal change (Sauvage). Therefore, it is necessary for museums to renew themselves, to develop their own discourse, cultural certainties and institutions in order to survive and to perform reparative work of source community work. Even if there is no possibility to fully decolonize a museum (Imbler), the colonial past plays a role in structuring

what museums are doing in the present. They should critically examine their colonial legacies and show how their institutions came to be by highlighting the impact of museum's practices. This helps in thinking how colonialism is shaping different countries across Europe differently and what that means for the different regimes of citizenships that Pan-European museums attend to.

Overall, even if there is no one-way solution to handle colonial objects as “there is no obvious way to even begin to respectfully remember any event of mass suffering” (Oostindie, 69), it is important for a museum to stand as an advocate for plurality in an antiracist future. National histories in the last quarter of the 20th century began to be superseded by individual and group histories, with an increasing interest in “regional and local histories ... in opposition to the national, grand narrative” (Sauvage). But the progress of decolonizing Luxembourgish museums has been slower and more uneven. In fact, the discussion and responsibility of it is passed on by historians to politicians and vice versa. According to Régis Moes, “whether or not to apologize for our colonial past is not the responsibility of historians but of politicians”(Mukuna). The results of the survey, however, prove that the public opinion is that museums should include this past more in their exhibitions as it is part of the identity of the country.

The answer to how Luxembourg could free itself from the dilemma of the lack of a legal basis for dealing with claims for decolonization is pretty clear. There is a need for a political decision to develop legal and binding regulations, which have already been realized in other countries such as the Netherlands. The act of taking care is therefore not only a cultural and historical question but also a political one. It is a question of whose history is told, what is at stake in telling this history and what it means to say to people that their history is not important. Now, the task is to take full responsibility for the injustice that occurred during the colonial era and to have the courage to actively re-address it. By

recognizing that this past belongs to Luxembourg's history, both museums can become places "that exercise consciously politics of positionality" (Wevers, 3). The recognition of this history is a restorative process, from which a new community, a new 'we' can emerge.

Still, this work is only the first stage, so there is a possibility for more research. Further research should consider the critical notion of postcolonial studies and apply it to countries that have not been priorly known as colonial empires. This has the potential to reveal covert racism and gives historians as well as scholars of the humanities the possibility to leave to a certain extent the scientific neutrality and engage with society.

The subject of coloniality, racism and the violence associated with it seems to be a taboo subject in Luxembourgish society, where the aphasic condition promotes colonial hierarchies. A question for further research could thus be: Why does Luxembourgish society think that they do not have to decolonize and is the Luxembourgish identity really so tolerant and neutral as it believes?

Attachments

Attachment 1: Exhibition Analysis

The attached analysis structure has been specially developed for this study

1. History of the Museum
2. First Impressions of the Museum
 - What kind of impression does the museum make on its visitors?
3. Content of the Exhibitions
 - What exhibitions are being shown?
 - What are the messages of the exhibition?
4. Objects shown
 - Is there any chronological or thematic structure in which the objects, texts or images are being shown?
 - What objects do stand out?
 - How are the information of the objects being presented (personal, dry, detached style, etc.)?
 - What are the consequences of how the objects are being presented for their understanding?
 - What objects are being shown and which not?
5. The visitor
 - For whom does the museum appeal to? For which kind of visitor is the museum made?
 - How does the narrative of the museum connect with the targeted audience and what are the consequences of choosing one targeted audience?
 - In which direction is the body of the visitor being pushed and what are the consequences of the guidance?
 - Are the visitor's emotions being appealed to?
6. Shaping Luxembourgish identity and collective memory
 - How is the colonial past of Luxembourg being presented?
 - When looking at the narrative of the museum, what does the colonial past of Luxembourg consist of? What kind of collective memory and identity does emerge from this representation?

Attachment 2: Results of the Online Survey

The survey was led from the 13th April until May the 13th 2020. The survey was sent via a hyperlink to a variation of respondents from different backgrounds and different age groups, all having in common that they have a connection to Luxembourg. The survey was completed by 78 people.

1. Do you consider yourself being a frequent museum visitor?
Yes: 24 respondents
No: 54 respondents
2. Have you ever been to the MNHA or the MNHN?
Yes: 67 respondents
No: 11 respondents
3. Do you consider museums as institutions that can be trusted?
Yes: 62 respondents
No: 16 respondents
4. Do you know anything about the complicity of Luxembourgers in colonialism?
Yes: 11 respondents
No: 67 respondents
5. If yes. Where did you learn about it?
 - > Museum : 1 respondent
 - > School : 0 respondent
 - > Press : 6 respondents
 - > Friends & Family : 2 respondents
 - > Own interest : 2 respondents
 - > Other : 0 respondent
6. Would you be interested in getting to know more about it?
Yes: 56 respondents
No: 22 respondents
7. What do you think could be a reason why you do not know anything a lot about Luxembourg's colonial complicity?
Not enough addressed: 54 respondents
Not interested: 13 respondents
8. Do you think that there is enough discussion about this topic in public debates?
Yes: 13 respondents
No: 65 respondents

9. Do you think that museums sufficiently address this past in their exhibitions?
- Yes: 8 respondents
- No: 70 respondents

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