Problematics of the Uganda National Museum Engaging Web 2.0

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Abstract: Web 2.0 is pressing online museum representation and education. This is becoming a desired engagement for major Western national museums and their educational offerings. In the Global South where information communication technology challenges abound, including a lack of sustainable contemporary technology and the needed expertise to employ it, museum curators and educators often find themselves lost in the virtual worlds of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and online learning as oral cultures embrace digital cultures. This paper will elaborate the problematics and possibilities of current conceptualization processes to develop a Museum Web 2.0 site for the Uganda National Museum in Kampala. To be elaborated are de-colonizing theories and methodologies of Mamdani (2005), Swadener and Mutua (2008), and Smith (1999), so not to superimpose Western notions over an East Africa museum. At the same time, the purpose is to avoid drawing strong binary polarities between the Global North and South and to reappraise this divide through focusing on theories and processes that can facilitate possibilities within the Uganda National Museum and its traditions. The ongoing problematic in a working of a more oral-based culture in the contexts of digital cultures and current unstable platforms also will be explored. The Museum Web 2.0 project wants to offer an initial Museum 2.0 model to assist other African and Global South museums in the development of de-colonizing non-Western conceptualizations for the showcasing of artifacts and for information dissemination.

Introduction

National museums around the world struggle to present an authentic and meaningful web presence that represents their spaces and the artifacts they house. With the arrival of Web 2.0 technologies (architecture of participation) such as Facebook, Flickr photo sharing, Foursquare, iTunes, Open Cobalt, Twitter, and YouTube videos, museums now have an opportunity to interactively share and discuss their artifacts and exhibitions online with audiences around the world and to offer new approaches to museum e-learning.

As the Global North (developed countries) advances rapidly in Web 2.0 development, it is imperative that collaborative opportunities be made available to museums in the Global South, or the developing world. The Uganda National Museum, the oldest in East Africa with one million specimens of which the core collection comprises ethnographic artifacts and fossils along with its oral heritage, in conjunction with the Acting Commissioner of the Uganda Museums and Monuments, Ministry of Culture, invited Professor Mary Leigh Morbey of York University, Toronto, Canada, to lead the project of Web 2.0 conceptualization and development for the Museum. To this end, Morbey formed a research team to conceptualize and develop the project. The team comprised York University and University of Toronto faculty; York University PhD and Masters students and paper co-authors Ugandan Maureen Muwanga Senoga (a Department of Art and Design Faculty member at Kyambogo

University in Kampala for 13 years), Lourdes Villamor (staff member in the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Services Department of George Brown College, Toronto), and Paul Kortenaar (Westin Chair of Science Education at the Ontario Science Centre, Toronto); Ugandan curators and web technologists working with the Museum; and the Ugandan Ambassador to France and Uganda UNESCO delegate, Elizabeth Paula Napeyok.

Working with a conceptualization developed by the Ugandans which is historically an oral based culture, the Web 2.0 project builds on Web 1.0 (point and click) structures towards decolonization in light of historical Ugandan colonization by the British and others, as well as domination by possible Web conceptualizations and content. The Museum 2.0 project, in its beginning stages, will examine the problematic of working with the open participatory spaces of Web 2.0 alongside notions of decolonization and forms of representation for an oral-based culture that includes indigenous narratives (Mutua & Swadener, 2004) and "voice"; as well, the Museum 2.0 project addresses the thorny conundrum of possible recolonizing ideologies and processes in the more open Web 2.0 spaces—we are conscious as well of unintentional recolonizing. The site planning will visually and interactively represent the holdings of the Museum presenting art objects, Ugandan textiles, historical and current Ugandan musical instruments, representation of its oral culture heritage, and the Living Museum Village which we will explain later. As well, the site planning involves interconnections to spaces outside the proposed museum. Further, the project will explore methodological approaches for Museum Web 2.0 e-, m-, and t- virtual learning—that is, electronic, mobile, and text virtual learning.

The team, noted earlier, includes six Ugandans and five Canadians who represent diverse cultural, political, technological, and arts-based education backgrounds. The team will shape the project's working concepts and decision-making from Ugandan vantage points, advancing a decolonizing approach that acknowledges Uganda's oral culture. The project also supports the current *Uganda National Culture Policy* of 2006, which addresses the intrinsic value of culture and the potential of cultural identity as a form of capital to move Uganda's people out of poverty. The 2006 policy, with both cultural and economic emphases, identifies strategies to enhance the integration of culture into development and includes advocating for culture, ensuring capacity building, fostering research and documentation, promoting collaboration with stakeholders, and mobilizing resources for culture. An economic emphasis is particularly critical in a country attempting to move many of its people beyond a state of poverty.

Theoretical Framing

A decolonizing conception of a Global South Web 2.0 site for the Uganda National Museum, with local and global e-, m-, and t-learning possibilities, is crucial to a global presence for the East African museum. Yet our choice of language and ideas is difficult because we approach research from an anti-oppressive and anti-colonizing stance, while at the same time realizing the (im)possibilities and complexities of our effort, as Swadener & Mutua also describe (2008). In the project we work towards developing cross-cultural partnerships and collaborations among indigenous researchers and *allied others* (Rogers & Swadener, 1999), for whom common goals of anticolonial sensibilities are paramount (Swadener & Mutua, 2008). The research is about decolonizing themes, oral voice, and outputs rather than about studies in colonialism or postcolonialism.

The decolonizing notions of Mahmood Mamdani (1996, 2005) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) interlinked to Web 2.0 notions of Tim O'Reilly (2006) and Henry Jenkins' participatory culture (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robinson, 2009), theoretically frame the Museum Web development. Information communications technology (ICT), and particularly Web 2.0 innovations, holds the potential to change and enhance how a museum presents itself and the culture it embodies and represents (Bowers, 2000, 2006; Lessig, 2002; Marcus, 2002, 2006; Parekh, 2000). In 2011, we face the question of how a Global South national museum might envision contemporary and culturally relevant website development with a meaningful interface. This Web representation and education requires careful attention to ideological visioning and website conceptualization.

With a view towards the Global South and the Ugandan National Museum specifically, ideological visioning from decolonizing (Mamdani, 1996, 2005; Smith, 1999; Swadener & Mutua, 2008) and decybercolonizing viewpoints (Ebo, 2001; Morbey, 2006, 2009) we take into account the glocal – that is, the local and global – possibilities (Robertson, 1995, 2000). The form of decolonization employed in this paper calls for more critical understandings of the underlying assumptions, motivations, concerns, and knowledges that inform research with, for, of, and by indigenous or colonized peoples (Smith, 1999; Swadener & Mutua, 2008). Our project asks how national institutional inheritance plays out after colonialism (Mamdani, 2005), and recognizes the principle of a respect for the rights and self-determination of peoples – they decide their future status (United Nations, 1960).

Further, the recognition of decybercolonization addresses possible colonizing expansion into cyberspace, which is the shaping space of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 (Morbey, 2009).

These ideological considerations, guiding website conceptualization and design, artifact representation, and structural and technological sustainable development, offer an approach that may provide non-Western museums with possibilities to develop what they envision as important to their cultures. It is imperative in emergent Global South museum website development to identify, as urged by Mamdani (1996, 2005), Marcus (2006), Smith (1999), and Swadener and Mutua (2008), the underlying assumptions about ICT and decolonizing ideas embedded in methodologies, models, interactions, and appearances in website conceptualization and development. At the same time, the project's purpose is to avoid drawing strong binary polarities between the Global North and South, and is instead to reappraise this divide through focusing on theories and processes that can facilitate possibilities within the Uganda National Museum and its traditions.

The term "Web 2.0" describes a current trend in World Wide Web technology and design, which aims to enhance creativity, information sharing, and collaboration among users through an architecture of participation. Its development is realized in web-based communities such as the social networking sites of Facebook, Flickr, Foursquare, iTunes, Open Cobalt, Twitter, and YouTube (Burgess & Green, 2009), as well as wikis and blogs. Web 2.0 also requires a re-thinking of e-learning methodologies as noted in the Museum 2.0 website at http://museumtwo.blogspot.com in its regular articulations and illustrations of current Web 2.0 museum explorations and possibilities. According to O'Reilly (2006), in the computer industry Web 2.0 is a business revolution led by the move to the Internet. It is about changes in the ways software developers and end-users adapt processes and products to the Web.

Jenkins et al. (2009) theorize about Web 2.0 engagement in the conceptualization of participatory culture, a shift from the individual to a community where the development and activities come from the community. The research approach for the website development and communal participation in the Uganda National Museum Web 2.0 site exemplifies this notion.

Museum Web 2.0

Why is Web 2.0 important to museum website development and for the Uganda National Museum? A sampling of the four national museums - the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; The Louvre Museum, Paris; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto - indicate a global trend of declining visits to all four mainly Web 1.0 websites since 2006, paralleling the emergence of Web 2.0 (Morbey, 2009). This leads to the question of how a museum web presence might be better developed to bring about contemporary and meaningful interfaces with its publics. The decline in hits and traffic on the four museum websites corresponds to the rise of Web 2.0, which more interactively interpellates users as participants. Current Web 2.0 development, with an architecture of participation in which users generate, share, and curate content, effectively facilitates Museum 2.0 website conceptualizations (Bayne, Ross, & Williamson, 2009; Museum 2.0, 2009; Yasko, 2007). An awareness of decolonizing and glocalizing (Robertson, 2000) ideas in conjunction with Web 2.0 and its participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2009) engaging play, performance, simulation, appropriation, collective intelligence, transmedia navigation, networking, and negotiation, offers rich possibilities for Global South museum website development. Administratively unencumbered, the Uganda National Museum is positioned to bypass old and out-dated communication media philosophies that often hold back Western museums in the movement towards Web 2.0 and beyond.

An apt example of a Museum Web 2.0 development from a North American context is the New York Brooklyn Museum site, located at http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/. The site embraces Web 2.0 characteristics, particularly in its museum community network (found at http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/network/). This network engages Facebook, Flickr, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, and other Web 2.0 social media. It illustrates a strong Web 2.0 interactive engagement in the "YouTube Contest" (http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/wc/), illustrating how social media is being used to attract new audiences into the museum. "Lessons Learned" from the YouTube competition at http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/blogosphere/bloggers/2007/11/07/video-competition-lessons-learned/ (Barazadi, 2008) illuminate how well the contest engaged through uploaded YouTubes video creators showing their way through and engagement with the museum; young people who may not have been drawn into the museum through more traditional means. From a different vantage point, an example of museum e-learning within the museum and employing YouTube in an overtly educative way is the video of artist Kiki Smith illustrating and

exploring her 2010 *Sojourn* museum exhibition at http://www.youtube.com/brooklynmuseum#p/a/u/0/bWUjl7kOBCE. The Brooklyn Museum 2.0 site also sets out key stages to successful interactive Web projects: to stimulate interest, engage, guide, communicate, educate, and create. These self-determined goals of the Museum's online extension are realized in its online social networking communities and its participatory YouTube contest. Global South museums such as the Uganda National Museum can do this in culturally appropriate, technologically sustainable ways that do not recolonize with imposing Western viewpoints of what a museum should be about.

The project brings to the fore the challenges of building a Web 2.0 participatory decolonizing structure that features Ugandan oral traditions. This can lead to online "real time" open spaces for public deliberation within the museum structure, for example, about public issues important to local Ugandans as well as to global communities (Simon, 2005). However, with the more open, participatory, communal understanding and space of Web 2.0 comes the thorny problematic of a possible recolonizing by those involved in the site creation or those engaged in Web 2.0 creations and contributions, whether it be the Web theorists from Canada, those in Uganda scripting a renewed Ugandan colonization, or individual Web 2.0 contributors who wish to dominate the participatory community. The project confronts the complexities of Uganda's colonial history and the temptation (prompted by potential self-serving agendas of the diverse collaborators as well as online contributors) to adopt Western Web 1.0 and 2.0 conceptualizations, which may be less fitting to the Global South and Ugandan contexts. Such temptations can be malicious or unintentional, but open equal possibilities for recolonizing practices. As it moves forward, the project requires sensitive reciprocal conversations amongst all parties, recognizing local and global viewpoints, in the exploration of new, meaningful spaces for museum website interfaces in light of the complex problematics present in Web 2.0 development.

Methodology

The Uganda National Museum invited York University researchers to assist in the development of a pilot website for the Museum in 2009. The collaboration offers a unique opportunity for Web 2.0 development that incorporates museum e-learning (Owston, 2009). In order to build spaces that resist recolonization, though, our project has had to grapple with the global movement of Web 2.0 building on Web 1.0 in our Web conceptualization. The research is in part about resisting colonization by an affinity with indigenous epistemologies, indigenous languages, and processes of indigenous customs (Swadener & Mutua, 2008). With this goal in mind, the project methodology will include phenomenological in-depth interviewing of the Ugandan participants using Web 2.0 technologies, particularly museum collaborators and possibly museum visitors, with themed analysis (Seidman, 2006; Weiss, 1994), along with follow-up face-to-face interviews when possible. Participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) will enlist all team participants to organize, plan, act, reflect, and re-plan the conceptualization and actualization, using Web 2.0 possibilities fitting to the Ugandan museum context and content. This process includes the site conceptualization, development, e-, m-, and t- virtual learning theorizing and implementation, and facilitates ongoing revision as the site emerges and the Ugandans take full ownership. Further, the process is a continuing journey with decolonizing discourse/collaborative methodologies, with the process as well as its outputs under continual interrogation (Swadener & Mutua, 2008).

The Project Objectives and Early Beginnings

The Uganda National Museum project is guided by four objectives: 1) a Ugandan-based, decolonizing conceptualization that realizes a sustainable, contemporary pilot Web 2.0 presence for the Museum and its artifacts and oral traditions; 2) the development of methodological approaches for Museum Web 2.0 e-, m-, and t- virtual learning led by Ugandan museum educators, engaging locally and globally those who wish to learn more about the Museum's history and its collections; 3) an initial Museum Web 2.0 prototype development for Global South museums; and 4) a Web 2.0 site documenting the project development and soliciting global interactive engagement and critical discussion through a blog forum.

The research team has come together in these early stages to collaboratively create a common vision and these four objectives through both virtual and face-to-face meetings. Our virtual meeting places include a closed Facebook research group site, and a Google group for more focused and intense discussions. Besides the working vision described in the preceding theoretical framing, methodology, and project objectives of this paper, a key

concern of course also includes timely financing to develop and sustain the project. We are currently applying for grants through appropriate funding agencies within Canada and internationally.

The team continues to brainstorm possible Web 2.0 representations of the Uganda National Museum. A central challenge is the representation of the artifacts in an architecture of participation. One example is a YouTube video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?gl=CA&hl=en&v=wEZiIqG666c of Royal Court Music in the Uganda National Museum, featuring a live concert of two Ugandans playing an ancient xylophone housed in the Museum. The e-learning opportunities envisioned in this project could add historical documentation and critical discussion led by a museum curator/educator in the museum Facebook or Twitter networked community; such an inclusion could also be complemented by relevant Ugandan visuals through Flickr photo sharing, and the Open Cobalt platform, for example. Currently, Facebook is already available in Kiswahili, a dominant Ugandan language along with English.

Web 2.0 databases, through wikis, blogs, and other interactive possibilities, can represent, illuminate, invite participation, and develop e-, m-, and t- virtual learning contexts for artifacts within museum building as well the Living Museum Village and its oral heritage outside of the Museum's current brick and mortar iteration. Additional theoretical underpinnings could enhance the Web 2.0 project development. An Open Source and Open Content approach, for example the Open Cobalt platform, can engage glocal communities in a shared endeavor to collectively build tools and knowledge (Lombardi & Lombardi, 2010; Morbey, 2010). Employing the notion of participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2009), the site becomes more of a process than a product. Both museum personnel and those interacting with the site would be free to draw on their lived experience to build the site in a creative and participatory manner. Thus, the Museum would become one that is not solely artifact-based, or Western-based, but a space and platform that is actively experienced and expanded rather than passively consumed (Pitts, 2009)—a difference that offers huge pedagogical benefits as well.

Conclusion

The Museum 2.0 conceptualization and development can contribute to knowledge in the areas of Global South museums, contemporary information communications technology, and museum education. The Museum's initial invitation brought Ugandans and international researchers together to harness current Web 2.0 developments that fit Uganda's culture, customs, and oral heritage. This collaboration and eventual museum website may also serve other national museums based in the Global South, who may wish to engage with a Web 2.0 presence in their institutions that is rooted in a Global South, decolonizing theoretical framework and methodology

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