

Travelling Objects: The Story of Two Natural History Collections in the Nineteenth Century

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This paper will explore the journey of two distinct natural history collections assembled by the naturalists Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772–1844) and Friedrich Welwitsch (1806–72), one from Brazil to Lisbon and Paris, the other from Angola to Lisbon, and then finally to London. Through an examination of these cases I will try to show how, in the nineteenth century, natural history specimens were associated with specific forms of collecting, travelling and exhibiting. I will recover and analyse the travel itineraries that do not appear on the museum labels of these objects, and by so doing reveal the exhibition culture that constitutes one of the main values of nineteenth-century Western civilization. Through the example of Portugal, I will also show how this culture is more visible in some countries than others. In fact, the making of natural history collections at this period is inseparable from the wider context of national and colonial identities, and from the conflict between a cosmopolitan scientific community and the growing number of nationalist projects that tried to exploit this knowledge for their own ends.

Of the two cases discussed here, the first took place in the context of the Napoleonic invasions, an event whose disruptive impact not only shaped both Europe and the onset of the nineteenth century but also determined the destination of many objects and collections. The famous French naturalist Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire came to Portugal in 1808 when the country was under Napoleonic rule. He was in charge of the mission entrusted with selecting from the Portuguese natural history collections the objects of greatest scientific interest. These were then sent to Paris, where they joined many others dispatched from various places in Europe and North Africa by Napoleon's armies and by illustrious members of the French scientific community. The new homes for these collections were the museums that were intended to consecrate French imperialist power. However, after the defeat of Napoleon many of the countries that had been looted of their treasures asked for their return. Portugal was no exception. But, as will be seen, the process of restitution was far from simple or linear. On the contrary, it was long and inconsistent, with political, scientific, diplomatic, and personal issues weighing heavily.

The second case to be discussed is very different, but one that raises many issues in common with the first. It took place later in the century, between the 1850s and '70s; its main protagonist was the Austrian naturalist Friedrich Welwitsch, and the main cities involved were no longer

Lisbon and Paris, but Lisbon and London. After a long stay in Portugal (1839–53), where among many other activities he worked in the Jardim Botânico da Ajuda, in 1853 Welwitsch was sent by Queen Maria II of Portugal on a mission to Angola. The official aim was comprehensively to study its natural resources with the aim of improving the economic and commercial exploitation of the Portuguese colony. Upon his return eight years later, and with all the collections in crates, Welwitsch did not stay in Lisbon for very long. Only London, he believed, possessed the museums, scientists and collections necessary for the proper study of his African discoveries. The potential ‘museum’ was therefore only unpacked in London and never completely returned to Portugal. What happened next was a fascinating legal case, to be discussed later, which pitted Portugal, represented by its king D. Luis, against the British Museum, where the knowledge of the Portuguese colony, so coveted by Britain, was safely stored.

GEOFFROY SAINT-HILAIRE

In 1808, General Junot, under orders from Napoleon, was commander of the French invading forces in Portugal. With him was Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, the distinguished zoologist and director of the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle in Paris.¹ The reason for Saint-Hilaire’s presence in Lisbon was not disguised. He was on an official scientific mission, similar to the one that had taken him to Egypt in 1798. He was there to select from the collections of that city and take back to Paris the natural history objects that he thought worthy of interest. It was not by chance that the great majority of the objects found worth taking from the cupboards of the royal Gabinete da Ajuda were specimens originally brought from the Portuguese colonies.² Of these colonies Brazil was the best represented, mainly because

¹ Jacques Daget and Luiz Saldanha, *Histoires Naturelles Franco-Portugaises du XIXe Siècle* (Lisbon: Instituto Nacional de Investigação das Pescas, 1989); *Revue d’Histoire des Sciences et de leurs Applications*, 25 (1972): volume dedicated to Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire; José da Silva Carvalho, ‘A Vinda de Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire a Lisboa’, *Boletim da Academia das Ciências de Lisboa*, New Series, 2 (1930), 900–03; Júlio Guilherme Bethencourt Ferreira, ‘A Missão de Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire em Espanha e Portugal, durante a Invasão Francesa, em 1808’, *Boletim da Segunda Classe da Academia das Ciências de Lisboa*, 17 (1923), 208–27; Júlio Guilherme Bethencourt Ferreira, ‘Subsídios para a história das sciencias naturaes em Portugal. O Museu da Ajuda e a invasão Francesa’, and, 5 (1911), 376–80, and Pedro de Azevedo, ‘Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire em Lisboa. Estudos, documentos e noticias’, 24 (1919–20), 93–121; E. T. Hamy, ‘La mission de Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire en Espagne et en Portugal (1808). Histoire et Documents’, *Nouvelles Archives du Musée d’Histoire Naturelle*, 4th series, 10 (1908), 1–66.

² Adrien Balbi, *Essai Statistique sur le Royaume de Portugal et d’Algarve, comparé aux autres états de l’Europe, et suivi d’un coup d’oeil sur l’état actuel des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts parmi les portugais des deux hémispheres dédié a sa majesté très-fidèle*, 2 vols (Paris: Chez Rey et Gravier, 1822), II, 93; José Silvestre Ribeiro, *História dos estabelecimentos scientificos litterarios e artisticos de Portugal nos sucessivos reinados da monarquia*, 19 vols (Lisbon: Academia Real das Sciencias, 1873), III, 353–55.

of the scientific voyage of Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira undertaken from 1783 to 1792. Brazil also constituted one of the biggest gaps in the Paris museum collection.

Even before the French invasion of Portugal the famous Cuvier, on behalf of the naturalists of the Paris museum, had written to the French Minister of the Interior proposing the appointment of his friend Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire to 'collect the objects and information useful to science and to our institution' from the Portuguese collections. He was well aware of what they would find there:

Nous pensons que cette mesure serait aussi utile en Portugal qu'à nous. En faisant un choix de ce qui nous intéresse, le commissaire assurera pour le pays la conservation du reste et l'expérience a prouvé que, faute de semblables précautions, des collections précieuses ont été absolument perdues pour tout le monde. Il n'est pas douteux que notre établissement ne puisse beaucoup profiter de ce voyage. Nous savons qu'il y a en Portugal plusieurs cabinets publics, riches en productions des trois régions, de l'Inde et du Brésil, dont nous sommes privés, faute de relations avec ces contrées éloignées. Le Portugal lui-même produit plusieurs objets qu'il sera intéressant de procurer à la France, et, comme tout cela doit s'y trouver en grand nombre, on peut, avec de la modération, nous enrichir beaucoup sans appauvrir sensiblement le pays.³

The aim of the mission was achieved. Some years later, in the catalogue of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, the son of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire wrote that in the collection his father obtained from Portugal there were a great number of beautiful specimens of fauna from Brazil, India, Guinea and other Portuguese colonies.⁴ Through the looting of the collections in Lisbon, France was reaching other geographical areas to which it did not itself have direct access. The fact that Portugal was being deprived of some of the objects that symbolized its identity as colonizer, and in many ways its past, could serve as a metaphor for the relation between colonizer and colonized. While on the contrary, countries like France and England were increasingly developing their status as nineteenth-century colonial powers.

This initiative by Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire was far from unique during the Napoleonic invasions of Europe and North Africa. And in fact, the plunder of Portugal cannot be compared with that of Italy or Egypt, whose objects were recognizable symbols of former powerful civilizations and therefore more suitable to incorporate in French imperialistic narratives. The widely quoted example of Napoleon parading the treasures looted during his invasions through the streets of Paris also attests to their significance. There was nothing to hide. On the contrary, there was much to be

³ Hamy, pp. 4–5.

⁴ Victor Ribeiro, *Maravilhas da Natureza (O Homem e os Animais). Descrição popular das raças humanas e do reino animal segundo o plano de A. E. Brehm. Edição coordenada, revista e ampliada com relação à fauna portuguesa* (Lisbon: Empresa da História de Portugal, 1904), p. 18.

displayed. The sudden invasion of Paris museums by objects originating from many worlds was a mirror of other forms of developing power.

In the many French versions of the 1808 event, and even in some Portuguese ones, what is permanently at stake is the legitimization of the venture.⁵ First of all, there is the much repeated idea that the advance of science was above the contingencies of geographical borders, and that objects belonged where they were cared for, studied and properly displayed. But other ideas were also voiced: that Saint-Hilaire came to Portugal to help in the organization of public education; that far from looting this was in fact an exchange, because the French scholar brought minerals that Portugal lacked; and that the mission was as useful to Portugal as it was to France, because Saint-Hilaire produced a catalogue of the collections, which was something that had not existed before.⁶ So, apart from taking the objects to ‘civilization’, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire is portrayed as the agent of civilization, transforming useless objects of curiosity into scientific specimens.

When Saint-Hilaire was ready to depart for France with the crates of specimens, the British army in Portugal tried to stop him. In Egypt the British had managed to recover some of the objects the French were gathering and divert them to London. But in Lisbon their efforts were unsuccessful, and after a few mishaps the French naturalist succeeded in leaving Portugal with almost everything he had packed.⁷

After the Peace of Paris, in 1815, the objects looted during the French invasions were one of the main issues which remained to be dealt with. A circular signed by the Duc de Richelieu invited each invaded country to present its demands for the return of its own objects, but this process of restitution was far from simple. Initially Portugal, unlike most other countries, did not even apply. The official Portuguese statement alleged that only duplicates were taken from the collection at the Museu da Ajuda and that the catalogue produced by Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire was enough compensation. The fact that Portugal was not included in the restitution processes was later considered by the director of the Museu de História Natural, as Portugal’s own fault. This omission, he writes, was due to the

Desmazelo que de ordinário e de há muito caracteriza os indivíduos a quem incumbe de qualquer forma promover interesses do nosso país. Devemos contudo confessar, exige a verdade, que no Museu de Paris para onde foram os exemplares do nosso

⁵ Ferreira, ‘A Missão de Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’, p. 208–27.

⁶ ‘Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’, *Magasin Pittoresque*, 19 (1845), 146–49.

⁷ Archive of the Museu Bocage–Faculdade de Ciências de Lisboa: ‘Note des collections d’histoire naturelle qui ont été apportés du Museum de Lisbonne pour le jardin des plantes de Paris’ (Ms. 1); ‘Relação dos productos naturaes que por ordem do General Junot levou deste Real Museu Mr. Geoffroy de Sainte-Hilaire em Junho e Agosto de 1808’ (Ms. 16.).

Museu, eles têm sem dúvida alguma prestado à ciência serviços incomparavelmente maiores do que se cá tivessem ficado.⁸

From then on, the Portuguese case becomes extremely convoluted, involving multiple and ambiguous positions, diplomatic problems and contradictions. Over the years there were various attempts to bring the collections back, but with no success. In 1819, the first attempt was made and failed, as Fontanier, French diplomat in Portugal, acknowledged in a letter of 1855. Thanks to the resistance of the director of the museum, he wrote, the Portuguese envoys were content to be given some specimens of lesser value.⁹ Another episode in the process of restitution took place in the 1840s, led by the Viscount of Sá da Bandeira, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a former student in Paris. Knowing which objects in the Paris museum had come from Portugal, the Viscount presented a demand for restitution, but this was dropped at the end of his term of office. According to the French diplomat, this prevented the Portuguese public and intellectuals from complaining about any imaginary spoliation that might touch on national pride.¹⁰ He also referred to the fact that the Regent D. Fernando also agreed that the tone of the demand was not appropriate, while adding that even if the Portuguese claim went ahead, the ‘professeurs du Muséum’ whom he claims to have known well enough would have rendered it ‘illusoire’.¹¹

Finally, the visit of D. Pedro V to Paris in 1855, a few months before becoming King of Portugal (1855–61), was seen by the French as the perfect moment to resolve the issue, under the convenient guise of an amicable gesture. The Portuguese prince was an acknowledged collector of natural history, and the opportunity was readily capitalized on by the French, who could now play the role of generous host.¹² The French diplomat Fontanier acknowledges how D. Pedro V’s ‘gôut pour l’étude de l’histoire naturelle était assez connu’, and how the Emperor, in order to be agreeable to his guest wanted to replace, ‘à la satisfaction de tous, une gracieuseté spontanée à une intolérable restitution’.¹³ The museum, he writes, was ‘assez riche et beaucoup trop genereux pour ne pas seconder avec magnificence les intentions hospitalières du Souverain’.¹⁴ To crown the

⁸ Archive of the Museu Bocage, Ms. 2.

⁹ Archive of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères–Paris–Consulat de France à Lisbonne–V. Fontanier (Lisbon, 27 June 1855), p. 307. Hereafter AMAE-P-CFL.

¹⁰ Archive of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères–Paris–Direction des Consuls et des Affaires Étrangères, V. Fontanier (Paris, 8 January 1856), p. 464. Hereafter AMAE-P-DCAE.

¹¹ AMAE-P-CFL, p. 307.

¹² As a child D. Pedro had been made familiar with the activity of collecting natural history specimens, classifying them and displaying them in a museum inside the royal palace. As a young man he became a collector, especially of birds and shells.

¹³ AMAE-P-CFL, p. 307.

¹⁴ AMAE-P-CFL, p. 307.

agreement Fontanier acknowledged how D. Pedro was ‘en effet très sensible à l’acueil que lui fissent les Professeurs-Administrateurs du Muséum’, and how ‘de nombreuses décorations qu’il distribuava témoignèrent de sa satisfaction’.¹⁵

D. Pedro’s own description of this event preserves something of its ambiguity:

Empregámos a manhã em escolher no Museu de História Natural as aves que o Imperador ordenou me fossem dadas. É um acto de delicadeza da parte *d’Ele* esta espécie de restituição feita pela França dos objectos de que o Museu de Lisboa foi despojado por Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, e o que mais prova que essa foi a intenção com que o oferecimento me foi feito, foi o ter sido encarregado dele Mr. Geoffroy de Saint-Hilaire, filho daquele que privou o Museu de Lisboa dos seus melhores ornamentos. Verdade é que os tesouros da natureza melhor estão onde se lhes dá apreço e se estudam do que onde se deixam apodrecer prosaicamente colocadas na fileira dos despojos de uma natureza que foi viva. E efectivamente despojar da vida a natureza para reunir esses despojos nas catacumbas dos museus e não os estudar é um pecado. Por consequência perdoo de muito bom grado a Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, que além disso era autorizado pelo Rei, fazer a sua inteligente escolha. Neste ponto julgo que o amor próprio nacional pode ceder diante do interesse das ciências.¹⁶

In accordance with the Prince’s remarks, this gift was not an open and assumed payment for the looting of 1808. It was he who had made the connection between the two events (as the French diplomat in Lisbon had also done). Apart from the ambiguity of a gift made to the future king of the nation, rather than to the nation itself, what is also striking is D. Pedro’s legitimization of what had happened in 1808. On the one hand, D. Pedro contrasted the natural history objects in their ‘natural’ habitat, with the death they are destined to by being collected (when they become ‘history’); but on the other hand, he clearly distinguished between the decay of objects ‘belonging to a row of spoils’, from the meritorious and useful activity of studying them in a collection. If Portugal did not provide the conditions for removing live objects from their environment, and was not capable of classifying and displaying its material culture (or that of its colonies), then it did not deserve them. Therefore, and in ‘the interest of science’, these objects should be in a place where those conditions were guaranteed, such as in the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle in Paris.

A year later, in 1856, when everything seemed to have been settled, and everyone appeared happy with the agreement, another interchange between collections was proposed by the recently opened Museu de História Natural in Lisbon. Fontanier argued that the proposal was a current practice among scientific institutions, but should not serve as a pretext to re-introduce the demand for restitution that had been made by Viscount Sá

¹⁵ AMAE–P–DCAE, p. 464.

¹⁶ D. Pedro V, *Diário da Viagem a França del-Rei Dom Pedro V (1855)*, ed. by Ruben Andresen Leitão (Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian–Centro Cultural Português, 1970), p. 216.

da Bandeira. He transmitted the Portuguese proposal to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's son, who asked that a special agent be sent to Portugal. The French diplomat was careful to recommend to the *Ministre d'Instruction Publique*, to whom he addressed the letter, that he make sure that the mission 'ne puisse rien perdre de son caractère amical'.¹⁷ His words clearly reveal how the offer made to King D. Pedro did not constitute the total, or even partial, devolution of the natural history objects taken in 1808. Almost fifty years after the event another Frenchman was departing for Lisbon on a mission which bore all the hallmarks of an intellectual interchange between two scientific communities. Appearances notwithstanding, however, a problem still remained unresolved.

To avoid going into great detail, in a case which produced an enormous amount of correspondence, I will concentrate on the episode initiated by Barbosa du Bocage, the director of the Lisbon *Museu de História Natural*, which more or less concludes this convoluted story.¹⁸ It resulted in more objects travelling from France to Portugal, but not the same ones that had left Portugal fifty years earlier. The distinguished Portuguese naturalist undertook a scientific journey abroad in 1858 and again in 1859, shortly after the opening of his museum. While in Paris, he tried to obtain from the *Jardin des Plantes* 'não a restituição dos exemplares que daqui recebera em 1808, mas o do donativo de algumas das colecções que este magnífico estabelecimento possui em duplicado nos seus vastos armazéns, como justa compensação do que devia ao nosso hoje tão acanhado museu'.¹⁹ Which was precisely what happened. Bocage was allowed to choose, conditionally, from the huge collection of birds and mammals in the museum warehouses, and that were not destined for the public galleries.²⁰ Clearly, this was the only restitution France was going to pay Portugal. Like D. Pedro, Barbosa du Bocage placed scientific values over national ones. One of the reasons he gave for not having asked for total restitution was that 'o bom uso legitimara assim a posse'.²¹ Certainly, Bocage strongly criticized Saint-Hilaire's gesture, but also praised him for his professional qualities. The extenuating circumstances for his actions were that the French naturalist had used the collection for the benefit of science and had catalogued the

¹⁷ AMAE-P-DCAE, p. 464.

¹⁸ Archive of the *Museu Bocage*, Div. 2-4; 6-16; 57, 58. Some of these documents have been published by Daget and Saldanha.

¹⁹ J. V. Barbosa du Bocage, *Instrucções praticas sobre o modo de colligir, preparar e remetter productos zoologicos para o Museu de Lisboa* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1862), p. 68. Archive of the *Museu Bocage*: In his scientific trip to Paris Bocage also took the opportunity of acquiring natural history specimens in a specialist Paris shop: Ms. 73-79).

²⁰ 'O Jardim das Plantas de Paris conveio afinal em nos indemnizar da espoliação que o Junot fez no nosso Museu: já estou de posse dos exemplares que nos mandaram; veio muita coisa boa': Letter from Barbosa du Bocage to José Maria d'Abreu, director geral de instrucção pública, in Archive of the *Museu Bocage*, Ms. 11.

²¹ Bocage, p. 68.

items that had lain ignored and forgotten in the cupboards of the Museu da Ajuda. Had they remained there, they might have disappeared, victims of moths, as so many others before them.²²

At long last the natural history objects were on their voyage from Paris to Lisbon. However, one final and unexpected problem would still have to be overcome. While in Paris, Barbosa du Bocage had taken the opportunity of buying some glass receptacles not available in Portugal, in which he planned to keep each specimen upon arrival.²³ Portuguese customs demanded substantial duty charges for importing what they took to be luxury items. Only when it was proven that they were intended for the Museu de História Natural were they allowed to reach their intended home.

FRIEDRICH WELWITSCH

Having presented the case for Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire in 1808, I will now move further into the nineteenth century, and focus on the travels of Friedrich Welwitsch (1806–72).²⁴ Born in Austria, Welwitsch became closely linked to Portugal by mere chance. He travelled for a while as the tutor of a nobleman, graduated in medicine in 1836, and in 1839 an event occurred that took him abroad never to return home again. He was commissioned by a natural history society, Unio Itineraria of Wurtemberg, to collect plants in the Azores and the Cape Verde islands, both Portuguese territories. However, a temporary stay in Lisbon, due to bad weather, was to become permanent. Welwitsch's rapid command of the Portuguese language and his acquaintance with the country's royal family and scientific communities soon found him fully participating in the Portuguese world of natural history. Among the Portuguese botanical gardens where he worked, was the garden in Coimbra, associated with the university, the private gardens of the Duque de Palmela in Lumiar and the Jardim Botânico da Ajuda, which belonged to the royal family.²⁵ Apart from these activities, he

²² Bocage, p. 4.

²³ Archive of the Museu Bocage, Ms. 12.

²⁴ For this section I have taken my information on Welwitsch's life mostly from Helmut Dolezal, *Friedrich Welwitsch. Vida e Obra*, ed. and trans. by A. Exell & E. J. Mendes (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1974); T. D. V. Swinscow, 'Friedrich Welwitsch, 1806–72. A centennial memoir', *Biological Journal of the Linnean Society*, 4 (1972), 269–89; José de Almeida, 'O Dr. Frederico Welwitsch e a sua obra em Angola. Estudo crítico-biográfico, compilação e anotações', *Boletim da Agência Geral da Colónias*, 13 (1926); 20 (1927); 32 (1928). For a guide to sources on Welwitsch see Phyllis I. Edwards, 'Friedrich Welwitsch, 1806–72. His manuscripts and correspondence in the departments of botany and zoology, British Museum (Natural History), the Linnean Society of London, and the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew', *Biological Journal of the Linnean Society*, 4 (1972), 291–303.

²⁵ The Gabinete da Ajuda, the museum of natural history from where Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire took the valuable collections brought by Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira, occupied a building adjacent to the Botanical Gardens. *Botanic Gardens of Ajuda*, ed. by Cristina Castel-Branco (Lisbon: Jardim Botânico da Ajuda, 1999).

travelled throughout the length and breadth of Portuguese territory collecting samples of the country's vegetation for an herbarium of Lusitanian flora. He soon became an acknowledged 'Portuguese' naturalist.

It was at this stage that the Queen of Portugal, D. Maria II, authorized by the government, appointed him to an important mission under her supervision. Welwitsch would be in charge of collecting and studying the vegetation of Angola.²⁶ Before better advantage could be taken of the rich resources of the vast African territory it was necessary to obtain a complete and systematic knowledge of it. The mission was therefore one of natural history, but the aims were clearly economic, commercial and political — common intentions for this sort of travel since the Early Modern period. In fact, this was not a new practice for Portugal. Many were the naturalists who, under orders from their Portuguese sovereign, gathered information about the empire, and Angola had not been an exception. However, by mid-nineteenth century, the metropolis was having difficulties in dealing with the new approaches to the colonies and undoubtedly this was also a way of asserting control over territories that were increasingly coveted by other colonial powers.²⁷ Portugal was consciously making an effort to

²⁶ Friedrich Welwitsch, *Colectânea de escritos doutrinários, florísticos e fitogeográficos de Frederico Welwitsch concernentes principalmente à flora de Angola*, ed. by Ascensão Mendonça (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1945); Welwitsch, 'Catálogo das sementes de plantas colhidas pelo Dr [...] em alguns pontos em que tocou na sua viagem para Angola, e principalmente n'esta região e por ele mandados ao Jardim Botânico da Universidade de Coimbra', *Anais do Conselho Ultramarino* (1856), parte não oficial, 1st serie, pp. 77–84, 249–54; Welwitsch, 'Informação do Doutor [...] sobre os seus trabalhos na exploração de Angola, e notícia de numerosos objectos que ia remeter para Lisboa', *Anais do Conselho Ultramarino*, parte não oficial (1856), pp. 293–97; Welwitsch, 'Apontamentos Phyto-geographicos sobre a flora da provincia de Angola na Africa Equinocial servido de relatório preliminar acerca da exploração botânica da mesma provincia', *Anais do Conselho Ultramarino* (1858), parte não oficial, 1st serie, pp. 527–80; Welwitsch, 'Carta do Dr. Welwitsch a W. L. Howorth, em 1861, sobre a cultura do algodão em Angola', *Arquivo das Colónias*, 1 (1917), 44–48, and 54–61; Welwitsch, *Cultura do Algodão em Angola* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1861); Welwitsch, 'Carta do Dr. Welwitsch ao Sr. Bento António Alves sobre plantas do sertão Angolense', *Anais do Conselho Ultramarino* (1858), pp. 581–83; Welwitsch, *Quelques notes sur la géologie d'Angola*, ed. by Paul Choffat (Lisbon: Academia Real das Ciências, 1888). offprint from *Comunicações da Comissão dos Trabalhos Geológicos*, Tom. II, fasc. 1, 1888; Welwitsch, *Catalogue of the African Plants collected by Friedrich Welwitsch in 1853–61* (London: Longmans, 1896).

²⁷ In 1853, the year of Welwitsch's arrival in Africa, the Visconde de Santarém replied to a request from the Visconde de Atouguia:

Ao momento de receber o despacho de V. Exa., já tinha coligido todos os documentos e esclarecimentos para provar que os direitos da Coroa de Portugal à posse dos territórios situados na Costa Ocidental de Africa [...] se fundão nos títulos mais solenes e reconhecidos pela Lei das Nações e pelo Direito das Gentes.

The manuscript continues with detailed references to all the documents that legitimate the Portuguese dominion over these African territories, and the libraries and archives where they can be found. 'Outro género de provas que é indispensável produzir', writes the author,

é a dos documentos que mostram o reconhecimento da Soberania de Portugal pelos chefes ou soberanos Africanos que habitam os países que hoje pertencem à coroa portuguesa ou que os estrangeiros nos disputam, estes documentos são da maior importância em razão dos princípios ostentados actualmente pelas duas primeiras Potências marítimas acerca de Africa.

classify the world at a time when natural history had its role reinforced as a discipline of power. But it soon became clear that attempts would fail.

The Angolan project was approved on 17 March 1851, and Welwitsch was awarded a monthly salary and an initial sum in order to acquire the necessary instruments for his research. In that same year he asked permission to travel to London for a few months, on a journey intended as preparation for the African voyage. After contacting some of the leading British botanists and carrying out some research he returned to Lisbon and not until 1853 did he set sail for Angola.²⁸ The next eight years would be spent travelling in the huge African colony, collecting and classifying many unknown specimens while being subsidized by the government of his adopted country. But, soon after his arrival in Africa, Welwitsch began to realize that the money he received from Lisbon was not enough properly to carry out his ambitious programme of research. One way he found to solve this was by sending boxes of plants, seeds and insects to London for sale.²⁹ This episode is an indication of what was to come. Welwitsch, for his part, was acting as a naturalist, guided by the long-term interests of his research, independent of Portuguese national interests. The patrons of his mission, on the other hand, were more interested in an immediate practical application for the results of his research than in the scholarly advances of botany. An example that illustrates this contradiction of interests is the discovery of the *Welwitschia mirabilis*. As the name indicates, this strange plant was Welwitsch's best known find. Its discovery was celebrated by the European community of botanists, but its agricultural or economic value to the Portuguese was more questionable.³⁰

In early 1861 Welwitsch finally set sail back to Lisbon. The second part of his job was about to begin. Now was the time to impose order on the disordered collection of specimens and to write about them. It was also at this stage that Welwitsch contributed to the Angolan display of the

Arquivo do Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros–Lisboa–Legação de Portugal em Londres–Maço II, no. 24; 66: Letter from Visconde de Santarém to Visconde de Athouguia (27 September 1853). The work referred to became a book, *Demonstração dos direitos que tem a coroa de Portugal sobre os territórios situados na costa ocidental de Africa, entre 5° 12' e 8° de latitude meridional*, which thanks to a government initiative was translated into English and published in 1856 and 1877.

²⁸ Bernardino António Gomes, 'As explorações phyto-geographicas da Africa Tropical e em especial as da Guiné inferior, ordenadas pelo governo português e executadas pelo Dr. Frederico Welwitsch nos anos de 1853 a 1861', *Extracto do Jornal de Sciencias Mathematicas, Physicas e Naturaes*, 14 (1873); Gomes, 'Uma viagem científica em Angola. *Anais do Conselho Ultramarino*, Parte não oficial, 4th series (1863), pp. 49–61.

²⁹ In 1859 Welwitsch also sent crates containing natural history specimens to the *Museu Nacional de Lisboa* (Archive of the Museu Bocage, Ms. 60). A few years later, in 1865, the director of the museum, Barbosa du Bocage, complained at not having received more specimens from these collections (Ms. 62).

³⁰ Joseph Dalton Hooker, 'Welwitschia, a new genus of gnetaceae', *Anais do Conselho Ultramarino*, parte não oficial, 4th series (1863), pp. 50–61.

Portuguese colonial section at the second Great Exhibition held in London in 1862, for which he won recognition and was awarded gold medals.³¹ This was the third international exhibition in which he had participated. Welwitsch had already been responsible for the Portuguese herbarium at the London Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 and, while still in Africa, he had been chosen as president of the Angolan display of the Portuguese section at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1855.³² Subsequently he also participated in the botanical section of the Exposição Internacional do Porto of 1865, the first to be held in Portugal.

However, his stay in Lisbon would not last long. By 1863 Welwitsch was on his way back to London. And the specimens were going to travel once again, too. If he had thought it necessary to go to London in order to prepare for his trip to Africa, he now considered it equally essential to return there. Portugal, he wrote, did not offer him adequate conditions to continue his research on the samples collected.³³ The London collections, especially those at the British Museum and at Kew Gardens, as well as the distinguished naturalists who worked there would provide the perfect environment for the final stage of research, and even if there were some voices raised against his departure, it was finally and officially approved by the Portuguese government. With Welwitsch, packed in forty-two crates, went the Angolan collection of approximately five thousand species of plants, and almost three thousand insects and animals.³⁴ In addition, the Portuguese government continued to pay his monthly salary. If going to London was necessary for the work that the government wanted to see finally produced, then Portugal was willing to back its adopted son. Welwitsch, however, never returned to his adopted country.

On arrival in London he renewed the connections previously established and entered into scientific correspondence with naturalists from the

³¹ Friedrich Welwitsch, 'Madeiras e drogas medicinais e outros objectos mormente etnográficos de Angola pertencentes ao Dr [. . .] e enviados à Exposição Internacional de Londres em 1862', in *Anaes do Conselho Ultramarino*, parte não oficial, 3rd series (1862), pp. 67–83, 91–95; [Visconde de Vila Maior], *Relatório do Comissário Régio junto à Comissão Real de sua Magestade Britânica na Exposição Internacional de 1862 em Londres sobre a parte administrativa* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1865), pp. 40–45, 108–12, 133–36.

³² Almeida (1927), n. 28, pp. 63–84, 70.

³³ Letter from Welwitsch to Manuel Jorge de Oliveira Lima (30 May 1863), *Correspondência Oficial de Welwitsch*, ed. by Américo Pires de Lima (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1959), pp. 93–96.

³⁴ José de Almeida briefly establishes a relationship between the case discussed here, by stating that Welwitsch left for London with the Angolan collections because he was afraid of 'ver perdida toda a sua obra se aqui tivesse de ficar; lembrar-se-ia amiude do pobre Rodrigues Ferreira': (1928), no. 32, p. 110; while Américo Pires de Lima mentions that Welwitsch never wanted to be separated from his collections, in case what had happened to Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira was repeated. He sent crates of specimens from Brazil at various times, with the result that many became mixed up on arrival. And later, of course, Geoffroy Sainte-Hilaire further contributed to the disappearance of the collections: *Correspondência Oficial de Welwitsch*, pp. 22, 23.

Continent.³⁵ While in London, Welwitsch wrote of his intention to return to Lisbon with the results of his studies as soon as possible. No one could prove that he was not working on the African collections, but time was passing, and Portugal still had not received the expected reports it needed in order to take better advantage of the Angolan resources. Letters arrived from Lisbon demanding results from him to justify the payments he was receiving; but there was no reply. After various unsuccessful attempts over the years and after realizing the impossibility of any dialogue, at the beginning of 1866 the Portuguese government decided to put an end to the payments. Four years later, Welwitsch contacted the Portuguese colonial minister and asked if his relations with the Portuguese government could be reinstated. The response was similar to previous ones: he and his collection were to return to Lisbon, and the results of his studies made known, in which case he would receive payment for travelling expenses. Possibly due to financial difficulties, Welwitsch agreed to return to Lisbon and packed some of the collections, but more money was needed for the journey. Time went by and he still remained in London. There was no further communication with Portugal. Then in 1872 Welwitsch died in London.

The end of Welwitsch's life meant the beginning of a complex legal battle that took many years to reach a conclusion.³⁶ The legal battle brought the king of Portugal, D. Luís, on behalf of the Portuguese government in conflict with the British Museum, represented by the two appointed executors of Welwitsch's will, William Carruthers, head of the Department of Botany at the museum, and Frederick Justen, a bookseller and publisher. Three days before he died, Welwitsch had made a will. A will which was concerned exclusively with the distribution of the natural history objects and instruments of study and in which the vast African collections were disposed of as his personal property.³⁷

Apart from the specimens destined for Portugal, Welwitsch's wish to benefit other institutions was clear. The British Museum was to receive the 'study copy of African plants', while the botanical museums of Berlin, Vienna, Paris and Copenhagen, the Imperial Natural History Museum at Rio de Janeiro, the Museum of Caruithia in Austria and Kew Gardens

³⁵ Almeida (1928), no. 32, pp. 97–129, 112.

³⁶ All the manuscript documentation concerning this case is in the British Museum–Natural History Archives—'Welwitsch' (DF 404 26–50); Bernardino António Gomes, *As colecções da expedição científica Africana ordenada pelo governo de Portugal em 1851 e o direito a ella perante os tribunais em Londres / The collections of the African scientific (sic) expedition ordered by the Portuguese government in 1851 and the right of this government to them, before the English courts of justice* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1875).

³⁷ British Museum–Natural History Archives, DF 404/26: Friedrich Welwitsch, 'Directions to my executors relating to my collections', 18 October 1872, in *Will of Dr F. Welwitsch, the opinion of Mr Sweet on the Will, and letters on Welwitsch's illness and death. Also 'directions to my executors'* (1872).

were to be presented with collections of samples. Some private individuals in various countries in Europe were also named as beneficiaries. Welwitsch clearly sought to leave his mark in all the main European centres of natural history, and probably also wanted to repay any help he may have received from specific naturalists. The Portuguese government, however, clearly had a different opinion over the real ownership of the specimens, and neither recognized Welwitsch's claim over the disposal of the objects, nor the gift of his study copy of the collection, the most valuable one, to the British Museum. Welwitsch had concluded his list by stating that the disposal of his collections to these various museums should be considered as made to them 'by the Portuguese Government through whose assistance and liberality some of the collections have been made'. Whether the Portuguese government itself was willing to act in such a generous manner, contributing to the progress of science in so many other countries, seems not to have concerned him.

As an appendix to his will, Welwitsch wrote a fascinating letter that serves as a kind of justification for his actions and decisions and that, as we shall see, somehow mirrored many of the arguments used to legitimize the looting by Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire in 1808:

On my return from Angola I was directed to proceed to London with the greater part of my collections, to obtain the assistance of the great scientific libraries and museums and of the eminent scientific men residing there for examining, arranging and naming the collections in the various branches of Botany and Zoology. There were neither books, collections, nor qualified men of science in Lisbon to enable that work to be done there, and to attempt it would have been to produce a work which could not have failed to bring discredit on its authors and its country. It was a necessity therefore to send the collections for examination to one of the great centres of science, and London was the choice.³⁸

Welwitsch continues by stating that he took the collections to London in the belief that the Portuguese government would continue subsidizing his work. When he was accused by a member of the Portuguese parliament of 'selling the Angolan collections and living in splendour on the proceeds in London', relations with Portugal deteriorated to breaking point. Nevertheless, he clearly states that he continued his work 'without intermission'. The letter accompanying the will concludes with an extraordinarily telling statement in which he contrasts the unjust accusations he suffered by his willingness to benefit Portugal in his will, in spite of all that had happened. There is a sentence in this letter that, I would argue, perfectly summarizes what is at stake. Welwitsch considers his services to have been 'to science and Portugal'; Portugal would have preferred them to have been 'to Portugal and science'.

³⁸ 'Directions to my executors relating to my collections', British Museum–Natural History Archives.

If Portugal could not provide the conditions, material and human, for the work to be completed there, then he had to go to ‘one of the great centres of science’. As Welwitsch adds, after collecting the objects, it was necessary to name and arrange them because without this they were of no value. Classification had to precede display, be it an actual display of objects as in a room in a museum; in the form of engravings; or a presentation to the scientific community, or simply to the Portuguese government. The process was only completed when what was collected became a collection. And although Portugal could provide the means for the former, that is make possible the collecting, the latter could only be achieved elsewhere.

After years of continuous litigation (1872–76) the legal process was finally concluded in 1876 with a ruling that pleased the British Museum more than the Portuguese. It was established that the king of Portugal was entitled to the majority of Welwitsch’s collections and notes.³⁹ But the British Museum also kept a complete set of all the specimens brought from Africa and a copy of all the notes. Not quite as much as Welwitsch had determined in his will, but still, the British Museum received the equivalent of the main set of material sent to Portugal, without actually having had to make any kind of investment or payment. From that moment, the information about the Portuguese colony was as available in England as it was in Portugal. Apart from mirroring the growing influence and intervention of Great Britain in the African territories held by the Portuguese, this case could be considered as a forewarning of the conflicts over colonial issues which came seriously to affect relations between the two countries later in the century, and which culminated in the ultimatum of 1890.

* * *

These two episodes involving Saint-Hilaire and Welwitsch took place at very different historical moments and in different contexts. However, they raise common issues: firstly, the relationship between travelling and the gathering of collections, and how travelling objects are transformed into objects for exhibition; secondly, the processes by which some countries attract more objects than others; thirdly, the way in which the spaces of display created in the nineteenth century were inseparable from the construction of national and colonial identities; and, finally, the relation between peripheries and centres.

³⁹ Curiously, shortly after the conclusion of this legal battle, at the end of 1877, a letter addressed to Barbosa du Bocage from the Secretaria d’Estado dos Negócios da Marinha e Ultramar, discusses the decision of sending the collection of African insects collected by Welwitsch, for study purposes, to some ‘sabios estrangeiros, à semelhança do que se practica em toda a parte’ (Archive of the Museu Bocage, Ms. 66).

We have seen the way in which travelling is inseparable from the formation of collections. If all travellers collect, or in other words if all travellers take their journey home in some way or other (be it by writing, drawing, photographing, buying or looting), some travellers only travel because they want to collect. This becomes very visible in the case of naturalists, because the main purpose of their travels is precisely to make objects travel. Louis Marin's concept of 'booty of knowledge' is useful to designate the travels undertaken by naturalists, because their booty only acquires a meaning when put to use at the service of knowledge.⁴⁰ In the case of both Saint-Hilaire and Welwitsch there was a constant reinstatement of the difference between collecting and turning the specimens into a collection; between travelling objects and exhibition objects. If Portugal possessed the means to gain booty from Brazil in the eighteenth century, and from Angola in the nineteenth, it did not provide the means and meanings by which to turn the booty into knowledge — either a written or exhibited one.

The period when Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire made so many objects travel (from 1798, the date of the first Napoleonic incursion into Italy, to 1815), was also the period that marked an involuntary interregnum for travellers in Europe. However, while European travel gave way to the movement of the Napoleonic armies, a wide array of objects was also set on the move. But there was a change of direction. If the majority of eighteenth-century travellers came from the centres and headed towards the peripheries of Europe, such as Italy or North Africa, now the objects were moving, by the exercise of force, from these peripheries to the centre. Therefore, if the French invasions are seen as the turning point between eighteenth-century travelling practices (the grand tour) and the new modes of travel that characterized the nineteenth century (tourism), I would argue that they also represent a rupture in the way a whole material culture was exhibited.

In the same way that travellers see their identities transformed along the journey, depending on the points from where they observe and are observed, objects too are subjected to the contingencies of the context of their display. In Angola or in Brazil, in Lisbon, in Paris or in London, the same specimens acquire different meanings. Welwitsch and Saint-Hilaire were, one could argue, the agents of civilization in charge of making objects travel in the first place. Their final destiny was not a private collection, or a princely one, but, as we have seen, public museums with a strong national identity. In fact, being visible to a wider public was part of the success of the discourse illustrated by these objects. When they reach the public they present themselves ready for consumption, which is to say

⁴⁰ Louis Marin, 'The Frontiers of Utopia', in *Utopias and the Millennium*, ed. by Stephen Bann and Krisham Kumar (London: Reaktion, 1993), p. 14.

that most of the story of the exhibited specimen (undoubtedly much longer than the time spent in the new habitat) is almost always omitted. The label does state their origin, it is true. The fact that they travelled from Angola or Brazil is fundamental to their newly acquired narrative. But the way they arrived there, which is just as much and as telling a part of the story, is almost always invisible. They ‘naturally’ came from very remote places to the centre of London and Paris. The in between is a silent gap in the final narrative of display.

The Welwitsch and Saint-Hilaire examples also show how, legally or illegally, ethically or not, cities such as Paris and London attracted objects from outside their frontiers. The reasons why these objects went from Portugal to Paris or to London are quite different, but always implicit is a kind of legitimization for this movement, as if these places had created the conditions for the natural existence of all kinds of objects, by their study, classification and display. A main argument of this paper, in other words, concerns the way that in the nineteenth century some European countries monopolized the means of creating a universal visual culture.⁴¹ I would call them ‘museum-countries’ because they are not necessarily the ones that uncovered the objects they displayed, but the ones that were able to make them travel and possessed the discourses that gave them meaning. By museumifying objects, these countries created the technology for the display of civilizing narratives, placing themselves as the main protagonists. They made theirs many of the objects that metonymically represented some of the most praised values of the western *episteme*. Being defined by such words as ‘civilization’, ‘progress’ and ‘future’, these nations were also the ones that managed to organize the many ‘histories’ of their own and other nations. As ‘guardians’ of the past they assumed the role of keepers of a heritage that was meant to be gazed upon in the present and in the future.

Portugal, on the contrary, possessed the objects but, like many other countries did not possess the instruments — museums, scientific communities, colonial strength and the power of knowledge — to protect its material culture. Projects such as those that led Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira to Brazil in the eighteenth century or Friederich Welwitsch to Angola in the nineteenth, could only have been possible with the support of the government and the royal family, whose interests went beyond the mere scientific to include the economic and political. The Brazilian ‘booty’ was confined to the exhibition space characteristic of a royal display cabinet,

⁴¹ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995); Carol Duncan, *Civilising Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995); *Art Apart. Art Institutions and Ideology across England and North America*, ed. by Marcia Pointon (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994); *Museum Culture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, ed. by Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (London: Routledge, 1994); Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, *Diacritics* (1986), pp. 22–27.

until Saint-Hilaire moved it to a public museum in Paris (that had also originally been linked to the French royal family). The Angolan collection hardly stopped in Lisbon at all, and was only unpacked in another public museum, in London. Therefore, and despite their different itineraries, the final destination of both Saint-Hilaire's and Welwitsch's booty is similar. Therefore, if in France or England enterprises such as natural history expeditions and control over their material results were increasingly given to public museums with very defined roles, in Portugal institutions did not possess the background these practices demanded. In Portugal power over diverse cultural forms was still very much linked with the private sphere as it had been traditionally over previous centuries, and most of the collections on display or displayable remained inaccessible to the majority of the people.

This is evident with reference to the restitution processes in both cases. Despite a tendency for the institutionalization of the disciplines of knowledge and the opening of collections to a wider public, the domain over objects still poised between private and public spheres: the process of the devolution of Saint-Hilaire's booty culminated in 1858 with the appointment of a director to the Museu de História Natural Museum of Lisbon, itself created that same year. However, in the Welwitsch process, initiated in 1872, the British were represented by its most important museum, and two of its naturalists, while the Portuguese (even allowing for the role of Bernardino António Gomes, a naturalist close to the royal family), were represented by the king of Portugal.

Both these cases illustrate perfectly the relationship between natural history collections and the construction of national and colonial identities. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, natural history expeditions and collections were common practices. However, one could see a gradual change from one century to the next: from an enterprise lead by a cosmopolitan group of naturalists that was, above all, scientific, to a national endeavour closely linked with colonial projects. These two cases, which were restricted only in appearance to élitist and circumscribed groups of scientists, and to the influence of a few museums or botanical gardens, closely mirror the political and economic interests embodied in the constitution of natural history collections. Inseparable from the tightening of the relationship between knowledge and power was the conflict between the interests of different countries.

Throughout the nineteenth century, colonialism became a visual experience available outside the colonies themselves. Thousands of objects and specimens travelled from the colonies to the metropolis, and from there often to other colonial metropoli, as we have seen, where they waited to be named, if still unknown, and given their 'rightful' place. Zoology, anthropology, ethnography or botany were some of the labels they

acquired on arrival. The proper venue for their exhibition was equally determined: a specialist museum, zoological or botanical garden, or universal exhibition. Visually displayed and described in a catalogue, each object came to occupy its place in an ever-growing three-dimensional universal encyclopaedia. The interest in natural history and its display was not a new curiosity.⁴² What was new in the nineteenth century were the spaces where they could be seen, their classification and the fact that never before were there so many things on exhibition, and open to such a large number of people. Such modern public institutions turned the world into a visual display to be travelled through, constructing still-frames cut out of history (natural or not), and creating an order where time and space was transgressed to be re-ordered according to new criteria.

Finally, we have seen how the concept of peripheries and centres, is central to the stories of travelling objects. We have also seen how what is considered the centre and what is periphery can change, depending on the perspective. That is, if in relation to its colonies of Brazil and Angola, Portugal, or even better, Lisbon, was the centre, the place where all the written and visual culture about or coming from the empire concentrated, in relation to London or Paris, Lisbon was situated on the periphery. By collecting specimens from its colonies, Portugal was establishing a route that had the metropolis as its final destination. But, as we have seen, the objects often ended up travelling somewhere else and, not by chance, to the 'capitals of the nineteenth century', to use Walter Benjamin's expression.⁴³ Paris and London were the two cities that could be considered the centres of world classification and display, the centres of the museum-culture that made the world visible throughout the nineteenth century. Portugal, as a European 'other', like the 'others' from other continents, was not recognized as able adequately to care for its own objects.

However, there were ways of subverting and questioning these positions, and often these came precisely from the periphery. One could argue that one way of resisting an acknowledged cultural dependency is manifested precisely when the élites from the peripheral country identify themselves with the values from the centre, and turn those values learnt from abroad to the criticism of their own countries. In this case, the Portuguese who identified with and criticized their own country acknowledged that Portugal was scientifically inadequate to the task of best exploiting its own material culture. In fact, by denouncing and showing awareness of the traditional characteristics that identify what is centre and what is periphery, one could argue that the Portuguese élite was subverting the very

⁴² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 131.

⁴³ Walter Benjamin, 'Paris. The Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in *Charles Baudelaire. A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 155–76.

dichotomy. As we have seen, even if their national identities vary, the protagonists of these natural history stories all share what I would call a social or cultural identity best summarized by the idea of civilization. The community of naturalists, diplomats, politicians and intellectuals was clearly a cosmopolitan one. Therefore, I would argue that there existed a kind of contradictory tension between cosmopolitan values independent of frontiers, and strong national values, a tension that determined the travelling itineraries taken by many objects in the nineteenth century.

The historiography of the history of collections, museums and other spaces of classification and display such as zoological and botanical gardens and universal exhibitions tends to focus on national histories. In doing so it misses much of the complexity of the making of these spaces, a process that often transgresses national frontiers or national objects. Museums are always made of travelling objects, and most often objects that have travelled from afar, from beyond the borders of the nation where they are relocated. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that collections, natural history ones or not, constitute cosmopolitan microcosms ruled by universal values. On the contrary, most often this multiplicity of geographical origins contributes to the construction of national discourses, where the access and control over other territories signifies their major strength. These are stories of overt colonial domination but also of more ambiguous forms of control of some countries over others; stories of the growing construction of national identities, but also of scientific relationships and the circulation of ideas and values that go beyond them; stories of the different forms of control over agents and objects and the ways of subverting them by diverting their intended destinations. Far from the usual associations of these spaces of exhibition as immutable and immovable venues, where objects reach a kind of final address, we have seen how, in the nineteenth century, museums and similar spaces were more like stages of departure and arrival, in movements that were driven by the different forces involved. In conclusion, I would argue that in order to better and more comprehensively understand the formation of the visual culture in the nineteenth century and beyond, one has necessarily to move beyond the spaces of the nation and, following the travel itineraries of the persons and objects that formed them, move between different national and cultural contexts.⁴⁴

FLORENCE

⁴⁴ This article is based on a paper presented at the one-day conference 'Travellers and Exhibitions: Representations, narratives and practices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', at the Institute of Romance Studies, University of London, on 9 March 2001.

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