

Press Release

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Living Cultures

What happens when museums and Indigenous Peoples work together to decolonise cultural spaces? The *Living Cultures* project at the Pitt Rivers Museum is working to re-present the history and narratives behind artefacts held in museum collections, relating the impact of the colonial past to the continuous related struggles of the present.

Living Cultures started in 2017 and is a partnership between Maasai representatives from Tanzania and Kenya, the Pitt Rivers Museum and InsightShare, an Oxford-based NGO that has worked for over 20 years with indigenous communities to enable them to better represent themselves on critical issues. For all, the partnership allows focus on self-determination and representation.

In November 2017 and 2018, Maasai delegates visited the Museum to discuss care of objects, following their statement that they were concerned and “annoyed, annoyed, annoyed” about the objects’ presence in the Museum, framing Maasai culture as dead. In fact, Maasai groups in Kenya and Tanzania are actively resisting the erosion of their land and culture.

In 2019, with support from the Staples Trust, consultations were held within the Maasai community across Tanzania and Kenya through video screenings and discussions with elders, and through the use of radio and media engagement, 70% of the Maasai community is being notified, helping to strengthen relationships across borders and ensure different views on ways forward are taken into account. Crucially, a new regional network has emerged, the Pan-African Living Cultures Alliance, enabling more communities to document, by use of participatory video, their knowledge systems, cultural systems, crafts, languages and traditional technologies.

In January 2020 seven representatives from Kenya and Tanzania, including a Maasai spiritual leader, will be coming to Oxford to give further spiritual guidance. This visit, bringing one of the largest cross-national delegations of Maasai leaders to the UK, is a continuation and elaboration of the last visit, leading on to the next steps of the conversation and allowing for ceremonial and spiritual guidance by the elders.

More museums are joining the conversation, expanding the scope of this project, and the fortnight-long visit of the Maasai delegates will encompass visiting the Horniman Museum, London and the Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology in Cambridge.

Key to the future is the development of relationships of trust between stakeholders and a continued openness with regards to the different possible avenues for redress.

Museums are bearers of difficult histories and their collections are continued causes of pain for affected communities. By working together to reimagine these museums as spaces in which reconciliation might be able to come about, we believe that anthropology museums, like anthropology itself, can become anti-racist projects and sites of conscience.

As an innovative collaborative project, *Living Cultures* has received extensive local, national and international media coverage. We hope it will continue to function as an example of decoloniality and self-representation.

Delegates

- **Lemaron Ole Parit** is the son of Mokompo Ole Simel, a spiritual leader of the Maasai, and is the great grandchild of Senteu, one of the best known of all Maasai Loibon (spiritual leaders), and Mpatiany. He is the inheritor of his father’s spiritual power.
- **Samwel Nangiria** (member of 2018 delegation to Oxford) is a socio-environmental scientist and long-term human rights defender. He is a leader of Enguserosambu Community Forest Trust and the founding director of Oltolio Le Maa – a participatory video group that documents human rights issues, social development and Maasai culture. He has worked with indigenous Maasai peoples in Loliondo, Tanzania, as a chief campaigner to retain the land and protect the culture under threat from hunting and conservation corporations for over 10 years. Samwel is a Tanzania Human Right Defender of the Year 2016 award winner and honorary member of ICCA consortium.
- **Amos Karino Leuka** is a teacher and long-time activist in cultural leadership and practices. He is a young member of the Loita council of elders and a member of the Land Committee in Loita. As a member of the council of elders, he has been outspoken on the subject of the position of girls in society and on the practice of Female Genital Mutilation. Amos is a founding member of the Pan-African Living Cultures Alliance.
- **Yannick Ndoinyo** (member of 2018 delegation to Oxford) is a junior elder from Maasai Ololosokwan village, Loliondo. For several decades, he has been involved in defending and promoting land and human rights of the indigenous Maasai communities in Tanzania. Yannick is Executive Director of the Eastern Serengeti Trust (TEST), a non-profit organisation working to assist local communities, the government and other stakeholders to manage land, wildlife, and local livelihoods.
- **Juliana Naini Mashati** is an activist working around income generation for women. She is a founder of Maasai Treasures, an organisation supporting women through the craft of beadwork in Morijo.
- **Evelyn Paraboy Kanei** is from the Iparakuyo Maasai community. She has worked to support community development since 2010, addressing the challenges that hinder sustainable livestock production. In her work, Evelyn has focussed on community history and post-colonial relations. She holds a degree in Accounting from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, and a Masters of Business Administration from the University of Mary in Fargo, North Dakota, USA.
- **James Meipuki Ole Pumbun** is an elder from the Loita Maasai community. He has been involved in land and cultural struggles in Tanzania and Kenya. He is an advisor to his age set traditional leader on matters of cultural security.



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Notes to Editors

- The University of Oxford's **Pitt Rivers Museum** (PRM) is one of the finest archaeological and ethnographic teaching museums in the world. Founded in 1884, when General Pitt Rivers, an influential figure in the development of archaeology and evolutionary anthropology, donated his collection of more than 27,000 objects to the University of Oxford, it now stewards over 550,000 objects. These collections of historical, social and ritual significance are of an extraordinary range and depth, including great works of art, invention and design from around the world. The Museum carries out world-leading conservation and research and welcomes half a million visitors each year. It is currently focused on developing more socially engaged practice with the emphasis on inclusivity. Today, the Museum is a dynamic, forward-looking institution with many connections to stakeholders throughout the world. Press Contact: Louise Hancock, Marketing and Media Officer, press@prm.ox.ac.uk. 01865 613017.
- **InsightShare**: Having facilitated the initial relationship building of the *Living Cultures* project, InsightShare has since assisted with engagement in the region, so that the partnership with Maasai communities is an active one, and partners are accountable. InsightShare works across four continents in critically endangered ecosystems to enable Indigenous Peoples to harness the power of participatory video against threats like climate change and mega development projects. PR contact: Sonya Carassik Ratty, Head of Communications (sonya@insightshare.org / 07912446810) or Grace Hutchison, Programme Development Officer (ghutchison@insightshare.org).
- **The Horniman Museum and Gardens** is the only museum in London where nature and culture can be explored side by side, with a mission to connect us all with global cultures and the natural environment, encouraging us to shape a positive future for the world we all share.
- **The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology** was founded in the 1880s. It holds world-class collections of art, artefacts, and continents over recent centuries, and contemporary art, representing Indigenous perspectives today, from Oceania, Asia, native America and Africa. MAA is both a leading centre for cross-disciplinary, internationally-collaborative research programmes and a public museum with a strong focus on educational and schools' programmes. The Museum was a Finalist for the Art Fund's Museum of the Year Prize in 2013.