

**Maasai leaders visit the UK to change the way their unique culture is represented in museums.**

- Maasai leaders visit UK to work with curatorial staff at Oxford University's Pitt Rivers Museum.
- Maasai leaders are excited to see how they can work with the Museum to take their concerns seriously and change the way the Maasai living culture is represented beyond the framework of the imperial past.
- Long-term, this project aims to change the narrative UK museums use to display Maasai artefacts and tell Maasai stories.
- Maasai leaders will also use this trip to fight for the rights of Indigenous Peoples to protect their lands, resources, and unique culture.

*For interviews or more information contact InsightShare: [hwallis@insightshare.org](mailto:hwallis@insightshare.org) / tel: 07971 850676. Print quality photos will be available from Thursday 22 November. For interviews or more information from the Pitt Rivers Museum, please contact Louise Hancock [louise.hancock@prm.ox.ac.uk](mailto:louise.hancock@prm.ox.ac.uk) 01865 613017.*

**Living Cultures** is a unique collaboration between Oltoilo le Maa (1), Oxford University's Pitt Rivers Museum (2) and InsightShare (3), that brings five Maasai leaders from Tanzania and Kenya to the UK in November (4) to work on telling different narratives about their living cultures and relate them to the continuous struggles of the present. Collaborating with museum curators to realign stories and descriptions of artefacts, the Maasai team will also showcase their powerful films and discuss how they use participatory video to bring sharply into focus their current land rights campaign.

Maasai leaders are excited to see how they can work with the Pitt Rivers Museum to take their concerns seriously and change the way their living culture is represented beyond the framework of the imperial past. The hope is to grow this work over many years and inspire other museums to follow suit. This project began a year ago when Samwel Nangiria (5) visited the Pitt Rivers Museum and witnessed how artefacts from his culture were displayed, whilst speaking at an event with Indigenous leaders at the museum.

Samwel Nangiria, Maasai leader and Director of Oltoilo le Maa, said:

*"Seeing the way Maasai sacred objects were displayed in the Pitt Rivers Museum I felt shocked. We are a living culture, not a dead one, and we want to talk to the Museum about how they can change this. I believe that working together with the Pitt Rivers Museum and with our partners at InsightShare we can honour my community and present our real culture in the museum".*

When Samwel returned home he sent an important message to Laura Van Broekhoven, Director of the Pitt Rivers Museum, that powerfully outlined his concerns and hopes for the work that they could do together. Samwel also spoke with the elders in his community. The elders used their participatory video (6) skills to send Laura a film outlining their concerns. This exchange between Maasai elders and the Pitt Rivers launched this exciting collaboration.

Welcoming the partnership, Laura Van Broekhoven, director of the Pitt Rivers Museum said: "After Samwel's visit, he sent an inspiring email message that powerfully outlined the concerns and hopes he had for the work that we could do together. The Pitt Rivers Museum has a longstanding record of working with indigenous peoples in many different areas, but we have not worked with Maasai communities so we very much welcome the opportunity to work together and start this process. The way Samwel phrased his aspiration spoke of radical hope and chimed very closely with the collaborative work we want to see happening at the Museum around inclusivity and with our Origins and Futures programme".

Samwel's email to Laura stated:

"I am imagining a partnership, piloted between your museum and the Maasai around the inclusion of living culture in the bigger framework of the museum. This will accommodate thousands of indigenous peoples around the world and will provide a benchmark for a healing process for the so many damaged hearts, knowledge and cultures of these isolated / marginalized yet important groups on our planet".

Nick Lunch, InsightShare Director, said:

"Confronting our imperial past and bringing Maasai stories up to date, Living Cultures aims to raise awareness of the ongoing struggles indigenous peoples face to protect their land, culture and communities".

Indigenous communities and their traditional ways of life are seriously under threat. In Loliondo in Tanzania Maasai communities are facing illegal land-grabs, forced evictions and human rights violations: these are the harsh realities faced by Maasai communities today. Foreign 'investment' in Maasai territory has led to the burning of villages, intimidation and violence by the authorities. Erosion of language and culture is the inevitable consequence, perhaps the ultimate conclusion of colonialism (7).

Co-ordinated by InsightShare and the Pitt Rivers Museum, **Living Cultures** opens an unprecedented space for collaboration and knowledge sharing through a series of activities that will explore new ways to address these issues, together. Long-term, this initiative aims to change the narrative UK museums use to display Maasai artefacts and tell Maasai stories. Maasai leaders will combine this work with using this visit to the UK to raise awareness of the ongoing struggles Maasai communities face in Tanzania and Kenya to protect their land, resources and culture.

## NOTES:

1. Oltoilo le Maa is a community based participatory video group formed in Loliondo, Tanzania in 2016 to document social events, human rights issues and local projects. By use of a camera and participatory video, the group fights injustices and land grabbing, promotes best practice and the protection of Maasai culture. Using participatory video they produced [Olosho](#), a powerful video exploring the ongoing land-rights struggle in Loliondo, Tanzania. The community's land - sandwiched between the Serengeti, Maasai Mara and Ngorongoro - is under threat from foreign companies and the Tanzanian government intent on evicting the Maasai and partitioning the land for luxury hunting of the world's most valuable wildlife. The video enabled them to take the community's concerns to politicians and decision makers, and successfully build on an earlier campaign, where 2.2 million people signed an [Avaaz petition](#) in 2013. This video is their story in their own words.
2. The University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) is one of the finest archaeological and ethnographic teaching museums in the world. Founded in 1884, when General Pitt Rivers, an influential figure in the development of archaeology and evolutionary anthropology, donated his collection of more than 27,000 objects to the University of Oxford, it now stewards over 550,000 objects. The museum carries out world-leading conservation and research and welcomes half a million visitors each year, and currently focuses on developing more socially engaged practice. Today, the museum is a dynamic, forward-looking institution with many connections to stakeholders throughout the world. This project forms part of the 'Origins and Futures' programme welcoming artists, elders or researchers to engage with collections and invites co-curatorial engagement with displays.
3. [InsightShare](#) is a community development organisation with 20 years of expertise in working with marginalised communities across the world using the unique power of participatory video (5) for social change. InsightShare set up The InsightShare Network in 2016 as a not-for-profit entity to support Indigenous communities to harness the power of Participatory Video as a vehicle for change. In November 2017, we hosted a learning retreat and events showcasing the work of our founding indigenous members – [Stories of Solidarity and Resilience](#). The Pitt Rivers Museum not only hosted the Oxford event, which was moderated by George Monbiot, but also provided a unique opportunity for our indigenous guests to interact with artefacts from the PRM collection, from their cultures.
4. **The two week itinerary**
  - 19-22 Nov: our Maasai guests will start the conversations with curatorial staff to see how indigenous living cultures can be better represented in the future.
  - 22 Nov (6-9pm): evening event, Oxford. The results of these initial conversations will be brought into a public discussion at Pitt Rivers Museum to explore how museums can play a role in enabling self-representation and redress and to discuss the role museums can play in the societal reparative process within this framework of radical hope and healing. The Maasai leaders will introduce films they have made on land

rights and traditional land management to the debate and we will report back on the first set of conversations.

- 26-28 Nov: we will explore these debates and discussions on a retreat in Somerset with strategic allies and co-create a land rights campaign.
  - 28 Nov (6-9pm): public event at Building Centre in London to launch the land rights campaign.
5. Samwel Nangiria is a Maasai activist and Director of NGO-Net, Loliondo, Tanzania. Samwel is a member of the Maasai indigenous community in Tanzania and has for the last seven years been working to lead a campaign to secure the community's threatened territory, land leased by the government in 1992 to a hunting company in Dubai, without the consent of the community. The community has experienced forced evictions and has been fighting land-grabbing. Samwel has been using Participatory Video with the community to make their case. He was acclaimed as Tanzania's Rural Human Rights Defender of the Year 2016. Samwel who initiated this exciting project with Pitt Rivers Museum and InsightShare, said: *"We've had journalists, we've had film crews, we've had photographers and we've seen how other people tell our story. Now it's time for us to tell our own story"*.
  6. George Monbiot, Guardian journalist and InsightShare supporter, explains the critical role participatory video has for social change in this short [video](#). He says: *"The crucial task is for people to talk directly to each other without the danger of someone else ventriloquising their concerns. This is what participatory video unlocks"*.
  7. For an up-to-date picture of what's happening to Maasai communities in Tanzania, the [Oakland Institute](#) (an independent think tank) has produced a detailed and damning report [Losing the Serengeti: The Maasai Land that was to Run Forever](#). This [article by The Ecologist](#) reported the violent situation in 2015, and contains a video and photo by the Maasai video collective working with InsightShare.