



**XXIX Encuentro Anual del ICOM**  
**XV Encuentro Regional del ICOM LAM**  
**“Museología e Historia: Un campo de conocimiento”**

**ICOFOM - 29th Annual Meeting**  
**ICOFOM LAM – 15th Regional Meeting**  
**“Museology and History: A field of knowledge”**

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**ANALYZING SUMMARY**

**Dr. Anita B. Shah**

**Museums and Historiographic Discourses**  
**History and Representation**  
**Ethics and Transmission of Memory**  
**Alta Gracia, Argentina**

The discussion on 8<sup>th</sup> Oct was concerned with exploring, developing and redefining concepts that can give solutions to the problems confronting museums in their quest for the balance between the past and the present. These problems are particularly acute in the museum's presentation of historical material conveying a specific reading of history. The museum is a specific phenomenon of man's approach to reality. Museology fulfills its role as a specific science by evaluating what impact the museum as a whole can have on the social consciousness of its audience.

The discussion opened with the question of why the 'negative' reality was not portrayed in the museums of Estancia. There were questions on what happened to the African slaves and the original owners of the land 'Indians' and finally also to the Jesuit monks. The museum visitors according to the museum specialists would want to know how the Jesuits treated the African slaves and Indians. The fact of legitimizing historical facts without proper evidence and documents was another problem that was put forth.

How could we portray the lives of particularly the African slaves and Indians in the 'right' perspective. The museum specialists present at the forum felt the need to show the history of all the people who lived in Estancia and not just the Jesuits monks. However, further research was required to bring out the 'true' perspective of history of that period. It is important to handle the 'negative' reality, to learn to face facts as they have transpired. The important issue is to bring out the historical facts and portray memory that will high light pluralism and help build a national identity.

The next point that was put forth was that museums were active dialogue creator and not passive places of patrimony. Museums are places or rather mediums of discussions for ideologies. Museums and forums for discussions of social issues and ideologies. Interpretation of ideologies have to be taken up by museums as they are integral to the interpretation of reality. Museums cannot avoid portrayal of ideologies. The museum has to be cautious against over glamorizing of ideologies as they can give a skewed or biased picture of reality. Certain ideologies and concepts are not always as 'pleasant' as they are depicted in the museum.

Museums can become targets of the perpetuation of hoax. This was brought to light by the Japanese delegate Prof. Kanayama. He said that how the Japanese museums were misled by archeologist Fujimura for 25 years into believing in objects to be of the Early Paleolithic Period when they were actually planted by him. We cannot ignore such incidents. This brings to light how museums can be misled by their own people. This is an ethical issue and needs to be pondered upon as we museum professionals are answerable to the public. This shows that for personal gain and publicity some people can play on the whims and fancies of the public.

Another important issue that was brought to light was the exhibition of the dead bodies. The mummies of three children of Llullaillaco in the Salta Province of North West Argentina has opened a controversy. There has been a continuing controversy since 1999 in Argentina regarding this issue. Original People from Argentina and Chile objected to the display of these objects as they are children and they have a symbolic relation and consider them symbolically consider them to be their ancestors. Ironically the Government of the Province of Salta seems to pay more attention to the mummies rather than to the living people of this community.

In June 2006 The Peruvian society asked the Government of Peru to explain how the 150 mummies of Leymebamba museum leave the country to be exposed in Austria and Italy and Europe. The museum has to deal with these ethical issues also. Since then, the Peruvian legislators are working on an Act to prevent non authorized and non regulated cultural exhibitions on foreign lands.

This attitude totally disregards their right to live with what they have inherited, and their right to decide what is 'good' for them. Thus a sort of unseen hierarchy gets established between cultures, relegating them to relatively inferior positions.

Thus museums have to deal with a whole lot of such issues that are sensitive.

All these points lead us to the facts that how can museums deal with issues that are politically correct and incorrect. Time can change the values added to beliefs. Time can turn tables and once politically accepted issues can become politically incorrect. This is especially true of societies that are in the mode of transition. But museums have to address issues and not be scared about reaction it can generate. Museums have to be cautious but not afraid. The museum is a place for stimulating thought and emotion, it is different from a history book.

Thus interpretation of reality and the transmission of memory with high ethical standards is not as simple as it may seem in the museum context. The learning gradient of experience, interpretation and understanding is not a gradual one. Past and present experiences together with projected meanings interact to give a complex understanding. Expectations, past experiences of the visitors, projections and identifications are all implicated in the total museum experience. What the visitors bring with them and will take back, both have to be carefully pondered upon. The role of the museum is to build bridges and open dialogues between cultures working towards reducing ethnic strife at the same time preserving the delicate fabric of cultural diversity of mankind, thus enriching the quality of human life on earth.