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Discursive Crossings in Liminal Spaces[1]

The *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Project* (IMP) unravels the challenges of conceptualising as liminal spaces the fractures that are real or imagined between museums and bearers and transmitters of intangible heritage elements. These are often constructed as in Binary Oppositions; 'Contact Zones'; Subject to the Tyranny of Authenticity; Unfathomable Fluidity; Agency/s for Revitalisation; Sites for Safeguarding; and dilemmas of 'Coloniality and Contextuality'.[2] It is my argument that the 'atmosphere' of museums[3], their collections and the location of associated living heritage elements command the respect of deeper and more rigorous interrogation. Illustrative case studies have the proclivity to museumise and freeze in time living heritage through the narratives of 'self and the other'[4] or 'as it once happened' in the anthropological past. Many questions remain for deep and ethical research – museological and interdisciplinary.

The current debate on formulating a new Definition of the Museum by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) could provide a platform for some of the answers or the ways forward. The following text is desultory referring to the intersectionality of the nature of border crossings attempted, negotiated and often in ethno-centric intellectual, professional and community group landscapes. Six months into the lockdown now and with the momentum from Black Lives Matters, both the institutions of the academy and the museum have opportunities to reflect, reveal and confront their theory and praxis. They may want to drag through as much baggage as possible through the 'portal'.[5] But the global triangulation of crises – COVID 19, Climate and Environmental Deterioration, and surging protests for Racial Justice across the world – challenge us to rethink current approaches to cultural justice and travel through the portal to vision and walk better futures. I sincerely hope that the rigour and reach with which the IMP project has been conducting

1 This contribution is based on the keynote by Amareswar Galla, held on the occasion of the Concluding Symposium of the *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Project* (26/02/2020, Brussels).

2 Cfr. the keynote address by Amareswar Galla, *The Dialectic of Coloniality and Contextuality*, held on the occasion of the ICOM Vienna Conference (06/12/2019).

3 I. K. B. Lundgaard, *Museum Atmospheres - Embodiment in responsive environments* (PhD. Thesis, Aarhus University, Denmark, 2019).

4 K. Yoshida, 'Introduction. Portraits from Asia and Europe: How have people depicted each other?', in: K. Yoshida and B. Durrans (eds.), *Self and Other: Portraits from Asia and Europe*. Osaka, 2008.

5 A. Roy, 'The Pandemic as a Portal', *Financial Times* (03/04/2020).

is a starting point to decolonise the 'whiteness',[6] and 'anglophone' hegemony in museological discourse. Race matters in the liminal spaces. For it is here that the rites of passage, as if it were, are betrayed. Hegemonic and privileged discourses frame and often co-opt active citizenship and esotericise the conceptual, diminishing the voices of rights-based stakeholders, the bearers, and transmitters of intangible heritage elements.

What kind of interdisciplinary persuasions and paradigmatic shifts do museums need to consider in addressing the atmosphere of experiences in their ambit to become civic spaces?[7] Do they engage with or even consider 'grassroots globalisation' and address the elite legacies, dominance and cultural reproduction?[8] Has museology evolved to internalise the constitutive embeddedness and the dynamism and democratic intent of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage? Are museums ready or do they have the capacity to go beyond chameleon like transformations?[9] Can they negotiate the imperatives of the marketplace or sustainability and address the poverty of methodologies – 'users', 'audiences', 'stakeholders', 'community engagement'?[10] Do they have the capacities and capabilities to address the First Voice and Sustainable Development Goals?[11] What of the human face of globalisation and developing communities of practice to enable rootedness in the ethics of engagement?[12] Can the notion of heritage value or even significance be interrogated, even within one's own ethnocentric boundaries such as the Anglophone world of the former colonies and their metropolis? These and many other challenges are opened by the five encounters of the IMP project. The pathways for the future are 'untrodden' and the liminal location of safeguarding beckons the future institution of the

6 A. Moreton-Robinson, 'Towards a new research agenda?: Foucault, Whiteness and Indigenous sovereignty', *Journal of Sociology* 42:4 2006, p. 383-395.

7 R. West, *The Making of the National Museum of the American Indian*. Champaign, in press.

8 A. Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination', *Public Culture* 12:1, 2000, p. 1-19.

9 Richard Kurin, 'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Key Factors in Implementing the 2003 Convention', Inaugural Public Lecture, Smithsonian Institution and the University of Queensland MoU Ceremony, 23 November 2006, published in: R. Kurin, 'Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Key Factors in Implementing the 2003 Convention', *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 2, 2007, p. 10-20.

10 J. Falk, 'Understanding Museum Visitors' Motivation and Learning', in: I. Lundgaard and J. Thorek Jensen (eds.), *Museums – Social Learning Spaces and Knowledge Producing Processes*. Copenhagen, 2013, p. 106-127.

11 A. Galla, 'First Voice in Heritage Conservation', *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 3, 2008, p. 10-25.

12 *Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*, https://ich.unesco.org/en/ethics-and-ich-00866 (20/8/2020); M. Jacobs, 'The Spirit of the Convention: Interlocking Principles and Ethics for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage', *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 11, 2016, p. 71-87; M. Jacobs, J. Neyrinck and A. Van der Zeijden, 'UNESCO, Brokers and Critical Success (F)Actors in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage', *Volkskunde. Tijdschrift over de cultuur van het dagelijks leven* 115:3, 2014, p. 249-256.

museum to the 'third space in the heritage sector' and as to 'how it can become inclusive', a central concern of my professional and academic journey.[13]

In addressing the role of museums in safeguarding intangible heritage there are many antecedents across the world. They offer lessons in different culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. One of the maladies of the heritage field in general and museums in particular, is cultural amnesia.[14] Considerable material from earlier transformations is either forgotten or lost in the academic practice of circulation of chosen publications, incestuous collegiality and chasing select citation indexes. The result is an increasing gulf between theory and the praxis of community-based inventorying and safeguarding. Academics and heritage professionals need to respect that modernity has created a chasm between the tangible and intangible, a construct of the colonial sociology of knowledge. It was not inherent in the bearer-transmitter communities. There are no such things as values of the binary heritage discourse that can be measured and authorised.[15] If postmodernity has failed the source communities, decolonisation discourse continues to be from the vantage point of legacy possessions and hegemonic power base of the former colonial institutional corridors. The elite middle classes of India for instance have rarely addressed this situation.

The idea of India as a construct, could be constitutional, administrative, political, and geographical and many more things one could possibly imagine.[16] It is an amalgam of one of the most complex layers of history in the world. India is one of the first countries in the world to constitutionally guarantee the equal rights of all its citizens. It is also the first one to incorporate Fundamental Rights of all its citizens and include a cultural diversity framework in its Constitution. The translation of such a powerful legal instrument into practice on the ground has been wanting and challenging. Some progress has been made. Now the Pandemic lockdown provides a critical reflexive space for understanding the progress made and the role of museums as agencies of empowerment and participation for historically disadvantaged communities. To label something as intangible heritage of India and its representation in the several national museums is part of a museological practice that has not so far progressed.

What makes the National Museum in New Delhi National? What makes the Indian Museum in Kolkata, the largest and oldest in South Asia, Indian? There are several other national cultural institutions in India. They are administrative organisations to represent India in a poorly conceived museological discourse. The questions have not even been addressed so far, either in the academy or the museum profession, as openly admitted in a series of national symposia in

13 A. Galla, 'In Search of the Inclusive Museum', in: B. Murphy (ed.), *Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage*. New York, 2016, p. 304-316.

14 One of the excellent expositions on cultural amnesia: C. James, *Cultural Amnesia: Notes in the Margin of My Time*. London, 2007.

15 L. Smith and G. Campbell, 'The Tautology of "Intangible Values" and the Misrecognition of Intangible Cultural Heritage', *Heritage and Society* 10:1, 2017, p. 26-44.

16 B. Chattopadhyaya, *The Concept of Bharatavarsha and Other Essays*. Ranikhet, 2017.

2019.[17] Throw into this ambiguity, if not vacuity, of intangible heritage elements as Indian. Several continue across the recent political borders. Bauls are from Bengal. Safeguarding their living heritage across the region that has been divided in 1905 by the colonial administration within the ambit of their divide and rule policies, is at least one among them. Another example is the Jamdani textile tradition that has no borders between India and Bangladesh. Yet both argue over Geographical Indications of Goods (henceforth GI) registration[18], as different from intangible heritage. Punjabi heritage cuisine is both Indian and Pakistani. The politicisation of intangible heritage has reached such high levels that two states in India, based on their recent borders, West Bengal, and Orissa, went to court for registering the GI of a popular heritage sweet called *Rasagulla*. But the intangible heritage of the cuisines was neither recalled nor understood. Competition for GI registration is for tourism promotion. But safeguarding intangible heritage through tourism and livelihood concerns of the bearer-transmitter community groups is poorly addressed across India. What is evident is that much of intangible heritage is perceived from the present, synchronically. The diachronic layers and continuities are rarely examined. Popular heritage arguments are hardly evidence based. "Contemporary Pasts" is a critical discourse that must be understood as it informs the living heritage of the present in India or elsewhere.[19]

In India as in Europe, rethinking objects, and sites or even the gaze of the so-called cultural landscapes, mapping their multiple journeys, and assessing their layered significances are critical in the much-discussed decolonising process. Understanding coloniality is a prerequisite in any such framing or positioning as might be appropriate. Contextuality, morality, ethics and respecting evidence based historical interrogation would help heritage and museological progression. It is in this context that I launched the Asia Europe Museums Network (ASEMUS) in Barcelona during the ICOM Triennial General Conference in July 2001. It was a responsibility that I undertook as part of my endeavour to establish a collaborative dialogue that is not oppositional, but one that would help us to learn to 'walk together on our museological journeys'. I was then the President of ICOM Asia Pacific Executive Board. The concept was originally presented via my keynote speech at the ICOM NORD meeting in Stockholm in 2000. It was more than the asymmetry of collections in the Asia Pacific and European contexts. It was the call for an inclusive museology that is progressive. It was my argument that the European collections from Asia were decontextualized and that bringing together coloniality and contextuality, both the meaning and associated intangible heritage of the collections, was a way forward for strategic partnerships for museums from the two regions.

In the early days prior to the start of the series of workshops and meetings that led to the adoption of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, there were seminal transformations

17 Several meetings, symposia and projects are covered in my Heritage Matters Column in the New Indian Express, http://inclusivemuseums.org/index.php/heritage-matters/(21/08/2020).

18 *Intellectual Property India,* http://www.ipindia.nic.in/gi.htm (21/8/2020).

19 R. Thapar, *Indian Cultures as Heritage, Contemporary Pasts.* New Delhi, 2018.

taking place in Australia. In 1982, the Interim Council of the National Museum of Australia was established. It is true that it did not open until 2001 as a Centenary of Federation project, a celebration that conveniently left to oblivion the framing of White Australia policy and its legacies. These are finally surfacing as Australia attempts to engage with Black Lives Matter. However, a major decision in the formation of the National Museum, one of the first anywhere in the world, was to establish an Indigenous or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee of the Council. The Council also made a major decision to scope and establish, once again one of the first ever in the world, an affirmative action program for enabling the participation of Indigenous Australians in museums through a strategic partnership with the higher education sector.[20]

I will give an instance, from the 1980s in the affirmative action program, of what is now framed as intangible heritage. In the curricula planning for the first two years there was a sequence of subjects entitled *Traditional Aboriginal Society* and *Contemporary Aboriginal Society*. In 1988, a review underlined the adage – once a practice and twice a tradition. The ambiguity of the binary between traditional and contemporary was questioned. It was discussed and considered as a colonial construct and that the binary of the subjects was artificial. In the reframing of the curricula a new sequence was introduced: *Concepts in Applied Anthropology*, *Aboriginal Society and Adaptation* and *Aboriginal Material Culture*. It was recognised and translated into both curricula planning and pedagogy that Indigenous Cultures in Australia are living, dynamic and adaptive to what were often traumatic histories of displacement, dispossession, and colonisation. Adaptability was included as part of the resistance sometimes referred to as frontier wars. Collaborative learning and teaching were funded to engage Indigenous knowledge bearers and transmitters in the classroom and field immersions.[21] This movement was translated into a national advocacy strategy through the Federal Government.[22] In 1994, the program received the recognition among the first group of projects funded for excellence by the Committee for Australian University Teaching. What is now considered as intangible heritage provided the essence of the programming that had a multiplier effect across Australia.

In the above-mentioned transformations, the seminal community grounded meeting from the Kimberley region of Australia and its emphasis on respect and recognition of living heritage, informed the 1994 meeting in Japan that drafted the Nara Recommendation on Authenticity of the World Heritage Convention.[23] The decision of the World Heritage Committee in 1994 to take

20 An overview of the program was published and a thousand free copies circulated during the Triennial General Conference of ICOM in Den Hague in 1989. A. Galla, *Museums and Beyond*. Canberra, 1989.

21 Curricula transformations were informed through the first voice of Indigenous Australians. P. Yu, *Crocodile Hole Report*, Derby, 1991; Yu, *Aboriginal Interests Working Group, Final Report of the Western Australian State Museums Taskforce* (report also called after the Chairperson, *Stannage Report*). Perth, 1991.

22 A. Galla, *Heritage Curricula and Cultural Diversity.* Canberra, 1993.

23 UNESCO, *Nara Recommendation on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention.* Paris, 1995.

into consideration the principles and views contained in the Nara Document on Authenticity in its consideration of properties nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List is a turning point in the history of the World Heritage Convention. It generated an enriched World Heritage discourse and listing of sites that demonstrated both cultural diversity and heritage diversity. Significantly, the knowledge of community groups living in World Heritage sites has become important in management, and this was further underscored in 2007 by the Committee adopting 'Communities' as one of the five 'Cs', or Strategic Objectives for facilitating the implementation of the Convention.

Eighteen years later, the celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention resulted in a mainstream publication locating intangible heritage in World Heritage sites. What is significant is that the safeguarding of intangible heritage elements in World Heritage sites need not be oppositional but collaborative, each abetting and augmenting the other respecting local rights-based communities and their living heritage elements. It is the practice of integrated local area planning. Through a rigorous refereeing process, five case studies were included.[24] They illustrate the participation of local communities living in and around World Heritage sites and contributing to the safeguarding of their respective intangible heritage and in doing so the outstanding universal value. iSimangaliso Wetland Park (South Africa) clearly demonstrates that conservation of a World Heritage site in partnership with the primary stakeholder community can result in economic, social, and environmental benefits derived to communities that have been historically disadvantaged. Conservation and community development are facilitated as sustainable development of the World Heritage site. Sian Ka'an (Mexico) is an example of participatory methodologies and project-based learning in safeguarding both intangible heritage and outstanding universal value. It recognizes that the high degree of biodiversity conserved in the World Heritage site is partly a legacy of the traditional knowledge systems of the Maya people. It respects and benefits from the Maya management practices and landscape skills over the centuries. In doing so the approach stems the decline of traditional knowledge.

In the Republic of Korea's Hahoe Historic Village, the recognition and knowledge of the local communities has become significant for conservation and in facilitating cultural experiences for visitors. World Heritage status has also helped Hahoe villagers in their struggle to resist external appropriation of their culture and to reclaim stewardship of their village, leading to tangible economic and social benefits. Kaiping Diaolou and Villages (China) World Heritage site presents a relatively recent phenomenon where the safeguarding of World Heritage is a networked exercise with the international diaspora. However, local people who live within the site take on shared responsibility and custodianship of its outstanding universal value. The last case study in this chapter is the Shiretoko World Heritage site (Japan), which argues that the co-management of fisheries with the fishing communities yields significant benefits for conservation of the World Heritage site and for the

24 A. Galla, (ed.), *World Heritage: Benefits Beyond Borders.* Cambridge and Paris, 2012.

local stakeholders. Building consensus with the fishing communities serves the common purpose of conservation and responsible economic development based on systematic monitoring of impacts.

Australian experiences were also translated into local methodologies elsewhere. In these translations there are lessons to be learnt from scoping the role of museums in safeguarding intangible heritage. One of them could be understood from museums in three World Heritage sites in Vietnam and India. All the three were inscribed on the World Heritage List without engagement with the local rights holders. In fact, working on post inscription projects in all the three of them revealed that the local stakeholder populations were oblivious to the meaning of World Heritage and outstanding universal value. The latter had subordinated both the primary stakeholder communities and their living or intangible heritage, if not overwhelming it with the processes of globalisation in its various avatars – cultural, social, economic, environmental (imposition of the colonial western Nature/Culture dichotomy) and digital and even religious and spiritual. Ecomuseology was used in the initial transformations or rehabilitation – Halong Bay and Hoi An World Heritage sites in Vietnam and Darjeeling Himalayan Railway World Heritage in India.[25] Ecomuseology became a tool for bringing people and their heritage together through community-based inventorying and safeguarding demonstration projects.[26] Benefit analysis for the primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholder communities informed the first stage of transformation.

Coming back to India, one must learn to accept that community groups have had safeguarding through their own First Voice for hundreds of years, just as in Australia. Guilds and craft societies have been recorded safeguarding the intangible heritage of skills, rituals, and modalities of intergenerational transmission for hundreds of years across the world. For example, in South Asia weaving and textile heritage continued, yes viable and sustainable, for centuries until the tyranny of British colonial taxation and the dumping of cheaper material from Lancashire mills. Relationship of indigenous people with the environment in India was diminished through heavy taxation on forest products. Modernity of design and architecture superimposed itself on local and indigenous forms that are now being revived and valued as climate friendly through the new discourse of intangible heritage and climate action.

It must be emphasised that NOT ALL intangible heritage elements need safeguarding. Caste system and its mores are systemically embedded in the codes of ritual hierarchies in India. They are the root problem of present-day India's power problems and corruption. Female genital mutilation and female infanticide are gross violations of human rights. Bonded labour or the legacies of the Devadasis, Temple Dancers, even after the systems were made illegal continue. Patriarchal practices and dowry are continuing. Many of these abominable practices must be understood to eradicate or minimise them. Only

25 A. Galla, 'Culture and Heritage in Development: Ha Long Ecomuseum, a case study from Vietnam', *Humanities Research* 9:1, 2002, p. 63-76.

26 A. Galla, 'Locating tourism in sustainable heritage development Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR)', *Cultura y Desarrollo* 4, 2005, p. 1-14.

legal prescriptions through international standard setting instruments have a limited role. Nor can simple solutions be found in the post-World War II mantra of education. If anything, demographers from Australian National University and Bangalore have demonstrated that education and the value placed on it has entrenched some of these practices even more in India. Education has diminished bride wealth, but dowry has become unbearably demonic on parents. The complexity of traditional practices and their contemporary manifestation is to be researched and understood through the First Voice of community groups and the liminal spaces of transmission of such practices, if we are to ensure human rights. For example, the adaptability of women with the growth of middle classes and their continuing subordination in the household needs to be researched. It has exposed the exploitative dimension of education and its role in increasing household incomes at the expense of subordinating and demeaning of women. If you apply the borders of caste, class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, economic status, faith, and sexuality, the liminality of intersectionality and associated ill-conceived intangible heritage becomes a pandemic. Education has proven to be an ineffectual vaccine.

It is the argument here for the youth present in the final IMP symposium, aspiring to become heritage professionals and researchers, that they interrogate the possibility of community grounded cultural spaces and then secondarily museums as sites for safeguarding intangible heritage. In the latter intangible heritage can be critical in reanimating or bringing to life recent and sometimes historical collections to facilitate experiential learning. This enhances the didactics of the display and adds value to the respective museum through dynamism in exhibition planning, design, and final outcomes. In the educational programming such contextual valorisation of collections creates a space for meaningful intergenerational dialogue and transmission. The direct participation of bearers and transmitters makes the learning more engaging for young audiences who are often seduced by the offerings of global popular cultural experiences that are often homogenising and have become a major threat to safeguarding intangible heritage at levels both the local and beyond.

Inventorying is a major challenge for safeguarding intangible heritage. Conventional collections management systems and site survey and mapping methodologies are inadequate for dealing with living heritage elements. Documentation can easily induce freezing the element for the transliteration process captures it in time and space. Museums have considerable experience in creating and managing databases. This knowledge could inform new and innovative methods for inventorying intangible heritage. However, most research and publications on cultural mapping marginalise or add on intangible heritage elements. Community based inventorying and safeguarding would also assist museums that want to become relevant to their diverse audiences. In addition to the visitors, working with bearers and transmitters would create the appropriate and respectful atmosphere that is ethically engaging.

Conservation is only a part of safeguarding process. Most often legacy practices of preservation, restoration and conservation of tangible heritage endure into the discourses of safeguarding intangible heritage. Yet conservation of tangible items associated with intangible heritage could be

informed by the knowledge of the bearers and carriers. This would inform the safeguarding process through direct community engagement.[27] The meaning and multidimensionality of safeguarding as a process should not be defined but understood and respected as an integral part of the contextual interface of museums and the element that they are working with. It requires a sharing of authority and not the patriarchy of authorising. The ethical frame is one of letting go the power and authority of the museum or making it secondary to the authority of the cultural rights of the respective bearers and transmitters. Safeguarding requires a critical understanding of the different contextual effects of power and authority. If it is ethically based on respect for the bearers and transmitters, shared authority could also be a way forward for museum development.

Museums have become media savvy to overcome the constraints of lockdowns during the Pandemic. Performative spaces, digital or real, of intangible heritage elements are more likely to attract quality media profiles than simulated tourist promotions which often compromise the values embedded in both the intangible elements and the associated collections. In recent years social media has become increasingly significant for the promotion of active citizenship. So important is the role of social media that it has been dubbed as the catalyst for the 'Arab spring' and various recent radical political transformations. The globally transformative movement, Black Lives Matter, has brought to the forefront racism and discrimination so deeply entrenched in museums across the world. Colour and power and the intersectionality of a range of cultural borders have created hierarchies. Decolonising and collaborative framing of them as flexible and ongoing intercultural discourses is critical. How well we come through the Pandemic as a portal, to what extent we drag through past prejudices and the scope of creating post Pandemic blended realities will determine as to what we learnt through reflecting, revealing and confronting our prejudices. Tweeting, Instagramming, and other modalities have become the culture of social action impacting on the way young people participate in civic processes. If in the transmission of intangible heritage, young people are our target groups or if you will critical audiences, what role does social media have in the safeguarding of intangible heritage through museums? At the same time: how can museums be of assistance through relevance, respect and participation in the intergenerational transmission and elements in all their adaptive transformations as part of community-based safeguarding of intangible heritage? The fundamental question remains whether museums have come to an understanding of the use of social media for young people. How can they maximise on the opportunities provided by social media in the intergenerational transmission of intangible heritage?

27 Some of the early incorporations of safeguarding in museum practice are by conservators. M. Clavir, 'Preserving conceptual integrity: ethics and theory in preventive conservation', *Studies in Conservation* 39:2, 1994; p. 53-57; M. Clavir, *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation and First Nations*. Vancouver, 2002; N. Odegaard, 'Artists' Intent: Material Culture Studies and Conservation', *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 34:3, 1995, p. 187-193.

In the movable dimension of heritage, museums have witnessed the development of considerable scholarship on 'objects', 'art works', and sometimes 'things'.[28] Similarly, our work has interfaced with sites, places, and landscapes in addressing the physical context of movable heritage. For the past two decades there has been considerable effort on the part of professionals from being site or object centred to becoming more community centred. Community engagement has become a measurable dimension of the corporate culture of heritage agencies. We now have a new dimension of expanding on the role and function of museums as spaces for safeguarding intangible heritage 'elements', where the bearer and transmitter communities, groups and individuals are the primary rights stakeholders and whose role is critical in the transmission and the revitalisation of intangible heritage elements.

In 2004 Richard Kurin in his keynote speech to ICOM 2004 in Seoul, has challenged the readiness or capacity of museums in the safeguarding of intangible heritage. In 2019 at an international research meeting he threw open the same challenge at the Smithsonian Institution. In 2020 museums continue to struggle to come to terms with the key conceptual frameworks: elements, safeguarding, revitalisation, viability, sustainability, carriers, transmitters, inventorying of living heritage, intellectual property rights, ethical engagement and in fact, the very centrality of intangible heritage and its community based inventorying and safeguarding. Several case studies and demonstration projects are paving the way to create an understanding of these conceptual challenges, but the establishment museology continues to reinvent itself and needs critical interrogation. Drawing from the current discussions on the implementation of the UNESCO 2003 Convention we could focus in future on the following thematic considerations:

a. Examining the concepts of the 'element' in the drafting of the 2003 Convention and its Operational Directives. What does an element mean in the museum business?
b. Actual trends, categories and examples of the elements inscribed on the Representative, Urgent Safeguarding and Good Practice lists. What are the different examples of elements that museums have dealt with in the safeguarding of intangible heritage in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts?
c. Addressing 'similar elements' in different countries or contexts. How do museums deal with intangible heritage elements that have multiple source communities or bearer and transmitter communities that are at times transnationals?
d. What is appropriate for elements of intangible heritage in inventorying, listing, safeguarding, and raising awareness? Museums have diverse contexts and are driven by their core missions. How do we transform our approaches and practices, addressing the safeguarding of intangible heritage, to incorporate or rather integrate inventorying, creating databases, establishing

28 S. Weil, *Rethinking the Museum and Other Meditations*. Washington DC, 1990.

safeguarding strategies and active citizenship and public education programming?

Research is critical in better understanding of an element (or group of elements) of intangible heritage through an examination of form, function, social, cultural and economic values, practices, modes of transmission and artistic and aesthetic dimensions, history and the dynamics of creation and re-creation. Museums must look at the way documentation and research assist safeguarding measures, especially for furthering the continued practice and transmission of the element/s; and be prepared with the participation and sustained prior informed consent of the communities, groups and individuals concerned.

One of the principal goals in establishing the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* after the Seoul Declaration of ICOM 2004, and drawing on the work of the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force, was to promote research on the role of museums in safeguarding intangible heritage. As a co-founder and Second and Third Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal*, I worked with the Editorial Board on sourcing, negotiating, and publishing a series of case studies that address the different ways that the safeguarding of intangible heritage informs the transformation of museum practice. Professor Lourdes Arizpe, the eminent anthropologist from Mexico, has consistently advocated the need for research in understanding the impacts of normative instruments such as the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and especially for the inscription processes on the above-mentioned lists under the Convention.[29] She identified the following concerns after a research planning meeting in Mexico and the research advocated could inform what we could endeavour to do in museums:

1. To analyse the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in current development processes. The main three issues are sustainability – intangible cultural heritage is very important in many instances for environmental, social, and political sustainability; the redefinition of what makes us human – several new theories show the relevance of cultural practices to the way societies achieve negotiated conviviality and pluralism; and the repositioning of nations, traditional regional cultures, ethnic and religious groups in the new world order. Research on these issues will make visible underlying currents in proposals for inscriptions on the different lists of intangible heritage and would make such work more relevant in the world today.
2. To examine intangible cultural heritage in terms of the needs and wants of local communities, as expressed in cultural idioms and in the context of economic crises and policy trends. Such an analysis must take into account the different levels of decision-making – say, municipal, state, and national – in the inventorying and proposing of candidatures on intangible cultural heritage.

29 L. Arizpe and C. Amescua (eds.), *Anthropological Perspectives on Intangible Cultural Heritage*. New York, 2012.

3. To create methodological tools for inventorying, registering and promoting intangible cultural heritage in multiscalar models, that is, taking into account that local cultures are always related to larger 'cultural areas': micro-regional, national and even macro-regional or even sub-continental. This may help ease the controversies arising from different groups claiming that only they have the 'authentic' way of performing an intangible cultural heritage practice, and falling out with other groups when that practice is included in the Representative List.

I have presented a few thoughts on the significance of promoting the role of museums and heritage agencies in safeguarding intangible heritage. There is considerable urgency for museums to rethink their core missions to integrate the safeguarding of intangible heritage along with the conservation of tangible heritage. This can only be done through critical and constructive research that engages and respects community-based knowledge systems. In doing so museums must learn to gain the sustained prior informed consent of the rights holder stakeholders or sometimes the source communities and ensure an equitable and ethical practice that enables the museum as an inclusive agency in safeguarding intangible heritage in the face of the accelerated pace of all forms of globalisation leading to the extinction of languages and cultures across the world. In addressing this challenge museums learn that community engagement is indivisible from their core purpose.

Relevance, living heritage and interdisciplinary thinking in education and cultural democracy from the early 20th century gradually transformed and mainstreamed design to improve life. One of the most well-known schools is the Bauhaus with the manifesto *Thinking the World Anew*. Bauhaus' Centenary last year interrogated the heritage of design and as to how changing values inform innovation, inspiration, and creativity. The Design Museum (MAK) in Vienna hosted The Design Biennale in 2019 on *Changing Values*. The MAK Conference "*The Vienna Biennale for Change: Brave New Virtues. Shaping Our Digital World* focussed on brave visions on handling artificial intelligence and new technologies, on shaping innovative (urban) ways of work, on new ways of living (together), and on responsible consumption."[30] Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, General Director of the MAK, initiator and head of the Biennale, states: "With the possibilities of art, design, and architecture, the Vienna Biennale will contribute to shaping a future based on values." Which "values can the utopia of an economically and socially just and fair as well as ecologically sustainable future become reality?"[31] All players, museums personnel, rights holder communities and collections remain strangers in a decontextualized

30 *Vienna Biennale For Change 2019: Brave New Virtues. Shaping Our Digital World*, https://www.biennialfoundation.org/2019/06/vienna-biennale-for-change-2019-brave-new-virtues-shaping-our-digital-world/ (21/08/2020).

31 *Opening VIENNA BIENNALE FOR CHANGE 2019. BRAVE NEW VIRTUES. Shaping Our Digital World*, http://www.viennabiennale.org/en/exhibitions/detail/opening-vienna-biennale-for-change-2019-1/ (21/08/2020).

environment. Can museums get in step with such contemporary thinking and take mediated pathways cognisant of the liminal spaces between institutions and community groups, between considerations of tangible and intangible?[32]

We are familiar with the impacts of leading edge museologists of the day such as Duncan Cameron who queried the museum as a "temple or forum" in 1967. Steven Weil argued the museum as an "idea" and an object as a "thing" in 1989.[33] The ICOM 2002 Asia Pacific meeting in Shanghai demanded the decolonisation of the museum, calling for rethinking the museum as a dynamic institution and including safeguarding living heritage. In 2010 ICOM adopted the Shanghai Charter on Cultural Diversity that called for a shift from Monoculturalism to Cultural Pluralism. In 2008 in Leiden, The Netherlands, in partnership with ICOM, we launched a research network – *The Inclusive Museum* – on how the institution of the museum could become more inclusive. It is an open-ended research movement for intellectual debate and discussion rather than being prescriptive on what is inclusion (see: onmuseums.com).

Rethinking museums as relevant spaces at the end of the second decade of the 21st century has become imperative. At the same time as the Vienna Biennale Conference in 2019, the Extraordinary General Assembly of ICOM in Kyoto discussed and debated the adoption of a proposed new definition. The debate almost broke up the professional body, the largest for heritage in the world. The current definition of a museum in its sixth iteration since 1948, was updated and adopted unanimously in 2007 in Vienna. As the then Chair of the Cross Cultural Task Force of ICOM (2004 to 2010), I participated in the complex negotiation process through the ICOM Reform Taskforce to have 'intangible heritage' integrated into the definition.

Those of us working on cultural justice through museums felt that our life journeys were being vindicated when the new definition was presented in Kyoto last year. It covered the range of social, cultural, economic and environmental concerns that mattered to museums two decades into the 21st century. The decision to adopt the new definition has been deferred. But the momentum for change can only be accelerated now. India is yet to join the debate. But India witnessed in 2019 a plethora of museum conferencing raising several important questions interspersed with a few excellent case studies of transformations as well as plenty of show and tell of the conventional demonstrations. Vendor driven culture of transformations without institutional capacity building is evident. Even if meetings are limited to burgeoning urban elites and their cultural reproduction in a market economy, these are conversations one must have to open the legacies of the past and start decolonising the museums. The silence on the role of museums in safeguarding intangible heritage of India is resounding! In 2019, the Government of India has come up with a new five-year plan with substantial budget for the transformation of national museums, and even to establish a National Institute for Cultural Heritage and Conservation to drive professionalisation of museums in India. The Government of India

32 A. Galla, 'The Stranger is Present', S. Nagbøl (ed.), *The Stranger. On the Understanding of, and Socialising With, the Stranger in a Globalised and Constantly Changing World*. Aarhus, 2015 [*CURSIV* 16].

33 S. Weil, 'What is the Proper Business of the Museum: Ideas or Things?', *Muse* 7:1, 1989, p. 28-32.

also released in 2020, during the Pandemic, a new National Educational Policy. It provides significant avenues of interdisciplinary research and teaching, both at the community and institutional levels for safeguarding intangible heritage. Hopefully, it will not be more of the same and there will be new and conscionable change agents beyond the national capital and other major metropolises in India. More than 80% of the country, villages, are forgotten by the museums in India, hence its intangible heritage.

India was an active member in the UNESCO General Conference that adopted the text of a new standard-setting instrument on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity, and their Role in Society in November 2015. It was drafted in close collaboration with ICOM. It affirms the *Code of Ethics for Museums* of ICOM. Member States have agreed on establishing and implementing a set of global guidelines for the protection and promotion of museums and collections. It is to become the cornerstone of international and national museum policies and legal instruments. It refers to the current definition from 2007. It reflects the international community's strong commitment to assisting museums in fulfilling their roles in contemporary society to promote sustainable development and intercultural dialogue, safeguarding heritage in all its manifestations. Hopefully ICOM will edit and amend through negotiation with its constituent committees and UNESCO, and adopt a progressive new definition by 2022, at the next Triennial General Assembly in Prague.

The new Secretary of the Smithsonian, Lonnie G. Bunch III, historian and founding Director of the iconic and phenomenal, National Museum of African American History and Culture on the Smithsonian Mall, offers three suggestions for museum transformation when and where appropriate. "A community-driven model of interpretation, collecting, and relationships that might assist them in navigating the tensions between history and memory" so that "museums matter"; "help audiences find the contemporary resonance of a museum's efforts"; "reposition cultural institutions as sites of value that are the centres and not peripheries of their communities".[34] The legacies or the way forward for the innovative and inspirational progression of the IMP project will be the future transformation, transitions, and transgressions of museums in the way they engage, rethinking the museums as a holistic and inclusive institution.

34 L. Bunch III, *A fool's errand, Creating the National Museum of African American History and Culture in the Age of Bush, Obama, and Trump*. Washington DC, 2019.