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## Decolonizing geoscience communication: a case study of a new human evolution exhibition at the Iziko South African Museum

**Robyn Pickering**<sup>1,2</sup>, Wendy Black<sup>1,3,5</sup>, Tessa Campbell<sup>1,3,4</sup>, Nkosingiphile Mazibuko<sup>5</sup>, Amy Sephton<sup>5</sup>, and Rebecca Ackermann<sup>1,6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Human Evolution Research Institute, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa (robyn.pickering@uct.ac.za)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Geological Sciences, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa (robyn.pickering@uct.ac.za)

<sup>3</sup>Archaeology Unit, Research & Exhibitions Department, Iziko Museums of South Africa, Cape Town, South Africa

<sup>4</sup>Institute of Archaeology, University College London, London, UK

<sup>5</sup>Exhibition Production & Design, Research & Exhibitions Department, Iziko Museums of South Africa, Cape Town, South Africa

<sup>6</sup>Department of Archaeology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Communication with the public is a necessary part of geoscience outreach and museums are an established medium for this. However, in many places, including South Africa, even the physical structures of museums are colonial which can create an atmosphere of exclusion, rather than one of learning, discovery and inspiration. South Africa has a rich record of the history of life, from deep time to our own human origins and the public are fascinated with these stories. We need to acknowledge that, like most scientific disciplines, human evolution (or palaeoanthropology) itself has a colonial history. As a result, narratives of human origins are often racist and patriarchal, and demographic representation remains skewed to the Global North. The combination of this colonial legacy with our colonial museums means that human evolution narratives in this space tend to othering, which can alienate young people and impede both knowledge transfer and uptake of this field by young scholars. Here we present a case study of a new permanent human evolution museum exhibit, titled *HUMANITY*, at the Iziko South African Museum in Cape Town, South Africa. Our goal in producing this exhibit was to decolonize the narrative of human evolution and decenter Whiteness, specifically the Great White Explorer narrative of discovery, which is central to most museum displays on this theme. This exhibit was co-created, with active community engagement, and input from researchers, curators, artists, community leaders, educators, school teachers, university students and more. The exhibit does not fit traditional Western museum aesthetics of white walls, square information boards and objects on plinths. We flipped the order in which such exhibits are normally presented, i.e., starting in the deep past and working towards the present day. Our flipped approach has the advantage of starting with the visitor themselves and drawing people in, focusing on the biological and cultural diversity of people in South Africa today as a means for exploring how that diversity came to be. Throughout the exhibit, we weave a story of complex human interconnectedness, a narrative that is consistent with our current understanding of the braided stream analogy for human origins. The exhibit also addresses the negative legacies of palaeoanthropological practice and encourages critical reflection on race, skin

color variation, and privilege. The biggest departure from previous exhibits comes from our intention to examine our own practice and to co-create an exhibit which speaks to a much broader audience. We believe this intentionality played a significant role in the success of the final installation and reaction from the public. We believe that being deliberate about moving away from colonial and Western norms is vital in the communication of science, in this case palaeosciences, to the public and scholars within the educational system. Our new *HUMANITY* exhibit could be a model for considering similar museum displays, especially those dealing with aspects of geosciences, palaeontology and human origins, many of which have the same problems.