

RESTATING SECURITY CONCERNS OF CAMEROON'S COMMUNITY COLLECTIONS AND MUSEUMS

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Abstract

In recent times, Cameroonian museums have faced increasing security challenges, which curators blame on frequent thefts, human and natural factors. Of the 30 recognized museums in the nation, over 20 are community palace museums found in the Western Grasslands. On account of their vulnerability, these collections and museums, (MA Fubab, 2016), became the prime targets of unscrupulous art dealers and traffickers. Unfortunately, and until recently, authorities of these institutions seemed indifferent to frequent object disappearances and rising insecurity. Some disappearances were only reported months or years after they occurred. The case of Afo-A-kom, a sacred throne-figure of the kom kingdom that was spirited off to the US in 1966 (P. McClusky, 2002) is a vivid example. Despite national legislation and international instruments protecting cultural heritage and prohibiting illicit transfers, insecurity around Cameroonian museums has remained a hydra-headed monster. A survey (2008-2013) involving the community museums of Mankon, Batoufjam, Foto, Bamendjou, Babungo, Baleng and Bafut suggested that these disappearances could be the work of insiders, coordinated crime syndicates or both. The present study therefore, examines the state of Grassfields community collections and museums, discusses their principal security concerns, and proposes new security dispositions. Our central question is: why the persistent thefts from these institutions and how could they be curbed? A blend of qualitative data, oral tradition and participatory observation, analyzed on the basis of chronology, content and the inside job theory, provide grounds for our findings. Traditional security measures and modern technologies must blend and diversify for, with all the safety guarantees, thieves still find their way, most often, with in-house accomplices.

Key words: *Restating, security, community, collections, museums*

Résumé

De nos jours, les musées camerounais sont progressivement confrontés aux défis inimaginables que les responsables ont attribués aux vols qui sont devenus très fréquents ainsi qu'aux facteurs humains et naturels. De la trentaine de musées reconnus dans la nation camerounaise, plus de 20 sont les musées communautaires situés dans les chefferies des grasslands de l'Ouest. A cause de leur vulnérabilité, ces collections et musées, (MA Fubab, 2016), sont devenues les principales cibles des collectionneurs sans scrupules et agents de trafic illicite. Malheureusement, les autorités de ces structures sont restées indifférentes face aux multiples cas de vol d'objets et l'insécurité croissante. Beaucoup des cas de vol ne sont signalés qu'après plusieurs mois voire des années. Le cas de la fameuse statuette Afo-A-kom, figure emblématique et sacrée du royaume Kom, volée et illicitement vendue aux Etats-Unis en 1966 (P. McClusky, 2002) reste un cas concret. Malgré la législation nationale et les instruments

internationaux sur la protection du patrimoine culturel, ainsi que les interdictions du trafic illicite d'objets culturels, l'insécurité autour des musées camerounais reste un monstre à plusieurs têtes. Nos descentes aux musées de Mankon, Batoufam, Foto, Bamendjou, Babungo, Baleng et Bafut (2008-2013) révèlent entre autres que, ces vols sont soit le travail de certains personnels, soit le fait d'un syndicat criminel bien organisé ou tous les deux à la fois. La présente étude fait l'état de lieu des collections et musées communautaires dans l'aire grassfields, explore leurs principaux soucis sécuritaires, et propose des dispositions à prendre. Notre question centrale c'est : pourquoi les multiples vols dans ces musées et comment faire pour y mettre un terme ? Les résultats de ce travail sont le fruit d'une confrontation : des données qualitatives, de la tradition orale et de l'observation participative, analysées sur la base de la chronologie, le contenu et la théorie de souris dans la maison. L'association et la diversification des systèmes de sécurité traditionnels, modernes et technologiques sont indispensables car, malgré toutes les mesures entreprises et qui existent, les bandits trouvent toujours leurs comptes, et très souvent, avec une complicité venant de l'intérieur.

Mots clés: *Revisiter, sécurité, communautaire, collections, musées*

Introduction

For several decades, the minimum standard of security for art collections and museums has been the focus of local communities, national governments and the International Committee for Museum Security of the International Council of Museums (ICMS, ICOM). Unfortunately, the elaboration of standard security guidelines acceptable to all has been a near impossibility. This could be explained first, by the fact that matters of museum insecurity have often been limited national legislation and resources available to local museum authorities rather than international consensus and secondly, on account of the ever-growing complexity of security threats (Marek Tomastik et al., 2018:14). Matters have been worsened by skyrocketing prices of antiques on the world art market and consequently, their money value. This signifies that theft and illicit traffic are viruses man must live with into the distant future. Yet security must not be limited to incidents of theft and illicit traffic for, other enemies of the museums are object deterioration, poor handling, natural disasters, fire and water.

In Cameroon, whose museum institution is fairly young, most community museums are off-springs of pre-colonial palace collections, known to harbor countless antiques, most of which have neither been inventoried nor catalogued.⁴ Due to insecurity around them, thousands

⁴ Rich in quantum, diversity, style and symbolism, these collections and later museums were a great attraction to early German, British and French missionaries, traders and colonial agents (Ian Fowler, 1990:14) who landed on the territory before or shortly after 1900. Given their huge

of objects were regularly lost not only to natural factors but also to unscrupulous deals and illicit traffic. The collaboration of some local intermediaries in these deals continued even after Cameroon's political independence in 1960-61. By the year 2000, many community collections had become shadows of themselves due to security threats and management lapses. Despite the transformation of some collections into museums, security around them remained traditional, porous and obsolete. The on-going Anglophone crisis, (since October 2016) and rebel incursions from the extreme north and east have worsened the security situation. As many chiefs and their close aides have fled their localities, palaces, art collections and museums have been left at the mercy of unscrupulous gangs, art dealers and intermediaries. Redressing the security situation around Cameroon's community collections and museums has therefore been a herculean task. This study explores current security systems and concerns around these museums and proposes new security dispositions to redress the alarming situation.

1. Conceptualizing museum security

Museum practitioners across the globe generally agree that blending traditional security practices with modern security technologies could considerably ensure the safety of museums and their collections. Unfortunately, all these measures put together cannot stop thieves for the latter still manage to whisk off antiques through deceptive tactics. Coincidentally, the challenges of tracking down such patient and determined thieves are as complex as the challenges facing thieves as well (VB Ngitir, 2014:312). Hence, while museum managers and personnel perceive their challenges as external, the thieves consider their obstacles as internal. The tussle has therefore centered on who outsmarts the other. The present study is therefore hinged on our two-model dialectical: the *anti-theft security* concept by M. Tomastik (2018:33) and the *inside job theory* propounded by G. Tron (2021:1). While the former perceives museum insecurity as a danger masterminded by external risk factors and therefore proposes an integrated system to

appetite for African antiques, thousands of masterpieces were ferried from various parts of the country, to feed their metropolitan museums in Berlin, Hamburg, Brunswick, Leipzig, Frankfurt, Paris, Bordeaux, London and more.

halt intruders and evil-intentioned visitors, the latter considers the obstacles as internal which must be outsmarted.

1.1 the thesis : anti-theft security concept

This concept, generally upheld by museum managers and personnel, perceives museum insecurity as a danger masterminded by external risk factors and therefore proposes an integrated anti-theft system to halt intruders, fire, water and evil-intentioned visitors. Museum security according to this concept calls for a coherent set of administrative and technological systems of protection. Such systems and emergency controls must be based on thorough security assessments. (Tomastik (2018:12). These are particularly crucial for Cameroon's community collections and museums which are plagued by gross management lapses, and managerial deficiencies. Common yet regrettable practices in Grassfields palaces include offering receptions to palace guests inside museums, using untrained queens or palace retainers as guides, deploying museum guards do other duty posts and keeping museums closed for long periods. Today, integrated safety management systems that include security alarm, emergency electronic access controls, closed circuit CCTV systems and mechanical barriers seem indispensable. In sum, the concept of anti-theft protection calls for construction, technical and organizational measures. Though highly plausible for Cameroon's community collections and museums, this system could be very expensive for palaces that have been barely surviving.

1.2 The anti-thesis: inside job theory

The obscure display of some objects at hidden corners of museum exhibitions, the absence of some personnel from duty for days and weeks, the widespread misery due to poor working conditions, the frequent appearances of art dealers around community museums during palace ceremonies and the successes scored by secret art dealers, lend credence to the theory that many of the thefts reported in Cameroon's community collections and museums benefitted from some internal facilitator or accomplice. To these must be added the belated reporting of prominent thefts, new or old objects going without ascension numbers for months, and the feeling that one has been a trusted guardian for over decades.

Annual and periodic festivals offer splendid opportunities for thieves and accomplices to ferry off objects on account of the general effervescence, wild masquerade displays and commotion that leave no one indifferent. Startling accounts of objects disappearing during such festivities have been reported by virtually all palaces with such collections. Thefts have also been masterminded by persons disguised as musical artists, photographers, scriptwriters, and museum security guards (G. Tron, 2017:1). Some are known to retain secret keys while others keep back doors and secret exits open. Shelley Murphy *et al.*, (2018:2) also allude to alternative theories such as mob job, thieves disguised as police officers, organized crime circles armed robbery and burglaries. These theories corroborate FBI reports on the role of that local criminals played in art thefts (S. Murphy, 2003:2).⁵

2. Problem statement, research questions and objectives

One of the principal challenges that have confronted Cameroon's community collections and museums for decades, have been security concerns. These have been largely responsible for the huge losses suffered by these facilities in recent times. These concerns which are rooted in logistical insufficiencies, financial constraints and largely incompetent personnel, were responsible for the illicit traffic, deterioration and degradation suffered by countless masterpieces since the birth of the Country's museum institution in the 1940s (K. Mbayu, 1994:14). Despite the litany of legislations and safety guidelines, both national and international, for the protection, preservation and restoration of museum collections, reports of lost items have remained the norm (S.D. Adeboye, 1995:42). This paper captures the miserable state of Cameroonian community museums, laments over their numerous management lapses, and wonders how museum personnel without job security could ensure the security of collections placed under their custody. Hinged on the *inside job theory*, we seek answers to five questions: What is the present state of Cameroon's community

⁵ The suspects frequented a Dorchester repair shop operated by Carmello Merlino, a mob associate who boasted to two informants that he planned to recover the artwork and collect the reward. Instead, he was tracked down by the FBI in 1999 and convicted of trying to rob an armored car depot. Despite offers of leniency in return for the stolen artwork, Merlino never produced it and died in prison in 2005.

museums? What security safeguards guarantee the safety of the collections? What have been the major security challenges? How have the collections survived after all? How can these concerns be addressed? To this end our paper examines the present state of Cameroon's community museums, identifies their principal security measures around those collections, discusses their principal security challenges, and proposes a salvation plan for the collections.

3. Methodology of the study

Methodology for the present study hinged on a blend of qualitative data, oral tradition and participatory observation. Talking about qualitative data, one must stress that while literature abounds on museum security at macro scale, this has not been the case for local and community museums. Secondly, the said literature focused essentially on western-style museums and advanced systems based on technological applications, alarms and human detectors. Though these could constitute enormous innovations for African collections in general and Cameroonian museums in particular, they were far from being applicable in the poverty-stricken sub-Saharan Africa, talk less on Cameroon. Even the security system around the National Museum of Cameroon remains largely dependent on the traditional manned guarding due to financial and material constraints, the lack of logistics and low levels of technology. For these reasons, we resorted to oral tradition which remains the major source for the reconstitution of community histories and the documentation of ethnographic objects that flood community collections.

This was complemented by participatory observation which took two forms, notably focus groups organized at each museum consulted and surveys involving data collection from 15 of the 20 community museums in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon.⁶ Regarding the focus groups, visits to these museums provided occasions for us to assemble local resource persons and identify lead speakers. Here, discussions articulated on the causes of insecurity around local museums, main actors in the frequent thefts, measures adopted to check theft and prospects for the future. These discussions were

⁶ These included the museums of Bafut, Babungo, Oku, Mankon, Baham, Bandjoun, Bapa, Batoufam, Fumban, Melong, Bamendjou, Bamendjida, Bamougoum and Baleng.

followed by guided filling of questionnaires on the spot. Regarding the survey, 15 museums were targeted for data collection on subthemes like causes of loss in their respective museums, categories of objects frequently lost, matters of theft, guarding, visitation, other uses to which the museum was put (exclusive of registered visitation), persons allowed in the museums after working hours, weekly visitation statistics and data on objects lost per month in the last 10 years or more.

Collected data was then analyzed on the basis of chronology, content and the *inside job theory*. Chronology here refers to the statistical evolution of each rubric over a period of at least ten years. This explains the care taken to respect chronological evolution in the presentation of this work. Content on the other hand alludes to the crude facts obtained from the field. These were then relayed on spreadsheets and analyzed according to the degree of frequency or recurrence of each answer. In these analyses, validation was based on three options: first, total confirmation in cases where all 10 or more resource persons gave identical responses to the same question; second, partial confirmation in cases where affirmative and non-affirmative responses stood at 50/50; and doubtful ratings for cases of insufficient evidence or rejection. On the sidelines of these analyses, the *inside job theory* was put to test as premise at each instance. This Premise received a score of 90 % yes among resource persons that were non-museum personnel and 40% among museum personnel. This to us was simply taken to mean that museum workers were less likely than non-personnel to speak the truth. On this score, the theory was validated.

4. State of security around the collections and museums

Cameroon's museums generally, and her community art collections particularly, have for long lived a precarious existence, marked by laxity, poor management, a general air of misery among the personnel and gross insecurity around their collections. Despite occasional reports of object disappearances, security rarely featured as a major preoccupation at working sessions of boards of trustees. This could partly be explained by the abundance and superfluity of the collections, sometimes with limited space for their storage, and secondly because most collections had neither been inventoried nor catalogued. Even worse, some collections that passed for museums were mere packing

stores with objects piled on others in all assortments. Our visits to the Oku palace museum collections (2008 and 2013) revealed a catastrophic display. Masks, wooden stools, containers, statues, statuettes, beds, musical instruments and more, were piled on bamboo platforms, covered by dust and left at the mercy of weevils and borers. Some rooms were almost air-tight and had hardly been opened in several months. Many of our students on internship to the Bandjoun, Oku, Baham, and Babungo royal museums equally narrated appalling stories and experiences. Allusion was repeatedly made to the lone guide being absent for days and weeks, non-respect for working schedules, and requests for extra financial tips (known in Cameroon as *choko*) to enable a hungry guide sustain their visit. Common reasons for the guide's absence included, *he is bereaved, he has been sick, he has gone for treatment, or he has been commissioned to other duties.*

While some cultural vestiges and masterpieces have simply been devoured by the destructive forces of nature, others disappeared as a result of poor handling, financial, theft and security lapses. This trend has transformed the one-time rich treasures of antiquities and masterpieces into galleries dominated by crafts and replicas of lost models. Consequently, the few surviving antiquities and practices require appropriate safeguard against further loss. Unfortunately, such safeguards have remained elusive on account of the acute financial and material constraints bugging these facilities. Virtually owned and run by local chiefs, these collections have hardly met their logistical and financial needs. The acquisition of modern technological systems has never been contemplated, not even in the long term. Grants from competent government services have become a thing of the past.⁷ After retiring as Director of Patrimony on July 30, 1994, Bernard Ayuk had this to say:

The preservation and conservation of
cultural patrimony was never a
government priority; it was always

⁷ The days of manna seemed to have passed following the demise of the state of West Cameroon. Bernard Ayuk, an anthropologist and former West Cameroon Archivist, responsible for archives and museums from 1969 to 1972 was directly in charge of the repositories of the Buea archives and the Bamenda Provincial Museum. His knowledge of the Bamenda Grassfields enabled him come up with an inventory of artifacts and antiquities hidden in virtually all palace chambers of the Grassfields region. Ever since, the data has never been updated.

shifted to second or third place. Priority went to education, social services, defense, law and order etc. Government resources for conservation were too meager and too low for anything. Government only sponsored trips from Buea to the Grassfields to do inventories of existing patrimony.²

The situation over 20 years after has not changed. Marthe Darista Medou, Cameroon's Director of Patrimony at the Ministry of Culture (2007 - 2013) revealed to us that though no detailed documentation on state grants to her department existed, the Ministry of Culture made available annually, a global sum of 50 million francs CFA for the rehabilitation of cultural sites, spaces, palaces and monuments. Since no specific text addressed the plight of community museums this sum was usually sprinkled over the broad spectrum of patrimony throughout the national territory³. Hence each of the ten regions received 500.000 FCFA on the average. This rarely impacted on the North-West and West regions which harbored over 15 of the 20 community museums in the nation. And even so, security was never top on the agenda since crucial matters such as accumulated wages, poor working and living conditions were prioritized. The security situation has equally been aggravated by infrastructural inadequacies. While thousands of art objects decayed in dark palace chambers and lodges, very few were exhibited. With the exception of a few palaces the bulk of them had no permanent museum structures. The few that had been erected with foreign assistance were abandoned shortly after for lack of maintenance. As earlier mentioned, the principal motivation that triggered determined dealers to persist in negotiated deals with Cameroonian collections and community museums was the high demand for African antiques in Europe and America. It all started in the colonial days as explorers and traders were soon joined by administrative officials charged with the subjugation of stubborn inland

kingdoms. The result was the ransacking and looting of entire Grassfields palaces.⁸

The story of insecurity around Cameroonian collections would be incomplete without the much publicized theft in 1966 of *Afo-A-kom*. This throne-figure was central in a special pair of three throne statues representing the producer (Foyin Yuh), his mother and his wife respectively. Smuggled from the loosely guarded kom palace in 1966, it was only reported missing four years after and restituted 7 years later. Yet the practice of restitution has all along been fraught with obstacles related to the localization of stolen objects, the high procedural costs, and numerous judicial expenses. P. O'keefe (1999: 36-37) makes allusion to cases where after favorable rulings, many complainants have been unable to pay court charges. In addition, even after locating a stolen object, a plaintive may only back up his claims on presentation of a certificate of ownership (indicating the size, form, aesthetic particularities and so on), together with other documented evidence on the origins of the object in question and the circumstances under which it either disappeared or was stolen.

5. Traditional security safeguards

Security systems around Cameroon's community museums in the last three to four decades could be aptly described as typically traditional and conservative. This took two major approaches: intensive manned guarding and local beliefs in some spiritual safeguards through super-natural forces. Regarding manned guarding which was generally the responsibility of palace retainers, sometimes complemented by selected princes and messengers the system was full of lapses. Generally selected from among members of customary societies and royal folks, these guards were regarded as performing their normal palace routine even as they chatted, lost concentration and dozed off on museums verandas. Occasionally, statutory guards were commissioned to other duties, swapped with some idle palace subjects or simply requested to join processions of palace cults to which they belonged. Consequently, museums either went shut for hours and even days or were entrusted to persons with neither curatorial ethics nor training (ICOM, 2006:1-14).

⁸ In the 1890s, Dr. Zintgraff took off from Bali and ransacked many Grassfields palaces in his subjugation campaign, emptying them of their masterpieces. This phenomenon reached alarming proportions in the 1950s and 1960s and centered on the most cherished items of antiquity.

The second approach was purely traditional and mystical. This was hinged on some customary and/or superstitious beliefs that anyone who stole from the palace took upon him/herself an abominable curse that pursued his/her and family down to the fourth generation. Such curses were said to manifest in insanity, miscarriages, addiction to theft, protruding bellies, hunch-backs, erectile dysfunction, unstoppable menstrual flows, and so on. It was in respect of such beliefs that many suspects and accomplices in the theft of *Afo-A-kom* (1966) were said to have died in the years that followed the sad incident. Similar affirmations are on record in relation to thefts of the twin *mamforti* figures from the Bafut palace collection, *koungbang* masks from the Mankon collection, assorted royal paraphernalia from the Nso palace and a sacred royal bed from the Nkar palace collection. Whether or not those deaths were truly associated with the thefts, there is room to warrant some credibility. This further validates the *inside job theory* on which this study is hinged.⁹

6. Principal security challenges

The principal security challenges bugging Cameroon's museums include redundancy and use of untrained security guards, the frequent collaboration of insiders with art dealers, financial and logistical constraints, infrastructural deficiencies, and the lack of planning.

Regarding their redundancy, Cameroon's guards especially those of community museums, generally received no formal training. For others, guarding hours were either a golden opportunity to receive tips from visitors or to negotiate secret deals whose finality was the traffic of some cherished item. To say the least, such moments were perceived as "one's own time to chop". With neither formal training nor in-service formation, the security guards around Cameroon's community museums hardly mastered the true value of the heritage entrusted to their care. Consequently, with a few bank notes, objects worth millions are doled out to art dealers directly or through intermediaries.

⁹ On the other hand and contrary to the views of Mathias F. Alubafi (2016:1-5), such evidence invariably justifies the location of community museums within palace premises. However, on account of the continued disappearances, it goes without saying that there is absolute need to complement such traditional security systems with technological accessories and alarm systems.

The second challenge centered on personnel collaborating with thieves. As earlier stated, the recurrent disappearances of collections from Cameroon's museums have been attributed not only to poor handling and natural factors but above all to what practitioners and museum theorists have code-named the *inside job*. The essence of this theory is that several cases of theft and other illicit transfers from museum collections have largely been associated with complicity between some museum personnel and unscrupulous art dealers. This increasingly worrisome phenomenon has bugged Cameroon museums for long and goes on record as the principal reason for the ineffectiveness of various security measures around these museums. Numerous visits to these museums revealed that museum staffs and support personnel lived under precarious conditions, some going for years without a formal salary. On account of the museums being located in palace premises and the fact that most personnel doubled as members of palace cults, the said personnel fell under the category of *palace people* or simply, the *chief's children*. This in Grassfields understanding meant that museum personnel were simply volunteers at the service of their fatherland and ancestry. Frequently, they were invited to join their peers for sacred meals at cult chambers and other sectors of the palace. Until recently, the mere pride of belonging to the royal trail meant more than a salary or wage to many. However, with the increasing challenges of a monetary economy, the high cost of educating children and the damaging effects of a deepening economic crisis, things have tremendously changed. For these reasons and the need to survive, museum personnel have been left with no choice but to market some of the items in their custody.

Thirdly, financial and logistical constraints rendered museums highly vulnerable. Perennial financial and material constraints indeed rendered collections increasingly vulnerable to art predators. Challenges associated with existing infrastructures have been numerous and range from ill-adapted and poorly designed buildings to unhealthy furnishings and the lack of maintenance. The use of bamboo on walls, scenographies and shelves for instance predisposes collections to insect pests, rodents and decay. While these structures could be credited for their traditional form and iconography, their single-hall permanent exhibitions have been too simplistic and redundant. Summing up the situation, one must note the lack of glass, poor ventilation, lighting and

fragile material supports, the absence of humidifiers and dehumidifiers and above all, the lack of funding to acquire, maintain and preserve basic needs.

7. The secret of survival

The survival of Cameroon's community museums has been variously described as controversial and precarious on account of the numerous security challenges confronting them. However, despite the damaging human and natural factors, Cameroon's community museums have survived after all. This resilience can be explained by a daunting local spirit of solidarity and strong attachment to indigenous values, the role of ancestral and spiritual protection, public sensitization on the importance of the nation's material culture, a sustained system of traditional apprenticeship and the role of surviving resource-persons and eye-witnesses. The people's solidarity thus remained mysteriously steadfast, sustaining both present and future achievements, including her collections and museums. Cultural values based on language, religious rites, "divine kingship" and above all the mystical role of ancestors and the gods have remained indelible messages transmitted by local art collections and later museums. Customary restrictions prescribed by local oracles also served as "deterrents" to potential criminals despite the huge illegal transfers. All persons linked to the disappearance of sacred and occult art are known to have died shortly after their abominable acts. Something which does not interest people will never be able to move them nor would it last. Cameroon's museum collections were and remain related to the culture of the people and so would not die.

A. O. Konare (1995:18-34) corroborates this by stating: "The conservation of an object would be short-lived unless accompanied by its original language, usage, handling and conservation". Cameroonian museum collections thus conformed to the principle of functional conservation which requires among other things that objects be conserved, used and sustained within their natural habitats. To these factors of resilience must be added the role of public sensitization by national and international bodies on the one hand and African diaspora on the other. Despite the huge losses, the error was detected and stricter measures taken to safeguard the surviving patrimony. This of course, has greatly impacted on the promotion of traditional system of

apprenticeship based on the family unit for the transmission of skills. In sum, the system bore a number of inherent advantages: first, it was intimately tied to religion and patronized by kings, the nobility and experienced parent-artists; secondly, royal and family guardians were charged with the transmission of artistic traditions and community savoir-faire from generation to generation. This system kept cultural and artistic values alive and renewed them from within; and thirdly, it selectively adopted modern techniques of conservation, restoration and architecture.

8. Which way forward?

Redressing security around Cameroonian museums has been a complex assignment that calls for a security toolkit, respect for basic security principles, a museum accreditation scheme, and a risk managed approach. Elaborated by the Arts Council England (ACE, 2013), the museum security toolkit was the result of a Collections Trust project for capacity-building on museum security and funded by Arts Council England (ACE). The project worked with museum practitioners, ACE colleagues and the Association of Crime Prevention Officers. This system developed a rationale for museum security auditing, with considerable security experience in the museum sector. The toolkit integrates eight fundamental guidelines: museum security doesn't happen in a vacuum, it must be embedded in a museum's mission, policies, procedures, activities and planning; museum security is the responsibility of everyone in the museum; security must balance safety with access to keep both visitors and collections at bay; its risk management approach must allow for planning security solutions as a response to risk assessments; an effective security plan must identify security threats to the museum.

In this respect, a credible museum security system must seek to improve the museum's security against theft, fire and flood; integrate the security of collections into the museum's policy; be supported in the daily practice of the museum; involve all staff at all levels; develop internal expertise before seeking external review; and elaborate clear priorities in future planning. Such a system instills confidence among administrative staff and personnel.

Thirdly, a credible security system must employ a risk managed approach. Ensuring the safety of collections is an integral part of the

day to day management of the museum. An appropriate risk managed approach to museum security presents in four steps: it gathers information about the security measures in the museum, identifies threats to the collections, and assesses the risks of the identified threats occurring, plans to manage the risks and implement the said plans.

Finally, an appropriate security system should integrate traditional measures and modern technologies. Despite the corruption factor which is typical of Cameroon, manned guarding has the advantages of flexibility, responsiveness to changing situations, constant mobility, adaptation to new museum environments and a large pool for informed choices. Since both guards and their collections are vulnerable to manipulation, (J. Malies, 2002:2), there has been increasing need for blending. Such blending with the human detector and other technological devices could provide double guarantees for museum security. The human detector could effectively protect works of art and exhibits from physical contact, theft or vandalism. It reliably detects if a person touches the monitored object and controls monitoring cameras as well as alarm systems. Its advantages include complete protection through multi-sensor surveillance, detects approaches before contact takes place, provides acoustic alarm on the exhibited object for security staff, it is deal for both permanent and temporary exhibitions, it enjoys worldwide access and alert via smart phone, functions on wireless network and battery power supply, can be integrated with existing alarm and surveillance equipment, controls movable surveillance cameras (PTZ), and provides extensive surveillance due to a radio range of 300 meters.

Conclusion

The high prevalence of multiple thefts from Cameroonian community museums, the apparent indifference of their authorities, and their often belated reporting, necessitated the present study. Though it represents only a minute strand of a huge monster the study sounds a wake-up alarm for Cameroonian museum promoters to jealously guard their endangered heritage. To theft, must however, be added the huge losses that result from fire accidents, floods, poor handling and inappropriate conservation. Based on a survey conducted of some Grassland community museums, the study examines the

present state of Cameroon's community museums, identifies the principal security measures around these collections, discusses their principal security challenges, and proposes a salvation plan for the collections. Far from apportioning blames for lapses responsible for the present deplorable situation, the study establishes the duty of museum operators to reduce any risks of reasonably foreseeable type from occurring to their collections. Hinged on pre-stated objectives and the *inside job theory*, the study reveals among other things that the current state of security around Cameroon's community museums has been catastrophic on account of its extreme porosity, redundancy and a gross absence of basic logistics. Secondly, the system remains confronted by a litany of challenges, notably, the lack of training, collaboration with thieves and unscrupulous art dealers, financial and logistical constraints, poor working and living conditions and above all, ignorance of the financial value of collections under their care. Thirdly, the current security system around these collections and museums is dominated by the traditional manned guarding and the mystical approach. These have in recent years proven their inefficiency and redundancy. Fourthly, despite the porosity and vulnerability of the existing security systems, these museums have survived after all. This resilience has been attributed to the local spirit of solidarity and strong attachment to indigenous values. These are further reinforced by the role of ancestral and *spiritual protection*, a sustained system of traditional apprenticeship and the role of surviving resource-persons and eye-witnesses. Museum thefts occur all too frequently, yet are rarely spoken about. Most large thefts occur when the museum is closed, but the theft of smaller objects such as jewelry, coins and medals, do easily occur during opening hours. Finally, to redress the cacophony and naivety, around the present security systems, there is absolute need to blend, modernize and innovate. Above all, museums must strike the delicate balance between providing a security and ensuring accessibility.

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