### MtM Workshop WP3-WP5

## Analysing encounters with difficult collections

*Proposal by Anna Szöke, Karin Schneider and Nora Landkammer*

Museum collections might be sensitive, difficult or awkward – because of the history they embody, the research practices they are or were connected to, the history of their acquisition, because of their sacred or cultural value, or because of the thoughts and emotions they awaken. While these are facts at the basis of ethical concerns on museum objects, a topic we have repeatedly come back to in conversations in TRACES is that there is a *performative* aspect to “contentiousness”. Objects become contentious through their readings, through challenging them and the institution hosting them, through enactment.

In the workshop we want to focus on jointly analysing these enactments in data from encounters with collections from TRACES research actions. In which ways does an object become contentious? How is the moment when ethics comes in to be described: is it controversy, fear, anger, consternation, empathy? Who are the stakeholders/the positions implicated by the encounter? We also want to discuss to which regard the idea of contentiousness is helpful for or hinders the way we deal with these objects or we whish them to be dealt with. Rather than discussing these questions on an abstract level we want to conduct in small groups line-by-line analyses of documentation of diverse encounters with collections from our project (in CCPs and practice-related actions of WPs). We suspect that these might contribute to: a) the understanding of the specific collections, b) planning and carrying out encounters with stakeholders and visitors, c) to joint empirical analysis with a differentiated grasp of what “contentious” means, with view to the common TRACES publication

The workshop is facilitated by Karin Schneider, Anna Szöke and Nora Landkammer, and supervised by Sharon Macdonald, together with the ethics board members Bernadette Lynch, Janet Marstine, Robin Boast that act as consultants for the analysis sessions conducted in small working groups. CCP and WP members working on museum collections are the core group of the workshop, all other TRACES members are very much welcome to participate and contribute to the analysis. The workshop will be open for external participants (colleagues in Berlin whose expertise has a special relevance for the workshop as well as CoHere members) upon invitation.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS:

This workshop can only take place if project partners contribute documentation from their activities. Please use the opportunity to have an in-depth reflection by consortium members and board members on material from your research. This call goes especially to CCP2, CCP3, CCP4, WP2, WP3, WP5, while also contributions on questions dealing with objects collections, museums from other TRACES members are very welcome.

We invite you to submit the documentation of an encounter in which a museum collection or object became difficult. This could be that a discussion came up, emotions started to play in, something unexpected happened, you felt weird, or any other characteristics of the situation that you associate with “becoming contentious”. It can be an encounter with visitors, with external guests in the research, or also with the research team itself or museum staff. We are looking for data on these situations that is as dense and detailed as possible. Ideal are transcriptions of audio recordings or detailed observation minutes. Alternatively, also writings from memory (as exact as possible, including also what doesn’t seem to matter at first glance) or compilations of notes are possible. Images or audiovisual documents are welcome. The notes need not to be long, also a brief field-note or memo in the size of one paragraph is useful. It would be great if the “external” researcher of CCPs could help to contribute something from their fieldnotes.

**Please send your contributions the latest until August 28th.**

The workshop team will prepare out of these contributions a selection of material to be analysed in the workshop. So don’t hesitate to send anything that you think could be interesting, also more than one.