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Provenance Research on Collections from Colonial Contexts

Principles, Approaches, Challenges

05

Editors:
Claudia Andratschke
Lars Müller
Katja Lembke

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Provenance Research on Collections from Colonial Contexts

Principles, Approaches, Challenges

Proceedings of the International Conference held at the Leibniz University Hanover, 21–23 June 2023

Edited by
Claudia Andratschke, Lars Müller and Katja Lembke

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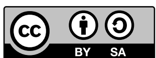

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Aware of its cultural and political responsibility in the sense of the Washington Principles and the Joint Statement, the Federal State of Lower Saxony founded a network for provenance research in 2015. It concentrates all efforts and competences of provenance research on state level and connects them with the German Lost Art Foundation. In this book series the Network for Provenance Research publishes the results of conferences, as well as chosen academic contributions of its members and partners. The network focuses on all relevant issues of provenance research, such as research on assets seized through Nazi persecution, on cultural goods from colonial contexts and on confiscation of cultural assets in the Soviet Occupation Zone and the GDR.

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Im Bewusstsein seiner kulturpolitischen Verantwortung im Sinne der „Washingtoner Prinzipien" und der „Gemeinsamen Erklärung" hat das Land Niedersachsen 2015 das Netzwerk Provenienzforschung gegründet. Es bündelt die Kräfte und Kompetenzen im Bereich der Provenienzforschung auf Landesebene und verzahnt sie mit den Initiativen der Stiftung Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste. In der vorliegenden Reihe veröffentlicht das Netzwerk Provenienzforschung in Niedersachsen die Ergebnisse von Tagungen sowie ausgewählte wissenschaftliche Beiträge seiner Mitglieder und Partner. Im Fokus der Netzwerkarbeit stehen alle relevanten Kontexte der Herkunftsforschung: Recherchen zu NS-Raubgut und Provenienzforschung zu Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten sowie zu Kulturgutentziehungen in der ehemaligen Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der DDR.

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Opening Remarks

Opening Remarks

Prof Dr Katja Lembke

Director of the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover and
Spokesperson of the PAESE Project

On behalf of the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover (*Landesmuseum Hannover*), I am very pleased to present this publication of the conference on colonial collections that we organised at Leibniz University Hannover in 2021.

The great importance of the topic is also reflected in the activities of our museum over the past years. Since 2008, we have had a department dedicated to provenance research, which initially only dealt with cultural property seized as a result of Nazi persecution, but since 2013 has been geared towards all sections and disciplines of the museum. We were thus one of the first institutions in Germany to consciously focus on objects from the former European colonies in addition to those acquired primarily during the Nazi era. The first visible expression of the new attitude towards the colonial era was already evident in the exhibition "Taboo?! Hidden Forces – Secret Knowledge" (*Tabu?! Verborgene Kräfte – geheimes Wissen*) in 2012, in which all of Lower Saxony's major collections worked together on a project for the first time. The aspect of provenance was the focus of the exhibition "A Difficult Legacy. Remnants of Colonialism Today" (*Heikles Erbe. Koloniale Spuren bis in die Gegenwart*), presented by Alexis von Poser and Bianca Baumann at the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover in 2016/17. It was our first approach to a postcolonial museum practice dealing with holdings from colonial contexts: collectors were

identified and confronted with resistance within the colonies, and precise and tangible questions were asked about objects from possible contexts of injustice.

In this volume we present the first results of a joint project that was also initiated by the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover. "Provenance Research in Non-European Collections and Ethnology in Lower Saxony" (PAESE) has been funded by the Volkswagen Foundation since 2018. At that time, there was no national funding, nor did there exist a research infrastructure in the field of provenance research on collections from colonial contexts. We are therefore very grateful to the Volkswagen Foundation for supporting this innovative project outside its usual funding guidelines.

Under the aegis of the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover, the collections in Hanover, Göttingen, Hildesheim, Brunswick and Oldenburg are being studied in close cooperation with the Leibniz University Hannover (Faculty of Law), the Georg-August-University Göttingen (Institute of Ethnology and Chair of Modern and Contemporary History) and the Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg (Institute of History). The objectives of PAESE are to conduct basic research on acquisition practices and on networking with German and non-European partners. Another important aspect is transparency, which is achieved through an informative website with a database. We have invited numerous researchers from countries of the Global South to Lower Saxony, thus opening up a close dialogue on how to deal with collections from the colonial era.

It is my personal concern to look at our collections from multiple perspectives. Thanks to their training, German ethnologists can provide important impulses, but it is only through the observation of an object by people from the same cultural context that further information emerges. For example, during the PAESE project, a simple bow from Tanzania was identified as a weapon used by insurgents during the Maji-Maji War in what was then German East Africa. Other, orally transmitted traditions and experiences can also be recorded in our collections just by working together. Furthermore, many people from Africa live in Germany and have rightly demanded their inclusion in recent years. We want to strengthen this dialogue in the future and open up our holdings if there is interest from the societies of origin. Our own team also needs to become more diverse and international.

In the future, we hope to have individual exhibits or even entire exhibitions travel to the countries of origin. However, such a tour is not easy to organise: Firstly, it must be ensured that the often sensitive objects are not damaged during transport, and secondly, art transports over many thousands of kilometres are expensive. This will require national support. We are, however, quite willing to do so and look forward to such cooperation.

The permanent return of objects to their country of origin is of course also an option. However, museums are only the "trustees" (or administrators) of the collections. Any deaccessioning must be justified and agreed with the respective governmental institution. In our case, the objects are the property of the Federal State of Lower Saxony, which is why the Ministry of Science and Culture ultimately decides on their whereabouts. So far, we have restituted human remains to Australia and Namibia. Should there be further returns in the future, I hope that this would not be the end of the cooperation. The objects in our collections are part of our common past through their history, indeed they connect the non-European countries and Germany to this day. It would be fatal if restitution meant that we stopped working together on our heritage. Therefore, I am grateful that during the conference we not only looked into the past and present and reported to each other which research has already been successfully carried out, but that we also looked into the future and discussed different ways of future cooperation.

Finally, I would like to thank Claudia Andratschke and Lars Müller, and all those who have worked hard to organise the conference and to finalise this volume. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Volker Epping, the President of the Leibniz University Hannover, for the opportunity to hold the hybrid conference at the university. It is another example of the excellent cooperation between the Lower Saxony State Museum and the Leibniz University.

Welcome

Welcome

Björn Thümler

Former Minister of Science and Culture in Lower Saxony

Dear Readers,

It is an honour for me to convey a message of greeting to this volume based on the international conference "Provenance Research on Collections from Colonial Contexts: Principles, Approaches, Challenges" that is of such great cultural and political significance.

Until this day, there has been a lack of consistent reviewing of colonialism in the German public sphere. Foreign rule over parts of Africa, Oceania, America and Asia was for a long time a suppressed chapter of European, German, but also Lower Saxon history.

Museums preserve a variety of exhibits that were acquired illegally or should not be exhibited for ethical reasons. Even at school, colonialism in general and German colonialism in particular are often not discussed with adequate reflection. Colonial history continues to have an impact today, resulting in racist prejudices, among other things. German colonialism, being relevant as well for Lower Saxony, unfortunately often remains unmentioned. Therefore, a careful and transparent scientific and social reviewing is of central importance.

With the Network for Provenance Research initiated in my office and the PAESE joint project, which was unique in this form, the state of Lower Saxony is playing a pioneer role in the field of provenance research, especially in the context of colonialism.

The collaborative project, coordinated at the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover and funded by the Volkswagen Foundation since 2018, investigates the provenance of selected holdings from colonial contexts in the five largest ethnographic collections in Lower Saxony. In addition to the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover (*Landesmuseum Hannover*), participating institutions include the Ethnographic Collection of the University of Göttingen (*Ethnologische Sammlung der Georg-August-Universität*), the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*, the *Roemer- and Pelizaeus Museum Hildesheim*, the Municipal Museum Brunswick (*Städtisches Museum Braunschweig*) and the Evangelical Lutheran Missionary Society in Hermannsburg (*Ev.-Luth. Missionswerk Hermannsburg*).

Since most of the research on the provenance of the objects is carried out within the framework of PhD projects at universities in Lower Saxony, the project represents at the same time a role model for cooperation between museums and universities contributing to the training of young academics in the field of provenance research on cultural goods from colonial contexts.

This can only be achieved in cooperation with experts from the so-called countries of origin in Namibia, Cameroon, Tanzania, Papua New Guinea, and Australia. I am pleased about the institutions and individuals cooperating with PAESE being equally represented in the program of the event and that they will finally be given “the last word” in the closing session.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Lower Saxony State Museum in Hanover and all those involved in the PAESE joint project for the conception and organization of this interdisciplinary conference. My special gratitude goes to the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover and to Dr Claudia Andratschke and Dr Lars Müller for their coordination. Equal gratitude goes to the Volkswagen Foundation and Pro Niedersachsen.

I am very pleased to have succeeded in bringing together international experts in the field of provenance research on non-European collections from colonial contexts for an exchange of views in the state capital of Hanover and worldwide.

I wish you a good read and a further stimulating discussion in the field of provenance research.

Welcome

Dr Adelheid Wessler

Head of Team Societal Transformations, Volkswagen Foundation

Dear Readers,

I was pleased to join you in the opening of the “International Conference Provenance Research on Collections from Colonial Contexts: Principles, Approaches, Challenges” and to address you on behalf of the Volkswagen Foundation.

Our funding of the project on Provenance Research in Non-European Collections and Ethnology in Lower Saxony is based on our funding initiative “Research in Museums”. Please allow me to give you a little bit of background in a few sentences about our relationship to this topic. The Volkswagen Foundation can look back on more than 10 years of funding collection-related research in museums. During this time, it has funded around 100 projects, especially collaborations between medium-sized and small museums with universities. Through the “Research in Museums” funding initiative the Volkswagen Foundation wanted to strengthen German museums as research institutions. Of central importance in this context was the intensive cooperation of museums with other research institutions as well as the promotion of young scientists in collection-related research.

The projects supported within the framework of the funding initiative were characterised by a very special diversity. The scientists supported by the Foundation have approached the objects in their collections with surprising and in some cases highly original research approaches, have brought to light interesting findings, and have also translated these findings into exhibitions that have attracted the attention of the public. In our recent funding activities, we broadened the scope of funding into the international sphere by setting up a call on "Cultural Heritage and Change" in which – besides other topics – museums and other research institutions from the Global North and the Global South are encouraged to collaborate in collections-based research.

Let me now briefly touch on our connection with provenance research.

Besides supporting several projects in this field, the Volkswagen Foundation also initiated and sponsored a few conferences addressing different aspects of provenance research in order to support scientific exchange and networking. To name just two: In 2009 at the conference "Erblickt, verpackt und mitgenommen – Herkunft der Dinge im Museum" ("Seen, Packaged and Taken – Origin of Things in Museums"), the first provenance research on cultural objects seized as a result of Nazi persecution at various German art museums, largely initiated by restitution claims, was presented. A few years later in 2015, the Volkswagen Foundation, in cooperation with the German Museums Association, took up the issue of provenance research on non-European collections in the conference "Museums of Culture, Wereldmuseum, Världskulturmuseet… What else? Positioning Ethnological Museums in the 21st Century".

The timeliness and importance of the topic of the PAESE Project became clear just from the debate about the visit of the German President Steinmeier to Namibia and the Reconciliation Agreement, in which Germany for the first time recognises the atrocities committed against the Herero and Nama as genocide.

I wish you an inspiring read!

Welcome

Prof Dr Volker Epping

President of Leibniz University Hannover

Dear Readers,

It is an honour to welcome you to this publication based on the international conference "Provenance Research on Collections from Colonial Contexts. Principles, Approaches, Challenges" concerning postcolonial provenance research.

German and European colonialism is currently at the centre of an intense debate in numerous countries – a debate in which many different groups are engaged. As President of Leibniz University Hannover, it is important to me that these discussions also take place at our university and with the people who teach and study there. On the one hand, it is important to incorporate scientific expertise in the debate, but also to deal with the legacy of colonialism or involvement by researching colonialism in our own institutions.

Provenance research deals with questions such as how objects from colonial contexts came to Europe and Germany, as well as what history they have in the respective collections and museums. Museums, including those here in Lower Saxony, are closely linked to colonialism with their collections from different African and Asian countries researched in the PAESE project.

Research into the history of these collections is necessary to start a dialogue about the future of these objects with the descendants of the former producers or users of these objects. This research can only be done in close cooperation between museums and universities. We have to make use of the access and knowledge of the museums and we have to utilise the expertise of different disciplines – and to let the results flow back into scientific research fields.

The cooperation between universities and museums is one reason why I am pleased to give a welcome note. Two departments at our university are intensively involved in this work: The Department of History is strongly engaged in the field of provenance research within the subject area "History of Africa". One issue of the department is to investigate Africa's multiple relationships with Europe. The question of how objects came from Africa to Europe during the colonial period is an important factor that also influences today's relations.

Projects by the Faculty of Law and the Department of Civil Law and History of Law take a different perspective on the conditions of acquisition in colonial contexts, but also the results of provenance research. Provenance research is not the end of the road, but in many cases it leads to questions of how to deal with the objects in the future. With regard to questions concerning restitution, an ethical and formal approach is needed. It is important to analyse not only the legal situation (hard law), but also ethical norms (soft law) in order to derive consequences and recommendations for action.

Besides cooperation between museums and universities as well as the different disciplinary perspectives on objects in today's museums, I would like to add another point. Modern science is hardly conceivable without international exchange, and this university looks back proudly on over 168 collaborations with partners in 40 countries. Such cooperation is crucial with regard to the field of provenance research, since both research on the objects and questions about their future can only be dealt with in dialogue with descendants of the formerly colonised.

I wish you all many new insights and an inspiring read.

Introduction

Provenance Research and Dialogue

Introduction

Provenance Research and Dialogue

Claudia Andratschke and Lars Müller

Ethnographic collections and museums have been at the centre of public debate for several years now. In various European countries, new museum projects have acted as crystallisation points for the discussion – such as the establishment of the Humboldt Forum in Germany or the restructuring of the Africa Museum, Tervuren, in Belgium. From a scholarly point of view, restitution discourse has been stimulated by a new critical engagement with the colonial past and its aftermath, as well as by postcolonial studies, and more generally by strong activist voices in a number of European states. Together with firm demands for the restitution of artefacts and repatriation of human remains from former colonies, this debate has been closely linked to that around how to address the colonial past.[1]

Provenance research has been an important aspect of such efforts. While dealing with the genesis or history of collections has always been a significant part of museum work, recent developments have fostered an intensive discussion on how the history of ownership, custody and translocation of objects has been shaped, from their production through their use to their later storage in museums.[2] Provenance research, whose focus in Germany after 1998 was predominantly on the identification of Nazi looted property, has increasingly turned to ethnographic collections from colonial contexts and opened up the debate to include collections of natural or archaeological specimens acquired in colonial contexts.[3]

This young and highly dynamic field of research has been further defined by numerous research projects, events and publications since the first conference, which explicitly addressed questions of provenance on colonial-era collections at the *Museum Fünf Kontinente* in Munich in 2017.[4] After the 2018 "Restitution Report" by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy for President Emmanuel Macron in France,[5] an unprecedented public debate arose around ethnographic collections, which had a profound impact on the professional community. A working group at the German Museums Association wrote a "Guide to Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts", for example, which was first published in 2018 and updated for the third time in 2021. In addition, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media (*Staatsministerin für Kultur und Medien*), the Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office for International Cultural Policy (*Staatsministerin im Auswärtigen Amt für internationale Kulturpolitik*), the Cultural Affairs Ministers of the *Länder*, the *Länder* Senators for Cultural Affairs and representatives of the municipal umbrella organisations drew up first "Framework principles" in March 2019 as a political declaration of intent regarding collections from colonial contexts.[6] In the same year, the German Cultural Council (*Deutscher Kulturrat*) published "Recommendations for Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts",[7] and the German Lost Art Foundation (*Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste*) expanded its funding lines to include colonial contexts. A "Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts" was established to coordinate exchanges with the countries of origin as well as the initiated "3-road strategy" for the digitisation and transparent online presentation of ethnographic collections in Germany. A database was created on the Benin Bronzes held in museums in Germany, and these are now gradually being returned following the joint declaration on their restitution between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2022.[8] And the portal *Collections from Colonial Contexts* was launched via the German Digital Library (*Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek*) in 2021, to be rendered multilingual by 2024.[9]

But it is not only in Germany that the debate has had a massive impact on the museum community. In the Netherlands, an "Advisory Committee on the National Policy Framework for Colonial Collections" was established in 2019, which presented its recommendations in 2021. In Belgium, an independent expert group presented "Ethical Principles for the Management and Restitution of Colonial Collections in Belgium" in 2021, and in Austria a panel of experts was established to develop recommendations for a legal framework for possible restitutions – just to name a few examples.[10]

In recent years, the discussion around the new research field of provenance research has been advanced through conferences, essays and books, and since 2022 the field has also had its own journal: *Transfer: Journal for Provenance Research and the History of Collections*.[11] The PAESE project (*Provenienzforschung in außereuropäischen Sammlungen und der Ethnologie in Niedersachsen*/Provenance Research in Non-European Collections and Ethnology in Lower Saxony), from which this volume has emerged, was located in this dynamic field; this book not only presents the initial research results of our subprojects and partners, but also aims to contribute to the further discourse.

Developing the PAESE Project

The Lower Saxony-wide PAESE project was actually planned before these most recent developments. When the founding of the Network for Provenance Research in Lower Saxony was initiated by the Ministry of Science and Culture in 2014/15,[12] there was no national funding for provenance research on collections from colonial contexts, so work on these could only be carried out on an ad-hoc or project-specific basis.[13] Besides the Lower Saxony State Museum of Hanover, other members of the network with ethnographic collections, such as in Göttingen, Oldenburg, Hildesheim or Brunswick, also saw an urgent requirement for provenance research in this field.[14] The need for *systematic* provenance research on collections from colonial contexts[15] inspired the establishment of a joint project with the aim of conducting cooperative research on the origins of the five major ethnographic collections in Lower Saxony. PAESE was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation as of 2018, and this book represents the end of the project even if its work continues in a number of capacities.

The PAESE project was an interdisciplinary and multi-perspective collaboration, unique in this form so far,[16] with a total of nine sub-projects at museums and universities in Lower Saxony: State Museum of Hanover, the Ethnographic Collection of the Georg August University of Göttingen, *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*, *Roemer- and Pelizaeus Museum Hildesheim*, Brunswick Municipal Museum, Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Hermannsburg, the Law Department of Leibniz University Hannover, and the History Department and Institute of Ethnology of the Georg August University of Göttingen.[17]

The objective of the project was, first, to conduct basic research on the origins of ethnographic collections in Lower Saxony; second, networking and cooperation with representatives of the countries or societies of origin as well as with comparable projects in the German-speaking and European regions; and third, to engage in transparency and dialogue regarding the origin of the objects and their future handling. From 2018 onwards, the project was able to establish cooperation with a number of institutions and individuals from the countries of origin.

None of our partners in Lower Saxony had collaborated on such a scale before and the network had to be built up from scratch. We encountered a diverse field – from museum organisations that already had experience in the field to those for whom this type of cooperation was new. In Namibia we worked with the National Museum and MAN (Museums Association of Namibia), in Cameroon with the *Musée Royale du Batoufam*, the *Université de Dschang,* and the Institute of Fine Arts of the University of Douala, in Tanzania with the National Museum and Fahari Yetu/Iringa Boma Museum and University of Iringa, in Papua New Guinea with the National Museum & Art Gallery, and in Australia with AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies), the Central Land Council (CLC), and the Strehlow Research Centre. And we exchanged ideas with many more, both in the context of the overarching PAESE project and within its subprojects.

Figure 1 | Visit of N. M. Mubusisi, National Museum Namibia, to the *Roemer- and Pelizaeus Museum Hildesheim* (with A. Nicklisch) © The Authors

Core Topics of PAESE

Basic Research

The selection of topics, regions and collections to be researched was based on the assessments of the respective partner institutions. The subprojects were planned mainly as PhD projects with a view to promoting the qualification of early-career scholars in this still largely unresearched field. We focused on various types of objects, regions and issues. The subprojects at the Municipal Museum Brunswick and the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover focused on collections from Cameroon. Isabella Bozsa researched the (post)colonial acquisition histories and meanings of objects of Kurt Strümpell's Cameroon Collection from the German colonial period, and Bianca Baumann investigated the appropriation contexts of two collections (Wilko von Frese and Julius Konietzko).

At the University of Göttingen, Sara Müller's focus was on trade networks and routes in Papua New Guinea, while Hannah Stieglitz researched not only the provenance of objects from nowadays Tanzania but also their use in university collections and teaching.[18] In 2020, Olaf Geerken, also at the University of Göttingen, began his subproject on *Provenances of Tjurunga*, researching the latter in the collections of the Evangelical-Lutheran Mission of Lower Saxony Hermannsburg, Hanover and Brunswick. At the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch* of Oldenburg, Jennifer Tadge focused on the collection of the Langheld brothers (especially their collection from Tanzania), including natural history specimens.[19] Sabine Lang, at the *Roemer- and Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim*, researched several collectors' networks. And Christoph-Eric Mecke, from the History of Law department of the Leibniz University Hannover, did not research the provenance of a collection but inquired into legal-historical, juridical and legal-ethical perspectives on colonial collections.

Continuous interaction between the subprojects was facilitated – among others – by an academic coordinator at the Lower Saxony State Museum of Hanover; each year there were several meetings, workshops and PhD colloquia at the universities involved, held in Göttingen (History: Prof. Rebekka Habermas; Ethnology: Prof. Elfriede Hermann), Hanover (African History: Prof. Brigitte Reinwald; Law: Prof. Stephan Meder) and Oldenburg (History: Prof. Dagmar Freist) in which the progress of the PhD theses as well as the historical, ethnological and juridical methods used were discussed.

Exchange and Collaboration

A second aspect of provenance research on objects acquired in colonial contexts, *exchange and collaboration*, is one that the PAESE project considers crucial. The aim was not simply to increase the German museums' knowledge about the objects, but also to explore the objects collaboratively – within a given framework – and to initiate an open dialogue about them.

As early as 1997, James Clifford published his essay on "Museums as Contact Zones", in which he describes how the museum can serve as a place where different actors and museum staff come together to engage in a dialogue about objects.[20] A few years later, Robin Boast critically examined this optimistic perspective, arguing that museums were originally colonial institutions and are still not neutral spaces of exchange. This neocolonial asymmetry must be reflected in any collaboration.[21] While international collaboration for museums has been discussed for a number of years, the question of what collaboration might look like, especially for provenance research, is the subject of an intense debate.[22]

The PAESE project has used these debates to reflect on its own work and also in an effort to engage in a dialogue around these issues. For example, at the beginning of the project, in 2019, we held a workshop in collaboration with the German Lost Art Foundation (*Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste*) on "Transnational Provenance Research in Ethnographic Collections", to which we invited a number of projects currently working in the field in Germany. We were thus able to bring together actors from Cameroon, Gabon, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Papua New Guinea, and representatives of collections in Basel, Berlin, Brunswick, Bremen, Göttingen, Hamburg, Hanover, Hildesheim, Lübeck, Oldenburg and Stuttgart (with the participation of the Federal States Working Group and the Ministry of Science and Culture in Lower Saxony, the Museums Association, the Network for Provenance Research in Lower Saxony, and the Working Group Colonial Provenances).[23] While this event was primarily an internal exchange within the museum community, we also placed value on actively contributing our experience to the research debate, for which the panel "Opportunities and Challenges of Cooperative Provenance Research" at the conference of the Association for African Studies in Germany (VAD) offered us the opportunity in 2021.[24]

Figures 2 and 3 | Workshop “Perspectives of Transnational Provenance Research in Ethnographic Collections in Germany”, PAESE in cooperation with the German Lost Art Foundation, 14–15 September 2019 © Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover (Photos: Kerstin Schmidt, Lars Müller)

Our cooperation rested on two pillars. First, on visits by partners from Cameroon (Albert Gouaffo, Richard T. Fossi, Paule-Clisthène Dassi, Rachel Mariembe, Hervé Youmbi, Tevodai Mambai, Ndzodo Awono, Prince Legrand de Bangoua Tchatchouang), Namibia (Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi, Werner Hillebrecht), Tanzania (Flower Manase, Jimson Sanga, Jan Küver), and Papua New Guinea (Tommy Y. Buga). Even when the COVID-19 pandemic severely restricted international travel, we were able to invite our partners to conduct joint collection surveys and discuss objects. The second pillar consisted of visits by our staff to Australia, Cameroon and Tanzania. Nevertheless, the pandemic still rendered some visits impossible.[25]

We also felt a responsibility to contribute the project's findings to a broader public discourse and so also placed value on organising and participating in panel discussions. We also conducted interviews with Cameroonian students on objects kept in Europe and made these exchanges available online.[26] We also sought to contribute to the wider debates in the countries of our partners, especially in Cameroon, where two of our colleagues were carrying out their research.[27]

We considered it important not to focus this work on the history of objects in general, and thus "merely" increase the knowledge of German museums about the objects in custody or work towards the returns of specific artefacts, but rather to initiate an open-ended dialogue. This open approach was and continues to be reflected in many ways in further activities. Opening up the collections via visits by our partners or transparent online inventories of the museums' holdings led to a more intensive discussion around restitution, for example, with consequential demands made to PAESE institutions for specific returns. The topic was debated following the visit of Werner Hillebrecht (Namibia) to the Municipal Museum Brunswick and is now likely to lead to the return of the belt of the freedom fighter Kahimemua Nahimemua.[28] In another case, Isabella Bozsa contacted the Bangwa community in Cameroon and the Royal Family of Fontem. Consultations with Chief Charles Taku and George Atem, both descendants of Fontem Asunganyi and Bangwa title holders, culminated in a visit by King Asabaton Fontem Njifua with a delegation to Brunswick and, shortly afterwards, a request for restitution.[29] The planned return of the belt (at the time of writing the final decision is pending), can thus be considered a direct output of practical provenance research and cooperation within the PAESE framework.

The PAESE Database – A Step towards More Transparency

One of the goals of the project was the transparent documentation of the researched holdings in a publicly accessible database.[30] As there was no comparable database of collections from colonial contexts available in Germany at the time, this was developed during the first two years of the project and made available online in 2020.[31] Although digitisation projects in which a museum worked together with a specific community were already under way,[32] the PAESE project planned a database that would be multiregional – and thus, in perspective, global –, open to natural history collections as well, and with a particular emphasis on the provenance data. This undertaking faced several challenges: five museum and university institutions fed data sets from different source databases (from different disciplines and institutional cultures, and thus with different recording standards, data fields, object, material and technical thesauri, etc.) into the PAESE database, continuously reflecting on questions of standardised documentation of metadata as well as the possibilities and limits of digital transparency in collections from colonial contexts.

The results were discussed at conferences and workshops. Designation and attribution became an area of crucial focus, including sensitivity to vocabularies and to the importance of avoiding images of sensitive objects. The new field of "cultural attribution" was established in order to critically address and find alternatives for previous attributions that had often been racist and misleadingly unambiguous, and first attempts were made to define methods or types of "acquisition" (not indicating a position, but a change of ownership) for objects from colonial contexts. All this work was always openly communicated; all decisions and terms are explained in an "Introduction to the Database" on the website.[33] Ultimately, the database brings together all relevant information from the basic data to the known or researched provenance, including scans of the inventory book entries, index cards or other relevant materials as well as transcripts. The focus is on documenting the provenance of the objects, indicating both known and unknown information, and the latter can be contextualised, discussed or problematised via free text fields.

SMBS_1709-0007-00

Basisdaten | Dokumentation | Weiterführende Informationen

Inventarnummer	SMBS_1709-0007-00
Alte Inventarnummer	A III c 438; Vw 1.4-44/1
Standort	Städtisches Museum Braunschweig
Objektbezeichnung	Elefantenmaske
Indigene Bezeichnung	
Sammlungsort	Afrika, Kamerun, Südwestkamerun
Material	Baumwolle Glas (Perle) Raphia
Maße	B: 67 cm; L: 92 cm
Beschriftung/Aufdruck/Etikett	
Teile	Einzelteil
Technik	
Datierung	vor 1902
Verknüpfte Person(en)/Instituti-on(en)	Kurt Strümpell
Konvolut	1. Konvolut Strümpell
Objektart	
Typ	Ethnographica
Kulturelle Zuschreibung	Bangwa
Erweiterte Beschreibung	Maske des Elefantenbundes "aka". Dazu wurde vom Maskenträger ein langes, weites Gewand getragen. Roter, schwarzer und dunkelblauer Stoff, als Futter heller Faserstoff. Farben der Perlen: Weiß, Gelb, Blau, Türkis und Grün. Die Ohren sind unterschiedlich gestaltet, auf der Rückseite ohne Perlen. Die Perlenornamente auf der Vorder- und Rückseite des "Rüssels" sind unterschiedlich. Auf der Rückseite des Kopfteils ist ein Ring aus Textilien aufgenäht. Die Schreibweise der kulturellen Zuschreibung variiert in den Quellen; auf den alten Karteikarten im Museum wird überwiegend die Bezeichnung "Bangua" verwendet.

Download: PDF

Figure 4 | PAESE Database, Elephant mask, Municipal Museum Brunswick, inv. No. SMBS 1709-0007-00 © PAESE, The Authors

The aim was to be as transparent as possible, as a precondition for dialogue on the further handling of the objects. The exchange with experts from the countries of origin so far has already shown that there are more sensitive objects than expected and that a large percentage of object descriptions made by collectors or later by museum staff that are overly generalising, incomplete, erroneous or wilfully false.[34]

The Conference

This volume compiles the contributions to the International Conference on *Provenance Research on Collections from Colonial Contexts: Principles, Approaches, Challenges*, which was held from 21 to 23 June 2021 at the Leibniz University Hannover in a hybrid format. The aim of the conference was to summarise what the project members and cooperation partners of PAESE had done over the three years, to situate the questions, methods, and preliminary results of the PAESE project within the field of provenance research on collections from colonial contexts, to discuss them publicly from various perspectives, and to give impetus for further discussion. The conference rationale was developed by the members of all PAESE sub-projects in collaboration with their cooperation partners from the countries of origin. In compiling the conference programme – and this volume – much importance was attached to the broadest possible methodological and thematic scope.

Figure 5 | The PAESE Conference, Closing Session © The Authors

The present volume continues this approach.[35] A core objective of the conference – as well as of this book – has been to hear the voices of our partners from the countries of origin. With this in mind, we were delighted that Syowia Kyambi agreed to deliver the keynote address. Equally, her contribution to this book not only provides valuable insight into her engagement with colonial contexts but also offers an artistic perspective on the topic.

The following eight chapters correspond with the panels of the conference, starting with contributions on methodological approaches of postcolonial provenance research (Section I). The second section addresses the collectors and trade networks that are the focus of many European projects conducting provenance research on collections from colonial contexts (Section II). And the following sections discuss the management and use of, and research on, objects in collections (Section III) and transdisciplinary approaches to provenance research (Section IV). One chapter explores the challenges and opportunities of restitution focussing on Namibia and Cameroon (Section V). Multiple perspectives were important in this panel as well as in the next chapter on cooperation projects between European and Cameroonian experts and scholars (Section VI). Section VII deals with the handling of sensitive Aboriginal collections from Australia in comparison with sensitive collections from Cameroon (Section VII). The last section, "Law vs. Justice", presents legal-normative and moral-ethical approaches to the evaluation of colonial collecting from various international perspectives (Section VIII). Each chapter is introduced by the chair of the respective panel.

The cooperation partners of the PAESE project, as well as colleagues from other national and international museums and universities, were also involved in the planning and implementation of the conference. Through the cooperation between museums and universities in Lower Saxony and colleagues from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Canada and above all from Australia, Cameroon, Gabon, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Namibia and Uganda with different disciplinary backgrounds, the conference was able to establish an academic and multi-perspectival exchange. The equal space given to German/European scholars and experts from the regions or countries of origin, which had already been taken into account in the planning and was expressed in all the panels, was crucial here, as well as the diversity in gender and career status, ranging from representatives of societies of origin and activists to museum practitioners, and from PhD students to professors.

In line with the project's rationale, Michael Kraus proposed placing the closing remarks in the hands of our cooperation partners from the countries

of origin. During this highly instructive session, they discussed the integration possibilities and the polyphony of sources, chances and limits of cooperation and their sustainability, to the future handling of objects and forms of restitution from their perspectives, and from historical, ethnological, regional and legal approaches. We are grateful that all participants of this discussion, Albert Gouaffo, Flower Manase, Tommy Y. Buga and Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi, submitted their statements to this volume and that the chair of this closing session, Richard Tsogang Fossi, provided a summary of the discussion (Section IX). This final discussion clearly shows that we do not yet have definitive answers to many of the questions that postcolonial provenance research has raised, and that dialogue between the various parties continues to be crucial. With the insights presented in this volume, we hope to contribute to the further discussion.

Both at the conference and while editing this book, we once again became aware of how the language we use shapes our work. We repeatedly found ourselves facing the challenge of finding a balance between language that on the one hand describes the historical conditions and, on the other, avoids perpetuating colonial or racist language and thus reproducing violence. We endeavoured to clearly mark problematic terms as source terms when their use could not be avoided for reasons of clarity or reference to former research. While the final decision was left up to the author in each case, we would like to express our sincere thanks to them for the instructive dialogue on these aspects, as well as to Wendy Anne Kopisch, who provided critical comments during the editorial process while proofreading several chapters.[36]

Beyond PAESE

This volume marks the formal end of the PAESE project and of the funding period by the Volkswagen Foundation. However, in our institutions and beyond we have initiated discussions and projects that have deepened our questioning and carried our activities further. We were particularly surprised by the rapid developments in the area of databases. To ensure the continuation of the work beyond the funding period granted by the Volkswagen Foundation, the Network for Provenance Research in Lower Saxony has maintained the PAESE website and database since 2022 and has already taken up objects

for further research projects.[37] In this regard, the database has already paved the way for a research infrastructure in Lower Saxony from which projects at regional or municipal museums can draw, initiated thanks to national funding since 2019.[38]

The PAESE database was also an important precondition for the nomination of the five PAESE institutions for their participation in the pilot phase of the "3-road strategy" of the federal and state governments by the Lower Saxony Ministry for Science and Culture mentioned above.[39] Furthermore, the PAESE facilities are thus among the 25 institutions that published records on the platform "Collections from Colonial Contexts" of the Digital Library in Germany in 2021, and who are now participating in various working groups preparing a new platform, scheduled to go online in 2024. At the same time, many of the discussions held among the PAESE network are now being continued at national and international level.

We are aware of the technical and financial framework conditions of the PAESE database as well as the fact that many other online databases but also other projects for the digital compilation of colonial holdings are under way. Collections from Kenya, Benin and Namibia with a regional focus have been published or will be published soon. The "Atlas of Absence" (*Atlas der Abwesenheit*) was recently made available and presents holdings from Cameroon in German collections, impressive both in terms of academic research and in its visualisation of the data.[40] The objective to present collections in a transparent way is also discussed and reflected in a number of guidelines and working papers that publish information about objects and collections in order to foster dialogue. The PAESE project has endeavoured to contribute meaningfully to this debate.[41]

Postcolonial provenance research is now firmly established in the PAESE institutions, and further joint applications are planned as the collections continue to work on other projects in this field. Hildesheim and Hanover are working on objects acquired in China, and a Lower Saxony-wide project on objects from the South Pacific is in the planning phase.[42]

In other cases, the collaboration also had an impact on the exhibitions. Interventions were set up at the museum in Brunswick, for example, and the reorientation of the permanent exhibitions there and in Göttingen has been sustainably influenced by the project. New joint, temporary exhibitions have also been designed, for example via collaboration between the museum in Hildesheim and partners in Namibia, an exhibition of the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover with the *Kamerunhaus*, Berlin or the revision of the

permament exhibition under new collaborative aspects at the Municipal Museum in Brunswick.[43] We are particularly delighted that some of our partners from African countries and PNG have also established contacts with other German museums and that projects are continuing here. This supports our hopes that the PAESE project has provided incentives that will continue to have an effect even after its formal end.

Acknowledgements

Finally, we would like to thank all supporters, members and partners of the PAESE project; first of all, the Volkswagen Foundation and especially Adelheid Wessler for their support and generous funding, the Ministry of Science and Culture, Lower Saxony and the Network for Provenance Research in Lower Saxony for additional funding of the conference, support and continuation of the PAESE website and database, and the German Lost Art Foundation for their support and interest in the project from the very beginning. We are also grateful to all members of the PAESE project staff for their excellent work and support well beyond the planning and implementation of the conference: Bianca Baumann, Isabella Bozsa, Anna Marquez Garcia, Olaf Geerken, Sabine Lang, Christoph-Eric Mecke, Sara Müller, Hannah Stieglitz and Jennifer Tadge.

We further extend our warmest appreciation to all project leaders, directors, curators and professors involved in the PAESE project: Katja Lembke (Director, Lower Saxony State Museum of Hanover), Evelin Haase (Curator, Municipal Museum Brunswick and project leader until 2020), Rainer Hatoum (Curator, Provenance Researcher Municipal Museum Brunswick and project leader since 2020), Peter Joch (Director, Municipal Museum Brunswick), Michael Kraus (Curator, Ethnographic Collection, Georg August University of Göttingen and project leader), Andrea Nicklisch (Curator, RPM Hildesheim and project leader), Alexis von Poser (Curator, Lower Saxony State Museum of Hanover and project leader until 2019), Mareike Späth (Curator, Lower Saxony State Museum of Hanover and project leader since 2020), Regine Schulz (former Director of RPM), Ursula Warnke (Director, *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch* Oldenburg and project leader), Dagmar Freist (Professor of Early Modern History, Carl-von-Ossietzky University Oldenburg), Rebekka

Habermas (Professor of Modern History, University Göttingen and project leader), Elfriede Hermann (Professor of Ethnology, University of Göttingen), Stephan Meder (Professor of Civil Law and Legal History, Leibniz University Hannover and project leader), Brigitte Reinwald (Professor of African History, Leibniz University Hannover), and Stefanie Michels (Professor of Global History, University of Düsseldorf). Many thanks to Maik Jachens for his support of the project, Jasmin Lasslop for her assistance with the conference organisation, and Ermisch Bureau for the book’s design and layout.

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We have exchanged ideas again and again in recent years with many other colleagues who are not mentioned by name here but whose input, interest and support helped shape the project and this book. To them too, we extend our sincerest thanks.

1 See Förster, Larissa; Eisenheiser, Iris (2019): "Zum Auftakt. Shifting Grounds", in: Edenheiser, Iris; Förster, Larissa (Eds): *Museumsethnologie. Eine Einführung. Theorien, Debatten, Praktiken*, Berlin, pp. 13–27. On the restitution debate see e.g. Habermas, Rebekka (2019): "Was verlieren wir, wenn wir restituieren? Von der Persistenz des Rettungsnarrativs", in: *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* Vol. 115, no. 2, pp. 272–275; ibid. (2021): "Rettungsparadigma und Bewahrungsfetischismus. Oder was die Restitutionsdebatte mit der europäischen Moderne zu tun hat", in: Sandkühler, Thomas; Epple, Angelika; Zimmerer, Jürgen (Eds): *Geschichtskultur durch Restitution? Ein Kunst-Historikerstreit,* Wien et al., pp. 79–99; Laarmann, Mario; Ndé Fongang, Clément; Seemann, Carla; Vordermayer, Sarah (Eds) (2023): *Reparation, Restitution, and the Politics of Memory: Perspectives from Literary, Historical, and Cultural Studies*, Berlin/Boston. Morat, Daniel (2019): "Katalysator wider Willen. Das Humboldt Forum in Berlin und die deutsche Kolonialvergangenheit, in: *Zeithistorische Forschung*, Vol. 1, pp. 140–153. Addressing the colonial past also means reflecting on the various connections between regions of former colonisers and colonised peoples. See Michels, Stefanie; Gouaffo, Albert (2019): *Koloniale Verbindungen – Transkulturelle Erinnerungstopografien. Das Rheinland in Deutschland und das Grasland Kamerun*, Bielefeld; Zimmer, Jürgen; Todzi, Sebastian (Eds): *Hamburg. Tor zur kolonialen Welt. Erinnerungsorte der (post)kolonialen Globalisierung*, Hamburg 2023.

2 Zuschlag, Christoph (2022): *Einführung in die Provenienzforschung. Wie die Herkunft von Kulturgut entschlüsselt wird*, München; Förster, Larissa (2023): "Provenance", in: Mairesse, François (Ed.): *Dictionary of Museology*, ICOM, pp. 463–467.

3 For the wealth of literature addressing provenance research on cultural goods seized by the Nazis see the overview in *Zuschlag*, 2022, *Einführung in die Provenienzforschung*; for recent literature about provenance research in colonial contexts see the contributions in German Museums Association (Ed.) (2021): *Guidelines for the Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts*; one of the first volumes addressing both contexts is Brandstetter, Anna-Maria; Hierholzer, Vera (2018) (Eds): *Nicht nur Raubkunst! Sensible Dinge in Museen und universitären Sammlungen*, Mainz; Förster, Larissa: "Der Umgang mit der Kolonialzeit. Provenienz und Rückgabe", in: Edenheiser; Förster, 2019, *Museumsethnologie*, pp. 98–103; Heumann, Ina; Stoecker, Holger et al. (2018) (Eds): *Dinosaurierfragmente. Zur Geschichte der Tendaguru-Expedition und ihrer Objekte 1906–2018*, Göttingen.

4 Förster, Larissa, Iris Eidenheiser, Sarah Fründt, Heike Hartmann (Eds): *Provenienzforschung zu ethnographischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit. Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte. Elektronische Publikation zur Tagung „Provenienzforschung in ethnologischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit", Museum Fünf Kontinente, München, 7./8. April 2017.* See also the conference on *Sensitive Heritage – Ethnographic Museums and Material/Immaterial Restitutions*, Grassi Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, 12–13 December 2018.

5 Sarr, Felwine; Savoy, Bénédicte (2018): *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Towards a New Relational Ethics*, http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf, accessed 10 May 2023. Savoy, Bénédicte (2022): *Africa's Struggle for Its Art: History of a Postcolonial Defeat*, Princeton. Gissibl, Bernhard (2019): "Everything in its Right Place? The Macron Moment and the Complexities of Restituting Africa's Cultural Heritage", *European History Yearbook*, Vol. 20, pp. 177–209.

6 German Museums Association, 2021, *Guidelines for the Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts*; the "Framework Principles for Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts"; *Framework Principles for Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts* on https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2210152/b2731f8b59210c77c68177cdcd3d03de/190412-stm-m-sammlungsgut-kolonial-kontext-en-data.pdf, accessed 5 May 2023.

7 Deutscher Kulturat (20 February 2019), *Vorschläge zum Umgang mit Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten. Stellungnahme des Deutschen Kulturrates*, https://www.kulturrat.de/positionen/vorschlaege-zum-umgang-mit-sammlungsgut-aus-kolonialen-kontexten/, accessed 20 June 2023.

8 See German Lost Art Foundation, Magdeburg/ Berlin, *Project Funding for Cultural Goods from Colonial Contexts*, https://www.kulturgutverluste.de/Webs/EN/ResearchFunding/Cultural-

Goods-from-Colonial-Contexts/Index.html. See also https://www.cp3c.org/; https://www.cp3c.org/3-road-strategy/. https://www.cp3c.org/benin-bronzes/. About Declaration see *Joint Declaration on the Return of the Benin Bronzes*, 22 June 2022, on https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/2059172/6d587c95c56499eaa385ba6d35bb720b/2022-07-01-joint-declaration-benin-bronzes-data.pdf?download=1, all accessed 10 May 2023.

9 See https://ccc.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/?lang=de, accessed 10 May 2023.

10 On trends in different countries, see the case studies in the excellent thematic issue of the Santander Art and Culture Law Review edited by Evelien Campfens and Surabhi Ranganathan on Switzerland, Suriname, Scotland, the Netherlands, Indonesia, Germany, France, England, Belgium. On the examples cited, see: Advisory Committee on the National Policy Framework for Colonial Collections, Council for Culture (Eds) (2022): *Guidance on the Way Forward for Colonial Collections: A Recognition of Injustice*, Den Haag, https://www.raadvoorcultuur.nl/binaries/raadvoorcultuur/documenten/adviezen/2020/10/07/summary-of-report-advisory-committee-on-the-national-policy-framework-for-colonial-collections/Summary+of+report+Advisory+Committee+on+the+National+Policy+Framework+for+Colonial+Collections.pdf; *Restitution Belgium: Ethical Principles for the Management and Restitution of Colonial Collections*, https://restitutionbelgium.be/en/report; Stefan Weiss (2022): "Koloniale Kulturgüter. Österreich richtet Expertengremium ein", in: *Der Standard*, 20 January 2022, https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000132682271/koloniale-kulturgueter-oesterreich-richtet-expertengremium-ein; „Restitution. Wie Österreich künftig mit kolonialen Objekten umgehen will", on *nachrichten.at*, 01.06.2023, https://www.nachrichten.at/kultur/restitution-wie-oesterreich-kuenftig-mit-kolonialen-objekten-umgehen-will;art16,3849531, all accessed 20 June 2023.

11 See https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/transfer/index, accessed 20 June 2023.

12 Members of the network include museums and universities as well as partners from libraries, archives and regional associations. Essential tasks are, among others, counselling museums in the area of provenance research, creating initiatives for research and collaborative projects, providing support with applications for funding, helping with the organisation of information, further education events, and public relations work. See https://www.provenienzforschung-niedersachsen.de/, accessed 20 June 2023. The coordination office of the network is based at the Lower Saxony State Museum of Hanover. First results of provenance research on collections from colonial contexts were presented at the exhibition *A Difficult Legacy – Remnants of Colonialism until Today*, Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover, 2016/17. See von Poser, Alexis; Baumann, Bianca (2016): *Heikles Erbe. Koloniale Spuren bis in die Gegenwart*, Dresden.

13 Andratschke, Claudia (2016): "Provenienzforschung in ethnologischen Sammlungen", in: von Poser; Baumann, 2016, *Heikles Erbe*, pp. 304–30; Andratschke, Claudia (2017): "Provenienzforschung in ethnologischen Sammlungen. Umgang mit einem heiklen Erbe", in: *Studia Instituti Missiologici Societatis Verbi Divini*, pp. 65–76; Andratschke, Claudia (2018): "Netzwerke erweitern – Von NS-Raubgutforschung zur Provenienzforschung in ethnologischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit", in: Förster et al., 2018, *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit*, pp. 295–310.

14 See e.g. Lang, Sabine; Nicklisch, Andrea (2021): *Den Sammlern auf der Spur. Provenienzforschung zu kolonialen Kontexten am Roemer- und Pelizaeus- Museum Hildesheim 2017/18*, Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net.

15 This has also been emphasised by Förster, Larissa (2016): "Plea for a More Systematic, Comparative, International and Long-Term Approach to Restitution, Provenance Research and the Historiography of Collections", in: *Museumskunde*, Vol. 81, pp. 49–54.

16 When the project finally started in 2018, there were already cooperation projects between universities, museums and countries of origin, as in Berlin or Stuttgart, but not on this scale. See the contributions in Förster et al., 2018, *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit.*

17 See Andratschke, Claudia; Müller, Lars (2019): "Projektstart PAESE – Provenienzforschung in außereuropäischen Sammlungen und der Ethnologie in Niedersachsen", in: *museums:zeit*, p. 53. https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/, accessed 20 June 2023.

18 See Stieglitz, Hannah (2022): "Koloniales Wissen aus der Kiste. Albert Peters Sammelreisen im kolonialisierten Ostafrika", in: Allemeyer, Marie Luisa; Joachim Baur und Christian Vogel (Ed.): *Räume des Wissens. Die Basisausstellung im Forum Wissen Göttingen*, Göttingen, pp. 250–253.

19 See Tadge, Jennifer (2020): "Conchyliologische Kenntnisse erwünscht…," on: *Retour. Freier Blog für Provenienzforschende*, 8 April 2020; Tadge, Jennifer (2019): "Beginn des PAESE-Projekts zur Erforschung kolonialer Sammlungsbestände", in: *Museumsjournal Natur und Mensch*, Vol. 10, pp. 43–46; Tadge, Jennifer (2020): „Vom Scheitel bis zur Sohle. Provenienzforschung am Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg", in: *Museumskunde,* Vol. 2, pp. 26–29.

20 Clifford, James (1997): "Museums as Contact Zones", in: Clifford, James (Ed.): *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, pp. 188–219.

21 Boast, Robin (2011): "Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited", in: *Museum Anthropology*, Vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 56–70.

22 For museum cooperations see especially Laely, Thomas; Meyer, Marc; Schwere, Raphael (2018) (Eds): *Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe: A New Field for Museum Studies*, Bielefeld. For postcolonial provenance research see especially Weber-Sinn, Kristin; Ivanov, Paola (2018): "Shared Research – Zur Notwendigkeit einer kooperativen Provenienzforschung am Beispiel der Tansania-Projekte am Ethnologischen Museum Berlin", in: Förster et al., 2018, *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit*, pp. 143–156; Weber-Sinn, Kristin; Ivanov, Paola (2020): "'Collaborative' Provenance Research: About the (Im)possibility of Smashing Colonial Frameworks", in: *Museum and Society,* Vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 66–81; see also the blog post Ilja Labischinski (2020): "We talk, you listen! Anregungen zu einer Diskussion über Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Zusammenarbeit mit Stakeholdern aus Herkunftsgesellschaften", on: Boasblog, 7 April 2020, https://boasblogs.org/de/dcntr/we-talk-you-listen/, accessed 20 June 2023; Scholz, Andrea (2019): "Transkulturelle Zusammenarbeit in der Museumspraxis. Symbolpolitik oder epistemologische Pluralisierung?", in: Förster; Edenheiser, 2019, *Museumsethnologie*, pp. 162–179.

23 See https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/paese-dzk-workshop-2019/, accessed 21 June 2023; Interview Larissa Förster and Lars Müller with Tebuho Winnie Kanyimba, Ndzodo Awono, Tommy Yaulin Buga, Drossilia Dikegue Igouwe, Richard Tsogang Fossi (2020): "Challenges of Transnational Cooperation. A Discussion with Researchers from the Global South", in: *Provenienz & Forschung,* Vol. 2, pp. 37–43.

24 Panel 54: Chair Lars Müller, Paper I: Isabella Bozsa, Bianca Baumann: *Cooperation as Method*, Paper II: Julia Binter, Golda Ha-Eiros: *Challenging Narratives about Africa through Collaborative Provenance Research: The Case of the Namibian Collections at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin*, Paper III: Syowia Kyambi, Mareike Späth: *Absurdity@Amani. The Joys of Joint Artistic and Ethnographic Explorations of a Colonial Collection*, 10.06.2021, further information: https://vad-africachallenges.de/panel/p-54-opportunities-and-challenges-of-cooperative-provenance-research/, accessed 20 June 2023.

25 The pandemic also had a major impact on our research trips; the stay in Tanzania had to be shortened; two employees had to be brought back with the return action of the German Foreign Office. The trip to Australia was complicated by quarantine regulations. Invitations were not possible for a certain period of time and then only with great hurdles. The pandemic thus had a massive impact on our work. See also the field report: Bianca Baumann, Isabella Bozsa (2020), *"Between Hysteria, Xenophobia and Well-Meant Advice: Two German Provenance Researchers in Cameroon During the Corona Crisis",* on: *Retour. Freier Blog für Provenienzforschende*.

26 See e. g. the discussion in cooperation with the NDR "Museumsdetektive – Auf den Spuren des kolonialen Erbes im Norden" at the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover, 13 September 2019, with

Larissa Förster (German Lost Art Foundation), Albert Gouaffo (Caméroun-Université de Dschang, Cameroonn), Flower Manase (Curator, National Museum of Tanzania, Daressalam), Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi (Curator, National Museum of Namibia, Windhoek), Michael Kraus (Curator, Ethnographic Collections, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen), Translator: Bernd Leinenbach. See e.g. the podium discussion "Woher kommst Du? Einblicke in die Provenienzforschung" in the series *Forschung made in Niedersachsen* run by the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture, 28 May 2019. See, https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Flyer-Programm-Hannover-2019-09-13.pdf, last accessed 20 June 2023; Podiumsgespräch/Webinar: *Aufarbeitung – Rückgabe – Verantwortung: Wie geht Niedersachsen mit seinem kolonialen Erbe um?*, 25 September 2020; "Die Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart – Post/Kolonialismus in der Lehre" (Lecture series *Alle Gleich Anders!? – Diversity in Theorie und Praxis*). Institut für Diversitätsforschung, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, 11 June 2021. On the interviews see: "Studentische Stimmen zu Objekten der Kamerun-Sammlungen im Städtischen Museum Braunschweig und im Landesmuseum Hannover", 9–10 March 2020, Institut des Beaux-Arts of the University of Duala, Nkongsamba, https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/videostatements-contested-heritage/, last accessed 20 June 2023.

27 Bianca Baumann and Isabella Bozsa not only conducted a workshop at Chefferie Sodiko (7 March 2020), but also another in collaboration with Rachel Mariembe from the Institut des Beaux-Arts of the University of Duala (https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/workshop-contested-heritage/; https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/workshop-sodiko/). See also *Cooperation Cameroun-Allemagne «1500 Objets D´Arts du Cameroun au Musee National De Hanovre En All.» Débats internationaux sur la provenance des biens culturels issus de contexte s coloniaux Atelier Interdisciplinaire Sur Les Biens Coloniaux et la Cooperation Avec Les Chefferies Traditionnelles*. Rachel Mariembe, Isabella Bozsa, Bianca Baumann (2020): "Voices of Students on a Contested Heritage: Workshop on Provenance Research at the Institute of Fine Arts of the University of Douala in Nkongsamba", 9–10 March 2020, on: *Retour. Freier Blog für Provenienzforschende*, 19 May 2020, accessed 20 June 2023.

28 See the contributions by Rainer Hatoum, Werner Hillebrecht and Frederick Nguvauva in this volume; see also Christiane Habermalz (2020): "Der Gürtel des Kahimemua", in: *FAZ*, 19 February 2020.

29 See *Press Release Royal Visit from Cameroon at the Municipal Museum of Brunswick*, City of Braunschweig, https://www.braunschweig.de/kultur/museen/staedtisches-museum/artikelpool-dauerhaft/bangwa-besuch-englisch.php. For the context of this case see Campfens, Evelien; Bozsa, Isabella (2022): *"Provenance Research and Claims to Bangwa Collections: A Matter of Morality or Justice?", VerfBlog,* https://verfassungsblog.de/provenance-research-and-claims-to-bangwa-collections/, all accessed 29 June 2023.

30 See e.g. "Öffnet die Inventare! Ein Appell, das vorhandene Wissen zu afrikanischen Objekten in deutschen Museen endlichen frei zugänglich zu machen", in: *Die ZEIT*, 17 October 2019, p. 64.

31 See https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/database/?lang=en, accessed 20 June 2023.

32 See e. g. Scholz, Andrea; Costa Oliveira, Thago da; Dörk, Marian: "Infrastructure as Digital Tools and Knowledge Practices: Connecting the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin with Amazonia Indigenous Communities", in: Hahn et al. (Eds): *Digitalisierung ethnologischer Sammlungen,* 299–315, and the book Hahn, Hans-Peter; Lueb, Oliver; Müller, Katja; Noack, Karoline (Eds): *Digitalisierung ethnologischer Sammlungen. Perspektiven aus Theorie und Praxis*, Bielefeld.

33 See Andratschke, Claudia; Müller, Lars (2021): *Introduction to the PAESE Database*, https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/PAESE-Database_Introduction_EN.pdf; Müller, Lars (2020): "Herausforderungen und Möglichkeiten von Datenbanken in der postkolonialen Provenienzforschung. Ein Praxisbericht aus dem PAESE-Projekt", in: *Provenienz & Forschung*, Vol. 2, pp. 52–57; Andratschke, Claudia; Müller, Lars (2021): "Dokumentation im Dialog. Die PAESE-Datenbank zur Provenienzforschung zu Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten", in:

Hahn, Hans-Peter; Lueb, Oliver; Müller, Katja; Noack, Karoline (Eds): *Digitalisierung ethnologischer Sammlungen. Perspektiven aus Theorie und Praxis*, Bielefeld, pp. 239–260; Andratschke, Claudia; Müller, Lars (2022): "Haltungen im Verbund entwickeln – ein Einblick in Aushandlungs- und Abstimmungsprozesse im Zusammenhang mit der PAESE-Datenbank", on: *Sensible Objekte – Sensible Daten*, https://sensdat.hypotheses.org/724, 19 May 2022, all accessed 20 June 2023.

34 See most recently also Sprute, Sebastian-Manès (2023): "Chaos im Museum. Bestandsaufnahme und Wissensordnung", in: Assilkinga, Mikaél et al.: *Atlas der Abwesenheit. Kameruns Kulturerbe in Deutschland*, Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, pp. 265–295.

35 We would like to express our sincere thanks for the following presentations which were not possible to transfer into a book chapter format: Sara Müller (Göttingen) on *Traces of the Sepik Expedition in Institutions of the Global North*, Tommy Y. Buga (National Museum PNG) with *Insights into Museum Practices at the National Museum and Art Gallery PNG*, Nelson Adebo Abiti (National Museum Uganda) on *Ethnography and Natural History and the question Whose Idea and What Do They Mean in Museums*, Miranda Lowe (London) on *Re-activating the Silenced Landscapes of Natural History Collections*, Shaun Angelis on *Living in their Hands: The International Repatriation of Sensitive and Restricted Men's Objects to Australia*, Matthias Goldmann on *Imperial Law's Ambiguity*. The speed with which developments in this field are taking place is shown above all by the contribution of Sylvie Vernyuy Njobati (*A People's Identity in Captive – The Continuous Ruins of German Colonial Rule in Present Day on the Nso People*) in which she makes a restitution claim for the Ngonnso', which is currently held in the Ethnological Museum (SPK) in Berlin. At the conference, an evasive statement by the museum about "Object No. III C 15017" was read, but in 2022 the Foundation Board cleared the way for a return. Two comments were given at the conference during Section I by Alexis von Poser and Oswald Masebo. See the conference booklet with abstracts of all papers on https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/conference/; Press Release SPK (27 June 2022), *Stiftungsrat macht Weg für die Rückkehr der Ngonnso' nach Kamerun frei*, https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/pressemitteilung/artikel/2022/06/27/stiftungsrat-macht-weg-fuer-die-rueckkehr-der-ngonnso-nach-kamerun-frei.html, accessed 20 June 2023. For updates on the case, see @sylvienjabati on Twitter.

36 See also Gouaffo, Albert (2023): "Plädoyer für eine dekoloniale Sprache im Museum", in: Assilkinga et al., 2023, *Atlas der Abwesenheit*, pp. 299–312.

37 Finally, the PAESE project was a starting point for the institutions and people involved and many new projects have already emerged or are planned at the moment. The Ministry for Science and Culture in Lower Saxony, for instance, has funded the five PAESE facilities to prepare a new joint project for the digitisation of their South Pacific holdings.

38 There were or are several projects in Lower Saxony, e.g. in East Frisia, Alfeld or Stade, whose results are also documented or have already been documented in the PAESE database. See Andratschke, Claudia; Jachens, Maik (2022): "Transparenz durch Digitalisierung. Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten in Niedersachsen", in: *museums:zeit*, pp. 19–20; for a project in East Frisia researching collections from Quingdao, China, see Andratschke, Claudia; Jachens, Maik (2023) (Eds): *Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten (China) in vier ostfriesischen Museen und Kultureinrichtungen*, Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net. In Alfeld the international animal trade of C. Reiche and C. Ruhe is at the focus of a project since 2021, see Andratschke, Claudia; Müller, Lars: (2021): "'Menschen, Thiere und leblose Gegenstände'. Die Alfelder Tierhändler Reiche und Ruhe als Ausstatter von Völkerschauen", in: Frühsorge, Lars; Riehn, Sonja; Schütte, Michael (Eds): *Völkerschau-Objekte*, Lübeck, pp. 131–143; the project at the University of Göttingen: https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/659291.html. The Museum in Stade started a project about the Karl Braun collection and his role in Amani, Tanzania, see; https://www.museen-stade.de/schwedenspeicher/service/forschung/sammlung-karl-braun; all accessed 20 June 2023.

39 See https://www.kulturstiftung.de/introducing-an-extensive-digital-public-repository-of-collections-from-colonial-contexts-in-germany/, accessed 20 June 2023.

40 On Kenya, see *Invisible Inventories Programme*, https://www.inventoriesprogramme.org/exhibition; on Benin see https://digitalbenin.org/; on Namibia see Förster, Larissa: *Online Guidebook and Inventory of Namibian Cultural Heritage in Museums and University Collections in German-Speaking Countries. An Initiative of the German Lost Art Foundation*, May 2022; On Cameroon, see Assilkinga et al., 2023, *Atlas der Abwesenheit*. See also *Digital Pasifik* on https://digitalpasifik.org/; and the project *Reanimating Cultural Heritage: Digital Repatriation, Knowledge Networks and Civil Society Strengthening in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone,* https://www.sierraleoneheritage.org/, all accessed 20 June 2023.

41 Next to repositoria there are also some working papers that provide overviews of demands or cases of restitution and that structure information about collections with another focus, see Moiloa, Molemo (2022): "Reclaiming Restitution: Centring and Contextualizing the African Narrative", *Open Restitution Africa*. The issue "Reclaiming our Cultural Heritage", *Jahazi: Culture, Arts,* Performance, Vol. 10, Issue 1, 2022. Müller, Lars (2021): *Returns of Cultural Artefacts and Human Remains in a (Post)colonial Context: Mapping Claims between the mid-19th Century and the 1970s*. Working Paper German Lost Art Foundation 1; Gram, Rikke; Schoofs, Zoe (2022): *Germany's History of Returning Human Remains and Objects from Colonial Contexts: An Overview of Successful Cases and Unsettled Claims between 1970 and 2021*. Working Paper German Lost Art Foundation, 3; Künkler, Eva (2022): *Koloniale Gewalt in Deutsch-Neuguinea und der Raub kultureller Objekte und menschlicher Überreste. Eine systematische Übersicht zu Militärgewalt und sogenannten Strafexpeditionen in deutschen Kolonialgebieten in Ozeanien (1884–1914).* Working Paper German Lost Art Foundation 4; Decoloniale Berlin (2022): *We Want Them Back. Wissenschaftliches Gutachten zum Bestand menschlicher Überreste/Human Remains aus kolonialen Kontexten in Berlin, Berlin.*

42 The Ethnographic Collection of the University of Göttingen had several projects addressing provenance research on sensitive collections like Tjurunga, see https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/drittmittelprojekte/637096.html. At the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg* the provenance of a Benin object has been researched, see https://www.naturundmensch.de/themen/provenienzforschung. The *Roemer- and Pelizaeus Museum Hildesheim* started a project about collections from China in 2022, see https://www.rpmuseum.de/de/museum/projekte/provenienzforschung.html, all accessed 20 June 2023.

43 *Heavyweight Fashion: Traditional Clothing and Adornment of Herero Women*. Exhibition at the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim*, 11 February 2020 – 31 January 2021. As an example of how, through the PAESE project, the collections in Hildesheim and Göttingen worked more closely together, see the exhibition: *Souvenirs aus Neuguinea? Die Sammlung des Ingenieurs Hermann Großkopf* (Souvenirs from New Guinea? The Collection of Engineer Hermann Großkopf), 13 August 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGNvB5-1dpc. For the exhibition in Hanover see https://www.landesmuseum-hannover.de/program/perspektivwechsel/, both accessed 10 May 2023. For the new permament exhibition at the Municipal Museum in Brunswick see https://www.braunschweig.de/kultur/museen/staedtisches-museum/artikelpool-dauerhaft/aa-dauerausstellung-haus-am-loewenwall.php, accessed 29 September 2023.

44 For further information see, https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/, accessed 10 May 2023.

Opening

Process & Materiality

An Ongoing Conversation within Myself and Between,
Spaces, Objects and the Moments Unseen

Opening

Process & Materiality

An Ongoing Conversation within Myself and Between, Spaces, Objects and the Moments Unseen

Syowia Kyambi

Verflechten

The word weaving keeps appearing in my thoughts and practice in both my life and also in my artworks; there is a constant weaving of ideas in my works; you'll see a transition of a thread that is going from one work to the next and the next, items that keep repeating themselves that are interwoven. The German word *verflechten* has an idea of entanglement intermeshed inside of the idea of weaving; that things are woven on top of each other, inside of each other, and my life's work; I'm always a bridge between people and organizations. I'm always connecting and networking, so I'm my practice; there is a heavy use of fabric and weaving and stitching but also there is this overlap that exists as well; of things being intermeshed and interwoven and the origins of this are also to do with my heritage being mixed. The fact that I focus in my practice a lot on British, German and East African history is evident of this *Verflechtung*.

Incorporating photography, video, drawing, sound, sculpture, and performance installation into my approach takes aim at the politics of the time as well as its legacy today. What is remembered, what is archived, and how

Figure 1 | *What Cultural Fabric?* (2009). Archival Ink printed on Photo Rag Paper, 60 × 45 cm, Santa Rosa, D.F Mexico City, Mexico © Syowia Kyambi

we see the world anew. I often engage with museums and/or ethnographic collections, personal and public archives, bridging disciplines together and visually interrogating our histories, the representation of identity, the effects on the psyche and the nuances in our relationships to each other and the world we live in. I'd like to take this opportunity to share projects I have developed which are rooted in archival material, expanding upon my processes and outcomes.

The most recent being "Kaspale", an open-ended performative intervention first realised during the process of developing works for the "AMANI: Traces of a Colonial Research Centre" exhibition at the MARKK Museum, Hamburg in 2019–2020. I took into consideration what it means to be part of this exhibition, asking myself what does it mean for me, a contemporary artist of mixed German and Kenyan heritage to work within ethnographic museums in Europe? How do I engage with materials such as those from Amani Research Station, built in 1902 during German imperial rule over Tanzania, and

the ethnographic MARKK Museum archive, without inadvertently repeating the assault and extortion the colonisers committed?

I look for refuge by building upon my use of language and methodologies to navigate the terrain of the globalised postcolonial post-industrial affects in my daily life. Creating interventions is an approach in my practice designed to generate dialogue and highlight alternative narratives within the existing narratives around identity, colonialism, and power structures.

The name *Kaspale* originates from a mix of both German and Kiswahili language, creating a multitude. "Kasper" is a word from the German language, and "pale" is influenced by sheng. Sheng is a powerful fluid language that has new words made up on a daily basis. 'Pale' in Kiswahili means over there. It is a very specific "there". A there that is nearby, visible, just around, at close proximity.

The pale in *Kaspale* is no longer pale in Kiswahili but sheng between English and Kiswahili. The process of naming *Kaspale* (German, Kiswahili, and the Sheng effect on the Kiswahili translation) is my own sheng, a mix of my German and Kenyan heritage; coherent and incoherent. The power in this mix is what I embrace using creolisation, as a result, the multitude becomes unbeatable, unbreakable, surviving due to an ability to morph, to adapt to be fluid, moving soft yet hard, as needed. *Kaspale* is a playful trickster who engage in social and satire. They have the task and ability to call out authority when needed. They speak up when others can't.

The original Makonde mask that inspired this process is part of the MARKK Museum Hamburg archive donated or sold by Hans Himmelheber (1908–2003) in the 1930s, most likely originating from an area between southern Tanzania and Mozambique.[1] In using this I was searching for a symbol of connecting to an ancestral truth, a connection to a higher being and an imagined space, creating an intervention into the Western gaze, opening the possibilities of an alternative narrative. The then curator Mareike Späth, whom I worked with in the MARKK Museum during my residency in 2019 in preparation for the exhibition, further explains her finding about the mask and my interaction with it.

> *The Makonde facemasks carved out of wood represent the so-called mindimu, the dead of the community that have risen from the graves. They can represent personified characters or abstract individual aspects of community life. Through their appearances, the mindimu contribute to character formation and awareness of the position that the individual* [assumes] *in the community, but also to guide questions of good sense in the community and intensive ties*

Figure 2 | Photograph taken of a Makonde mask that inspired *Kaspale*, whilst in residency at the MARKK Museum, Hamburg, 2019 © Syowia Kyambi

within the social organization. A special type of mindimu, which includes the mask shown, is characterised by exaggeration or deliberate deformation of individual elements, such as the ears. In this way, magical practices or caricature aspects of a character are depicted. Zoomorphic (mostly hare, antelope or monkey) and anthropomorphic elements are often combined. They embody tricksters, cross-border commuters and similar ambiguous characters who are attributed to the world of the supernatural.

Dancers wear these types of facemasks in the last phase of the initiation cycle, before or during their return from seclusion to the community. Gary van Wyk compares the creation of a mature, socially fully integrated person, which is completed performatively with the mask appearance at the end of the initiation, with the carving of a mask. Both are a lengthy process of design and perfection, in which an external transformation is paired with an internal, psychological one in order to achieve maturity, wisdom and knowledge and to render this visible. Van Wyk emphasises that female masks are usually hidden from public view and only appear from women and initiates, but never in public. This applies in particular to a variant of this mask type made of clay. Remarkably, without knowing the object and its use, Syowia Kyambi decided to work with this mask and also to use the mask not from the original, but from clay.[2]

Kaspale's Kaunda Suit / 1964–2018

Kaspale wears a Kaunda suit made of mosquito netting. The Kaunda suit represents an idea around how ideology has been shifted over time, and how an identity changes. What is interesting for me is that this uniform represented ideas around the independence era on the African continent. It was an expression of freedom, an expression of being able to be a businessman. There is no Kaunda suit for women.[3] The suit was symbolic of a desire for unity; post-colonization, a desire for upper-class citizens to share their roots with the working class. Presidents used the suit to say to their people that they are part of their people that they are together with their people, one and the same. The Kaunda suit was a powerful symbol that spoke of leanings toward socialistic ideologies. It was a way to say, "Here I am! I am free! Here I am and I am my own man! Here I am, I am my own country now; here I am, I am with my own people now; I am together with my people!"

The name Kaunda suit was coined after Kenneth Kaunda (1924–2021), the first president of Zambia, which gained independence in 1964. Several African countries gained their independence in the 1960s. A lot of men from this generation (in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s) who possessed a grey coloured Kaunda suit, have now given their suit away or very rarely have kept one. If they have, it is in the cupboard, tucked way. You will now find the grey version of this suit as a uniform of employment. Employees of shopkeepers in downtown Nairobi wear it and it has become a bus driver's uniform for private schools.

The surviving versions of the Kaunda suits are fancier and have begun to have more of a following in Western fashion, towards the aesthetic of capitalism away from socialism and communism. The suit of the 60s was worn by icons of the independent era like Sam Nujoma, Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda, pushing an ideology of solidarity with working-class selfhood away from Western thought. This ideology has shifted its power dynamics from independent African man, back to a space of servitude running counter to the post-independence ideological shift on the continent; this is a shift away from socialism and towards capitalism. For me, the suit embodies this transition.

Kaspale's version of the suit becomes indexical of the mosquito, symbolic of the ineffectual prevention of the penetration of the colonisers across the African continent, allowing solutions for colonial penetration yet an object of protection for humanity.

Figure 3 | *1964–2018, Fabric* (two Kaunda Suits). Wood, ash, glue, push pins. Exhibited in Double Consciousness, Gallery Mitte im Kubo, Bremen, Germany, 2018 / Unravelling The (Under) Development Complex, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, Germany, 2022–2023 © Syowia Kyambi

The red ochre colour featured on *Kaspale's* arms and feet was an intuitive act to generate energy, protection, and power. This, for my process, was about reclaiming armour. Somehow, I instinctively protected myself, Syowia, when taking on *Kaspale's* role. In traditional East African ritual, the use of red ochre symbolises power and knowledge, the ochre is used as both an insect repellent and also for protection against the sun. The fingers and toes are

highlighted with golden nail polish, the points of energy exiting and entering the body, and a golden mouth symbolizing the speaker, holding the space for truth telling. With the golden lip powder and the use of the mask, there is an essence of a double mask, as both are revealed in the process of the performance.

Kaspale is also gender fluid; this is one more element that feeds the aesthetics of a multitude. Not only in the name but also with gender and the anthropomorphic elements A mix between human and animal, the spirit world and our world, male and female orientation, and a mix of languages in their origins and in the hybridity of language.

> […] *identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation. They* relate *to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself, which they oblige us to read not as an endless reiteration but as 'the changing same': not the so-called roots but to coming-to-terms-with our 'routes'.*[4]

Kaspale is becoming, a constant fluidity in the tool of intervention. A becoming that is constant.

Kaspale in the Lecture Room

Kaspale's first intervention engaged the old lecture rooms within the MARKK Museum. Idly lying about, waiting, traipsing on top of the rails and tables, hopping about the basement corridors where the first practical lessons of race classification took place. This lecture room is still in use today as a learning environment. *Kaspale's* performative interruption into this space remains a work in progress. It was a beginning for me to actualise *Kaspale's* character and explore their aesthetics.

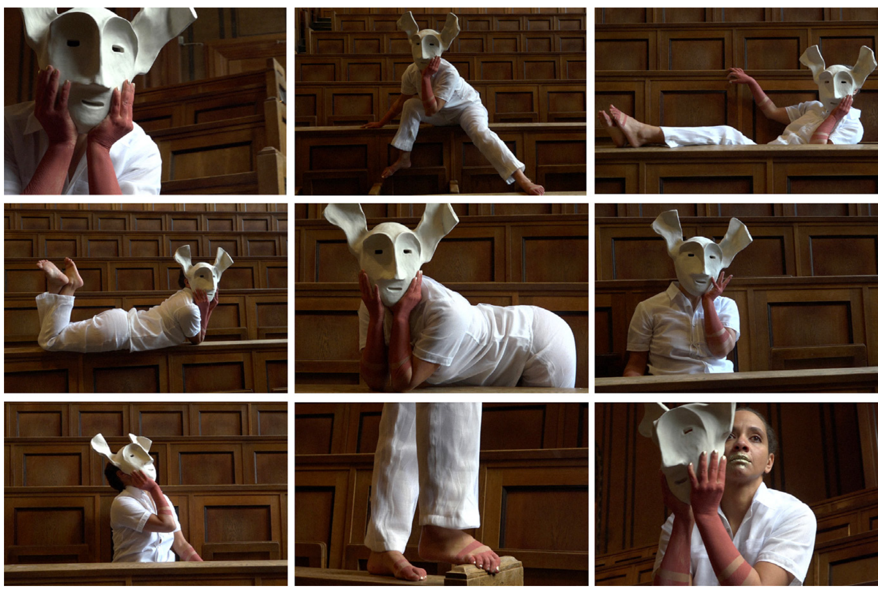

Figure 4 | *Kaspale in the Lecture Room*. Set of nine Video Stills, taken whilst in residency at the MARKK Museum Hamburg, 2019. Digital photo collage printed on photo paper with matt laminate mounted on aluminium dibond, 100 × 145 cm. Exhibited in solo show titled *KASPALE* at the Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute, Kenya 2023 © Syowia Kyambi

Kaspale's Archive Intrusion

I created a series of ten postcards, which were adapted and used for the audience of the exhibition. The audience was prompted to write their thoughts and questions and their reflections on their colonial past. The questions included, "do you know of any traces of colonial entanglement in your life, your family, your relations, your neighborhood, and your city?", "Do you collect, keep or use any objects, photographs, or material that relate to the connection between the colonial past and present?"

Kaspale intervenes into these archives, disrupting the urge for the audience respond with nostalgia over this period. *Kaspale* also becomes a tool for people to add their narratives to be prompted into self-reflection.

By inserting *Kaspale* into the photographs produced by zoologists, Julius Vossler (1861–1933) and Dr Franz Ludwig Stuhlmann (1863–1928) in the early late 19th and early 20th century during their time in Tanzania, which are now part of the museum archive. *Kaspale* disturbs these images, disrupting the urge for the audience to be nostalgic over this period.

Figure 5 | *Kaspale's Archive Intrusion / Waiting for the Botanist.* Digital photo collage printed photo paper with matte laminate mounted on aluminium dibond, 115.11 × 160 cm (also part of the postcard series). Original archive photo from the MARKK Museum Hamburg, Germany. Part of the solo exhibition titled *KASPALE* at the Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute, Kenya 2023 © Syowia Kyambi

Kaspale's Archive Intrusion / The Vortex

Figure 6 | *Kaspale's Archive Intrusion / The Vortex I* (2019). Digital photo collage printed photo paper with matt laminate mounted on aluminium dibond, 78 × 62 cm. Exhibited in the Dakar Art Biennale, Dakar, Senegal, 2022 and the Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute, Nairobi, Kenya, 2023 © Syowia Kyambi

The Vortex series came about from the desire to go beyond the archive. Here *Kaspale* exists in a place where time is uncountable; where things are unrecognizable, a darkness where you can't use your eyes to see. "[...] the structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent 'in the flesh', neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met [...]."[5]

The process of creating the vortex series was a desire to strip down the zoologist photographs in the previous works, *Kaspale's Archive Intrusion* and to go beyond what Vossler and Stulhman captured. To go through, and beyond their lens, an attempt to no longer remain in a position of looking at the past with someone else's lens. Someone whose work remains in an archive in Germany to represent what Tanzania, what Amani, what Muheza in 1902 was.

In *The Vortex II*, *Kaspale* is moving towards us in what is hard to see if it's a walk or a run. Their face leaning towards the left, masked. It is an unknown space, a dark space that holds both the past and the future, timeless, somehow unidentifiable.

With this I am seeking to go beyond the colonial past and into timelessness, a void. The vortex is a space that one could reach in meditative states; higher states of consciousness and within this vortex, *Kaspale* is still visible. Roaming through it, sitting in it, lying down in it, being with it, being within it. It is a surface to scratch, and I am still scratching to see how to go beyond the past. There is an attempt to find myself in another space, in a different narrative. This represents my desire to be free. In my practice, I am stuck inside of a colonial narrative, and I desire to observe time in another way. The constraints that are given to the African continent in terms of its historical narrative are that it tends to start and stay inside of the colonial discussion. I'm looking for ways to go beyond that.

Kaspale's Playground

Figure 7 | *Kaspale's Playground*. Performance installation, wooden chair, wooden suitcase, ceramic mask, *Kaspale*'s puppet, golden string, The Contemporary Art Institute Nairobi, 2023 / Spazju Kreattiv, Malta 2022 / Afro Vibes Festival, Frascati Theatre Amsterdam, 2022 / Afro Vibes Festival, Kikker Theatre Utrecht, 2022 / ICA Live Arts Festival, Cape Town, South Africa © Syowia Kyambi (Photo: Don Handa)

There is a story my mother told me which stuck with me, it is a landmark moment in history. I don't remember it myself; I was too young. I ran into my parent's bedroom saying "boese maenner machen bang bang". It was 1982, the year when Daniel Toroitich arap Moi (1924–2020), the second president of independent Kenya, drastically changed his leadership approach. The year he became a dictator. We lived next to Kenyatta Market behind one of the major connecting highways in the city called, Mbagathi Way. It was on this street that the Kenyan coup d›état attempt against the president was fought. I was three at the time and all I said was "bad men doing bang bang". It is often said that Moi changed after this. His fear and distrust took over and this is the legacy he is remembered by. Rather heartless, thoroughly feared, oppressive leader. A scary guy, people still hesitate when speaking about him. He died on the 4 February 2020 at the age of ninety-five. The media has spoken

about him with jubilation and his violence has been dumbed down, washed out of the narrative. In death, we all speak too kindly about the deceased. He was Nyayo House. He is behind the philosophy of Nyayo, a philosophy guided by the ideology of nationalism wrapped in authoritarianism. Nyayo means footsteps. Moi is Nyayo House, and in this period the nation walked with footsteps shaking with fear and distrust.

Nyayo House's construction started in my birth year 1979 and was completed by 1983. It was, and still is, the place where you get your papers, all the items that indicate who you are legally. The marker that shows you are part of the country, a place of official counting, official inclusion, official permission. In the basement of the same building was a torture chamber run by the Kenyan government during Moi's era. In the 1980s and early 1990s people would make large loops around the streets that are situated near Nyayo House to avoid walking in front of the building. There are rumours of it shaking, of hearing voices and screams.

Nyayo House is a symbol of the oppression of the government beyond the Moi era. It symbolises how corruption and murder by the government will never have any repercussions. Victims will not have justice. In 2013 the 5,298 Mau Mau torture survivors who filed a suit against the British brutality during the time of emergency in Kenya received £3,000 compensation each.[6] Sixty-one years on, this does not compensate all Mau Mau survivors nor is the amount sufficient compensation. This compensation does not cover in-depth reparation. The question I have is what will it take for Kenya's independent government to be held accountable for its violations on its own citizens?

There was a glimmer of hope with the opening of the Nyayo House basements in 2012, but the hope was short lived.[7]

> *Shem Ogola stood in the middle of the small crowd that had gathered to witness the opening of the basement of perhaps the most well-known building in Kenya. And in the glare of world television cameras, he broke down in a flood of tears. His body shook. Choked with emotion, he started talking to himself. Through Ogola, a torture survivor, Nyayo House torture chambers gained a human face. The nation went into shock. Kenyans had heard about the torture and abuse of pro-democracy activists which had become a frightening trade mark of the Moi regime, but seeing the inside of the horror house itself brought home the gruesome reality in a way nothing else could. Eager Kenyans burst into the basement compartments that they either did not know or did not believe existed. The true character of the defeated regime of Moi had been laid bare.*

The basement doors were once again closed to the public and there are still several other spaces from the past and the present that remain secret, some inactive and some I suspect are new active spaces.

The development of *Kaspale's Playground* came about as a need to engage with Kenya's post-independence era and a desire to dismantle a symbol of fear and oppression. To investigate the oppressive nature of a regime in which I grew up in and which informed my sense of self during my most formative years. I selected Nyayo House as a focus as it is a strong symbol not only in my memories but also in today's time.

The development of *Kaspale's puppet* was a tool to engage in Nyayo House without going to Nyayo House, which would have been a risk to my safety. *Kaspale's puppet* allows me to infiltrate in different ways these difficult spaces.

Creating the character *Kaspale* and building upon *Kaspale's* props is a methodology I use to create an extension of myself, an extension of what I needed in order to tell stories that are hard for me to tell and hard for others to hear. *Kaspale* is more than one thing. *Kaspale* is I, and yet *Kaspale* is not I. *Kaspale's* dismantling is releasing me, Syowia, the person, the mother, the artist, the friend, the lover, to be free of self-censorship, to shed what happens to a person who has lived most of her life in a space where you are afraid to speak up and to speak out, told you do not belong here and that you are not valuable. *Kaspale* is also something outside of me, Syowia. A character that can speak for a general public, because as an individual it is hard to represent a greater whole, as a creolised character, an extension of myself, an extension of my multitude, it is easier.

Revisiting Kenya's recent history, I bring to the fore the many layers of violence that underpinned former President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi's 24-year rule. Through the project *Kaspale* I seek to claim both the remembering and the telling of this history in ways that are not mediated by a supposed shared national memory. The origin of *Kaspale's* ability to communicate a 'truthiness' is rooted in my personal experience of being raised in a violent space of dictatorship which has resulted in both self-censorship and national collective censorship/amnesia which is still being played out and activated to this date, as well as the personal psychological violations which were inadvertently passed on by my parents born in 1936 and 1942. In a world at war and a world where seeing humans as nonhuman was the norm[8].

In the processes of developing this work, I noticed that creating shadows really spoke to an idea that one identity has multiple identities. That one source can produce multiple positions. This is what the project is doing.

Figure 8 | *Kaspale's Playground* (2020). Video still. Background image is a projection of photo documentation of the 1992 mother's protest © Syowia Kyambi

Resistance has always existed in the power of being multiple and not singular. The women's protests in 1992,[9] which inspired some of the performative movements in *Kaspale's Playground*, particularly the stripping off of clothing. The women who stripped in protest were not alone they were in a group. The power inside of a group is important to look at, to respect, to understand. This further prompted me to understand that the multiple *Kaspale's* who originate from the mangroves are a clan and have a relationship to their cosmos identity, the multiverse. There is interconnectedness and there is a power with the multitude.

Annie Coombes describes in her essay *Mining the Archive, Mapping the Future*:

> *If conventional forms of autobiography foreground the resolution of difficult journeys,* […] *feminist writing of the self, on the contrary, resembles unfinished business, often taking the form of a series of movements between present and past, self and Other, towards the production of an identity that is still 'in process'. And this might also describe one of the strengths of Miriam Syowia Kyambi's work – a journey, with multiple points of entry, grounded in a sense of place and history while recognizing the mutability of those concepts.*[10]

Kaspale's Ancestors

Figure 9 | *Parts of the Sister's [Kaspale's Ancestors]* (2021). Earthenware ceramics, 28.2 × 26 × 14.5 cm. Exhibited at the Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute, Nairobi, Kenya, 2023 on loan from the private collection of Michael Armitage © Syowia Kyambi (Photo: Kibe Wangunyu)

I have started to create a clan, partly to relieve *Kaspale* of the burden of representation but mainly to give *Kaspales* a context and show them that they are not alone, that they have a history, and they have a community. Further, developing the clan that *Kaspale* comes from reemphasises the strength in numbers. Initially inspired by the double face of *Kaspale's puppet* which gave way to the on-going development *of Kaspale's Ancestors*.

Figure 10 | *The Ancient Ones II [Kaspale's Ancestors]* (2021). Earthenware ceramics, 28.2 × 26 × 14.5 cm. Exhibited at the Nairobi Contemporary Art Institute, Nairobi, Kenya, 2023
© Syowia Kyambi (Photo: Don Handa)

The Green Gold

Figure 11 | *The Green Gold* (2019). Sisal, rusted metal, glass container. Exhibited at MARKK Museum, Hamburg, Germany, 2019 / The Museum of European Cultures, Berlin, Germany, 2022–2024 © Syowia Kyambi

The Green Gold features a fragmented narration highlighting the role of the plant and material sisal, and the initial plantations introduced by the Germans to East Africa from the Yucatan area of Mexico in the early 1900s.

Hanan Sabea states in her essay *Pioneers of Empire? The Making of Sisal Plantations in German East Africa, 1890–1917*, "since its inception, sisal was […] synonymous with power, capital, and progress, all ideals of the colonial project that was seeking not only economic profit but also visible signs of dominating presence."

By braiding the sisal, I am relating to the personhood of the labored black body used to build Europe's economy. The absence of this body echoes the violence of the eradication of black personhood in the colonial project. The sisal in a glass container in *The Green Gold* is sisal from the Sansevieria Trifasciata (Mother in Laws Tongue) plant, which is indigenous to Africa and anteceded sisal from colonial times. Sansevieria Trifasciata has now become a common houseplant around the world. The short braided sisal in *The Green Gold* is from Yucatán, Mexico. The same variety of sisal that Dr Richard Hindorf (1863–1954), a German botanist employed by the German East African Company (*Deutsche*

Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft) brought to Tanga, Tanzania in 1890. The longer sisal is from East Africa, which is the remnants of this original variety of sisal.

One sample of a letter out of three, which are part of the work:

> *Dear Sansevieria Trifasciata,*
> *We've never met, though I've seen you upon many a windowsill along my treks to wherever my work takes me. I believe my great great grandmother knew you well. You must have come into contact when she was making her baskets and mats. I'm amazed at how far you've travelled and how comfortably you sit within their living rooms listening in on their stories of how their families moved across the lands.*
> *Does it feel strange to now be so common? Though your name still carries the weight of the past, as all our names tend to do.*
> *Your resilience is astounding. You don't need much, I know, so easy to maintain you and tame you. I guess it's part of life, no, this constant shuffle and metamorphosis.*
> *I wish you well.*
> *Sincerely,*
> *Syowia*

Figure 12 | *I Have Heard Many Things About You* (2016). Municipal Gallery Bremen, Germany, 2016 / Pavilion of Kenya, Venice, Italy, 2023 © Syowia Kyambi (Documentation: Cantufan Klose)

I Have Heard Many Things About You, a performance installation, commissioned for the *Kabbo ka Muwala, Migration and Mobility in Contemporary Art in Southern & Eastern Africa* exhibition at the Municipal Gallery (*Städtische Galerie*) Bremen in 2016. The title of the work is an extract from a letter Namibian chief Hendrik Witbooi (c. 1830–1905) wrote to the Germans during the colonial invasion, which also connects to myself as a person that has never visited Namibia, but has heard many things about it. This is also true for the people of Bremen, many of who may have heard about Namibia but never visited or delved into deep discussions about their history and genocide of Namibia. This is a site-specific work as Adolf Lüderitz (1834–1886) born in Bremen was a German merchant and the "founder" of former German South West Africa, Imperial Germany's first colony. The coastal town, Lüderitz, the main port established to extract resources out of Namibia is named after him.

During my public four hours and thirty-minute walk, from the Oversea Museum (*Übersee Museum*) Bremen, through the railways station to the Municipal Gallery, the curators and assistants of the Gallery gave whoever showed an interest or had a question a flyer, whose text is provided below. I didn't speak during performance but at artist talk next day.

Figure 13a | *I Have Heard Many Things About You* (2016). Municipal Gallery Bremen, Germany, 2016 / Pavilion of Kenya, Venice, Italy, 2023 © Syowia Kyambi (Documentation: Cantufan Klose)

It's important to present my work to you in a public way, to do this walk between the Übersee-Museum, through Doms Hof via the Böttcher Street to the Bremen City Gallery connecting with the ground, interrupting our everyday movements in the hopes of creating a moment to ask you to think about our collective history, specifically Bremen's history with Namibia and how the colonial condition is present in our lives yet not deeply explored in educational and social forums. My art often asks how we are personally contributing to situations and my work is demanding of the audience to see themselves in the 'other' and to recognise the struggle in this process. The dress I'm wearing is a national Herero Day dress worn in Namibia in commemoration of the Herero/Namaqua genocide and those who fought for the rights of the Namibian people a country which gained its independence in 1990. The veil that follows the dress that I drag through the streets of Bremen include excerpts of letters and records from Chief Witbooi […] *one of nine national heroes of Namibia) and letters from German administrators engaging chiefs from different areas, constitutional resolutions, photographs from the Mohamed Amin Foundation of historical spaces in Namibia. History is a long and layered narrative, and my work is only a moment, a moment asking for reflection. My performative action is a highlighter, marking some narratives, instigating operations of repair, through acknowledgement, through the sharing of knowledge and through the act of being present.*

Wearing a long red dress which has a brown stomach pooch on the inside that makes the stomach fuller with a white petty coat underneath and a black jacket with red and golden embroidery and a red head dress that emulates cow horns worn in contemporary Namibia to commemorate the genocide. The 14-meter veil I pulled through the street was a collage of elements including patterned fabrics, painted material as well as photographs by Mohamed Amin sourced from the Mohammed Amin Foundation based in Nairobi of Namibia's past, Lüderitz town and national monuments, excerpts from Witbooi's letters stitched together into one piece.

Infinity: Flashes of the Past

Between 2005 and 2007 the Nairobi National Museum was supported with funding from the European Union for a facelift and expansion of the museum. It was under this umbrella that I submitted my concept for the stairwell between the two galleries, Natural History and the Ecology Gallery. *Infinity: Flashes of the Past*, consists of wooden frames, scanned archive photographs, chain-link, and an octagon mirror. Commissioned in 2007 for the National Museum permanent collection. I explored various photo albums in the museums archive department. Starting with photo material dated from 1889 to 1918 along with a World War I in East Africa 1914–1919 album as well as investigating the Beeacher archival records, the Leakey East Africa Archaeological Expedition, into Kenya's independence era looking at collections titled *Kenyatta's Functions with the People* the *Kenyatta Election Kenya* albums, to name a few.

The images used in this permanent photographic installation were scanned from the Nairobi National Museum's archive department. I sourced through the records going as far back as 1898 until current times (2007). Photographs in the piece were used to combine normal everyday life with political figures and monumental moments in Kenya's history. It was important

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Figure 13b | *I Have Heard Many Things About You* (2016). Series of video stills describing the second part of performance taking place inside of the Municipal Gallery Bremen, Germany, 2016 / Pavilion of Kenya, Venice, Italy, 2023 © Syowia Kyambi (Documentation: Cantufan Klose)

Figure 14 | *Infinity: Flashes of the Past* (2008). Wooden photo frames, octagon ceiling mirror, brass chain link, Archival Photographs from the Nairobi National Museum Archive Department. Permanent Collection, Nairobi National Museum, Kenya © Syowia Kyambi

for me that the viewer sees several images at once. Looking at photography as the camerapersons' point of view – the idea that we never really see the whole picture, just flashes of one person's perspective. The octagon shaped mirror of which these photographs hang give another dimension to the work. Not only do viewers see themselves in this history but also the work becomes infinite, the past our constant shadow. In the book *Managing Heritage, Making Peace*, Annie Coombe shares insights to this work, stating:

> *Together they represent the key categories which constructed the colonial image of Kenya to a British public keen to be simultaneously horrified, seduced and vindicated. On the one hand, these consist of ethnographic 'types', missionary propaganda, official images from British royal tours or colonial atrocities perpetrated under British colonial rule* […]*. On the other hand, images*

Figure 15 | *Infinity: Flashes of the Past* (2008), close up image. Wooden photo frames, octagon ceiling mirror, brass chain link, Archival Photographs from the Nairobi National Museum Archive Department. Permanent Collection, Nairobi National Museum, Kenya © Syowia Kyambi

> *from a newly independent Kenya, of presidential social functions and official troops inspections produce another kind of fiction. The colonial archive and its successor's meaning are transformed through Kyambi's reconfigured combinations* […]*. Kyambi has intentionally segued interruptions to the official accounts presented through familiar public genres by inserting scenes of private domesticity in unexpected context* […]*. Deliberately mixing together images from such different categories produces a tension which serves to shift the monolithic character of most commemorative sculpture.*[11]

When working with the archive, gaps and fiction becomes necessary, so that we can realise that there is another narrative, that there are other stories. And we may not know these stories but fitting them with an idea of what it could be is a process of getting to a more multi-narrative narrated archive. An archive and

narrative that is more relatable. An archive that can be observed, can be taken apart, can be reorganised; can be positioned and repositioned differently, presented differently and is ultimately more accessible. "Truth is both visible and disguised, oscillating between creative labour for the self and for others."[12] Gaps can be filled with stories; they can be filled with silence or left to be silent.

Speculative fiction is a tool that can be used when exploring the gaps in the archive. What's important is that it's not about filling in the gaps, because when one attempts that, more gaps arise. It's about making the gaps apparent, to make them come to the fore, to highlight them. Speculative fiction helps to do that. It's a broad category of fiction encompassing different genres creating elements that do not exist in the real world and often deals in the context of the supernatural, futuristic, or other imaginative themes[13]. So, there is a reality but then there's a fantasy. There's the historical and then there is speculation around the historical. For example, *Kaspale* is not a real person, but they're talking about real issues and referencing historical moments.

> *Kaspale does not re-enact violence; instead, the character makes bodily gestures to indicate identity and a sense of connectivity through a 'right to opacity'. This opacity is also in the refusal to adhere to expectations that symbols of violence must be done in mimicry or that history can be isolated from political, national, colonial and economic considerations.*[14]

It's the unearthing that speculative fiction does. It connects to something that's supernatural, unexplainable; it connects to histories. Sometimes we need a fictional story to point us in the direction of something that may have happened. To point us in the direction where we need to look further into the things we don't know about.

"In Creolization you can change, you can be with the Other, you can exchange with the Other while being yourself, you are not one, you are multiple, and you are yourself. You are not lost because you are not disjointed because you are multiple."

This is a powerful and necessary position for me to take in my practice. The quote comes from Édouard Glissant in the documentary film *One World in Relation* and it describes the power of Creolization.[15] The multitude within Creolization makes *Kaspale* indispensable. To use the methodology of creating a Creolised character has assisted me to excavate hidden narratives, to reveal the ugliness in our humanity, and ultimately to heal from the process of my past and hopefully extend this healing to people affected by the countries collective trauma.

My work is layered, complex and uneasy and asks the viewer to bear witness to the hidden histories embodied in my work. The embodiment of collective experiences, and constant search for links between the now and the morphed now. I reveal the complex framework of prejudices that are based on Western romanticizing of my context, East Africa and simultaneously explore the richness of my artistic self-reflexivity and ability to transform performatively. Eloquently blending apparently disparate ingredients together. Without interfering or directing the viewer too much, I allow my audiences to watch these different ingredients react in front of their eyes. History collapses into the contemporary through various objects and sounds including mythical characters that simultaneously embody mischief, disruption and hurt. I open my gullet like a pelican and try to digest the intangible. Rooted in my practice is a deep connection to land, earth, and home.

1 This refers to a time that is pre-colonial. I find it quite important that the museum cannot identify the exact time and origin of this mask. The ambiguity for me here holds a lot of power as it references a time that's pre-colonial. My choosing of this mask was done intuitively, the meaning behind the mask was revealed to me after my choosing to work with it.
2 Geißler, P. Wenzel; Gerrets, René; Kelly, Ann H.; Mangesho. Peter (2019): *AMANI. Auf den Spuren einer Kolonialen Forschungsstation*, Bielefeld; Späth, Mareike (2019): *Kaspales Antlitz*, Original print in German, translated by the author.
3 The pan African movement in the 1960s and 1970s and the civil rights movement have never fully taken up feminism. Black women were torn between joining feminist movements and black movements against racism. One side wasn't dealing with racism the other wasn't dealing with sexism. The fact that there is only a male uniform for the Kauna suit speaks volumes. Nationalist movements on the continent did not fight for women's rights.
4 Hall, Stuart (1996): "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?", in: Stuart Hall (Ed.): *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London, p1. 17, p. 4. The last sentence refers to Gilroy, Paul (1993): *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness Marks a Turning Point in the Study of Diasporas*, London.
5 Derrida, Jacques (1996): *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago, p. 84.
6 BBC. Mau Mau Torture Victims to Receive Compensation – Den Hague, 6 June 2013, see https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-22790037, last accessed 15 May 2023.
7 The other moment of hope was during President Kibaki's rule (2002–2013). Several new memorial monuments were created during his tenure.
8 Sadly, this is still a way of thinking in today's time between first world and third world countries as racism is still rampant.
9 In 1992, women gathered at Nairobi's Uhuru Park and stripped to protest the Government's decision to imprison their sons for fighting to introduce multipartyism.
10 Coombes, Annie E. (2013): "Mining the archive, mapping the future: violence and memory in the work of Miriam Syowia Kyambi", in: *Miriam Syowia Kyambi. Contact Zone 13. Nairobi, Kenya: Goethe Institute Kenya*, Kenia, pp. 10–25, p. 15.
11 Coombes, Annie; Hughes, Lotte, Karega-Munene (2014): *Managing Heritage, Making Peace: History, Identity and Memory in Contemporary Kenya*, London.
12 Blackmore, Kara (2020): "Scale and Silence: Visual Arts and Symbolic Reparations in Colombia and Kenya", in: *Wasafiri*, Vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 54–64, p. 19.
13 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speculative_fiction, last accessed 15 May 2023.
14 Blackmore, 2020, *Scale and Silence*, p. 18.
15 Glissant, Édouard (2010): *One World in Relation*, Documentary Film (directed by Manthia Diawara, produced by Lydie Diakhaté, K'a Yéléma Productions and Third World Newsreel).

I.

Dialogues between Theory and Practice

Approaches and Case Studies of Postcolonial Provenance Research

Dialogues entre théorie et pratique

Introduction

Dialogues between Theory and Practice
Approaches and Case Studies of Postcolonial Provenance Research

Introduction

Brigitte Reinwald

Provenance research on collections from colonial contexts is, simply put, "more than a question of origin,"[1] but necessarily implies opening new avenues to collaborative approaches that raise awareness of divergent and conflicting meanings associated with past processes of appropriation / dispossession and transfer / loss of objects by the individuals and groups involved on both sides. This desideratum for a postcolonial provenance research worthy of its designation, which has been frequently voiced in recent times, is usually accompanied by the demand for transparent cooperation with the societies or communities of origin on an equal footing. The challenges involved are manifold if the claim is not to pay mere lip service that fashionably grazes the surface of an otherwise self-referential research persistently oriented towards "knowledge production for European museums".[2]

In this respect, it is not surprising that the concept of origin and the designations of "societies of origin" derived from it are currently being discussed as highly problematic. They perpetuate the colonial archive and its underlying epistemologies of power in several ways. Not only in the sense that they served to legitimise colonially conditioned power relations by categorising the colonised as supposedly static, ethnically organised groups, but were also adopted as classification concepts for ethnological museum collections. As Weber-Sinn and Ivanov argue, this homogenising term persists not least in

restitution debates that would be more interested in the assumed origins than the trajectories of objects within and between societies, as if "a whole society [were] the quasi natural single 'author' of a cultural item," which "obscures regional and transregional entanglements as well as social, gender and generational differences – among others – within one society."[3]

That this critical reflection should not only apply to the conditions and circumstances that shaped the historical processes of authorship, appropriation / dispossession and transfer of objects in the colonial context but is also relevant with regard to the descendants and stakeholders of the previous owners, is astutely addressed in the two case studies presented here by Bianca Baumann and Drossilia Dikegue Igouwe.

In her research paper on the biography of a royal wooden portrait figure from the western region of present-day Cameroon, Bianca Baumann emphasises the necessity of a mixed methodological approach in order to bring together the respective narratives, interpretations, attributions of meaning and (social) values that shaped the handling of this object in colonial interaction and accompanied the change of ownership.

Baumann's blending of historiographical and social anthropological approaches contributes to detaching the circumstances of the transfer of the portrait figure from the one-sided view of the surviving archival sources and to bringing possible motives of the donors into play. In this respect, the interviews the researcher has conducted with various stakeholders, i.e., regional and local rulers, dignitaries, as well as Cameroonian scholars and museum experts, provide her with insight into the knowledge systems that situated the object politically and culturally. This not only sheds light both on the significance attributed to the portrait figure, which symbolised royal power then as now, and on possible political rationales for presenting it as a gift to the German officer and later consignor to the museum in Hanover, but it also underwrites claims and expectations by the interviewees that Germany honours the bond activated by the gift-giving of their ascendants. This is not primarily about restitution, but about reactivating social relations that were set in motion by the previous change of ownership and that could translate into financial or infrastructural support for regional projects from the German side. As Baumann concludes, the multiplicity of interpretations and perspectives raised by collaborative postcolonial provenance research, testify for the high relational potential of the objects and collections removed under colonial conditions insofar as they foster the establishment of new contact zones between "societies of the present place-of-repository and former place-of-use."[4]

In her study of ethnographic objects from the present-day regions of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Southern Cameroon, which are kept in the Ethnographic Museum in Lübeck, Drossilia Dikegue Igouwe addresses the problem of exogenous and endogenous perceptions of what she understands as Fang cultural heritage objects. The objective of her provenance research is to (re) make visible the intangible values, knowledge and practical know-how that remained hidden or were concealed in the process of appropriating the objects and transferring them to European collections. Dikegue Igouwe thus ties in with recent research opinions according to which anthropological collections are "knowledge repositories for the collaborative processing of history"[5] whose potential far outstrips the mere materiality to which these objects in European museum collections are usually reduced.

As the author's preliminary findings in exploring Fang reliquary figurines and masks (formerly) attributed to Fang rituals suggest, colonially-influenced ethnological assumptions about a single origin or sole authorship of these objects, which emerged in the process of appropriation by Europeans and were solidified on inventory maps, should be set aside in favour of an examination of the circulation routes, cultural borrowings and ritual circumstances of use that may have shaped the social life and cultural meaning of the objects prior to their removal, in order to also trace the involvement of all participants in their trajectories within and between African societies. However, we might ask to what extent we should qualify the retrospective testimonies collected in this regard as endogenous narratives, as the author herself mentions in passing.

What unites both case studies is the ambition of their authors to go beyond binary narratives and self-referential interpretations of objects of colonial contexts by taking up the challenge of testing and implementing appropriate methods to enter into a dialogue with descendants and actors of the "societies of origin". The diverging and conflicting meanings they attach to past processes of dispossession and transfer and their present effects are to be understood as an indispensable corrective to Eurocentric perspectives on these historical processes and thus as an integral part of a collaborative postcolonial provenance research that still needs to be further developed, mindful of the unequal socio-cultural conditions between the present places of storage and the former places of use of the objects in question.

1 Headline of the Interview with Antoinette Maget Dominicé (Junior Professor for Cultural Heritage and Provenance Research, Institute of Art History, LMU, Munich), Uta Werlich (Director of the Five Continents Museum, Munich), and Philipp Schorch (Professor of Museum Anthropology at LMU). See Filser, Hubert; Thurau, Martin: "More than a question of origin" in: *Einsichten / Insights*, 4 July 2022, https://www.lmu.de/en/newsroom/news-overview/news/more-than-a-question-of-origin.html, accessed 1 July 2023.
2 See the contribution of Bianca Baumann in this volume.
3 Weber-Sinn, Kristin; Ivanov, Paola (2020): "'Collaborative' provenance research – About the (im) possibility of smashing colonial frameworks", in: *Museum & Society*, Vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 66–81, p. 75.
4 See the contribution of Bianca Baumann in this volume.
5 Philipp Schorch in the interview with Hubert Filser & Martin Thurau (see endnote 1).

I.

Dialogues between Theory and Practice
Approaches and Case Studies of Postcolonial Provenance Research

Holistic Visions of Fang Heritage Objects

The Problem of Endogenous and Exogenous Categorisation

Holistic Visions of Fang Heritage Objects

The Problem of Endogenous and Exogenous Categorisation

Drossilia Dikegue Igouwe

Abstract

In my holistic view of Fang heritage objects, I distinguish between two narratives. One is characterised by the Western vision of African heritage, which views it "from the outside" and which I refer to as an exogenous representation. This exogenous narrative is based on discoveries, explorations, voyages and their subsequent narratives, and ranges from the collections of cultural goods to the preservation, cataloguing and categorisation in exhibitions in Europe. For this reason, the debate on possible restitution should by no means be restricted to this Western view alone, whose narrative would then become the only perception of African heritages. The second narrative, which is in a way an endogenous view, always within the general framework of the holistic approach to African heritage, represents and must represent the "perception" of the African continent itself. This African "narrative" is far older than the European stance, and is based on African worldviews and cultures that have existed since long before Europeans were collecting and appropriating objects, often also inflicting humiliation and violence. For a long time, almost no attention has been paid to the African narrative. But now the African narrative is taking shape.

Visions holistiques des objets du patrimoine fang : la problématique de la catégorisation endogène et exogène (Résumé)

Dans mon approche globale des objets du patrimoine fang, je distingue deux discours. Le premier se caractérise par la vision occidentale du patrimoine africain, qui le perçoit «de l'extérieur» et que je qualifie de représentation exogène. Ce discours exogène est fondé sur des découvertes, des explorations, des voyages et les récits qui en découlent. Il va des collections des biens culturels à la préservation, au répertoriage et à la catégorisation dans les expositions en Europe. C'est pourquoi le débat sur une éventuelle restitution ne doit en aucun cas se limiter à cette seule vision occidentale, dont le discours deviendrait alors la seule perception du patrimoine africain. Le second discours, qui est en quelque sorte une vision endogène, toujours dans le cadre général de l'approche holistique du patrimoine africain, représente et doit représenter la « perception » du continent africain lui-même. Ce «discours» africain est bien plus ancien que la vision européenne et repose sur des visions du monde et des cultures africaines qui existaient bien avant que les Européens ne collectent et ne s'approprient des objets, infligeant souvent des humiliations et des violences. Pendant longtemps, le discours africain ne suscitait guère d'intérêt. Mais aujourd'hui, ce discours prend forme.

In the early 20th century, Pan-African congresses were held in Britain, the United States and throughout Europe, followed by those held in Africa. The African narrative has developed mainly through relevant conferences organised by educated Africans from Africa and the diaspora, and further crystallised by UNESCO's heritage conventions in particular. UNESCO now sets the rules by reinforcing the endogenous aspect of this heritage.

It also received recognition by Modern Art; European artists who discovered African art early on drew inspiration from it for their works (Rubin 1996).[1] These "narratives" of African cultural heritage are the subject of this presentation and the objective of my research, which seeks to contribute to a global view of the perception of African cultural heritage.

An interesting discussion is currently taking place in Europe and Africa, especially between the former colonial powers and the colonised peoples of Africa, concerning the ownership of African cultural property in European museums, galleries and repositories. These objects are mainly considered as material goods, and their inherent spiritual values are not sufficiently taken into account. Consequently, the exchange of intangible values, knowledge

and know-how is not adequately considered, although this aspect of restitution is probably even more important than the material goods themselves. In what follows, I analyse these circumstances, which I mainly encountered during my field research in Central Africa.[2]

In a holistic consideration of heritage objects, the study of their provenance is the beginning of a process that can lead to a reasoned restitution to the former owners. At the same time, since this is a holistic approach, we must also take into account the circumstances of the circulation of objects, step by step, involving all participants: creator and maker, users of the objects in their circumstances, collectors or buyers, private and public collections. Thus, for a clear vision of heritage objects, the holistic approach to determining the provenance integrates all these parameters at the same time as we will see later: the circulation of heritage objects with all the partners involved, the destination of the objects in the collections (public and private), and eventually the restitution.

The discourse analysis framework of this study ranges from the principle of "more visible" to "less visible". Objects referred to as "more visible" are examined and the obvious information is available to us, for example in the databases of the Lübeck Ethnographic Collection. On the other hand, the "less visible" aspects are hidden in the data to be collected from the population of origin, the former owners of these objects, who in the past often utilised these objects under various circumstances or rites. With information from the societies of origin, the endogenous nomenclatures of the objects can be extracted and defined to be included in lexicographic reference works (lexicons, dictionaries and encyclopaedias), and in order for application processes to be established. These nomenclatures range from the natural ecological environment of the material, through its manufacture and social use, to its acquisition by a museum or private collection. In other words, an exhibition of an object in a museum should represent both the endogenous and the exogenous aspects of knowledge about its cultural heritage.

The final narrative of the objects thus comprises meaning at different levels as well as names, social values and the circumstances of their uses; ongoing mutations that occurred during their journey from one population to another. This means that a multitude of different data must be researched, evaluated, compared and put into context. And one cannot expect these data to be obvious and easily gathered, as the following examples demonstrate.

We found that there are three knives without proper nomenclature in the ethnographic museum in Lübeck. They are referred to by ethnographers as "throwing knives" and have the following Inventory Numbers: AF 121 (1),

AF 121 (2) and AF 121 (5). This lack of nomenclature has made it difficult to assign them either to the endogenous or to the exogenous category. A reconstruction of the nomenclature of these heritage objects could, however, be based on different contributions such as a publication by Efraim Andersson ("Contribution à l'ethnographie des Kuta I")[3] or "Au Gabon" by Fernand Grébert,[4] where we can also identify these weapons. The same applies to four helmet headdresses of the Fang with the following Inventory Numbers: 70.13: 4; 70.13: 5; 70.13: 6 and 70.13: 7 (acquisition date 1909), collected by Günther Tessmann (1884–1969). In this case, the endogenous names of these types of headdresses are not identified; nor are their social values and circumstances of use. This lack of data at the Lübeck museum inspired me to conduct a survey among former Fang owners of these headdresses during my field research in 2021 (Equatorial Guinea from 28 July to 31 August, Gabon from 1 September to 5 October, and Southern Cameroon from 6 to 25 October). In this case of our data collection mission related to the nomenclature and uses of the headdresses collected by Tessmann, it was possible to receive all relevant information from the populations of origin.[5]

The objective of this chapter is to unveil and highlight the endogenous vision of the heritage object, considering the history of the society of origin, its customs, its worldview, its cults and rites. Subsequently, I seek to take into account the exogenous representation of these objects, its circulation, the social background of the collectors, their strategy, the conflicts of interest and the circumstances of collecting, right up to the presentation and storage in museums or private collections. As we will see, the holistic restitution of the object starts from the social situation of the creator and the family that commissioned the object for ritual or other purposes, moving through its social use by the community, for which the object is attributed meaning from the beginning, until passing through the hands of collectors.

The core of this work is based on a comparison of historical, ethnological and regional approaches. The diverse historical sources are interpreted by current African and European societies according to their different socialization. However, in the societies of origin, many people are able to interpret the objects collected during the colonial period not only from an African, but also from a European point of view. While they are influenced by their own African traditions, many, especially those from the younger generation, have also been educated at Western schools and universities. Whenever contradictory interpretations arise, we hope to distinguish the issues and assign them to their respective social movements.

As we can see, the notion of community of origin can become ambivalent: It is no longer the (pre-colonial) communities of origin alone that give accounts of their relatively isolated points of view; rather, an analysis within the framework of the diversity of sources must take into account the phenomenon that so-called original societies have meanwhile adapted some exogenous interpretations of their own heritage. In this scenario, we may therefore encounter contexts for data collection, analysis or interpretation that take into account changes due to the diversity of historical situations that are highlighted here, and are therefore based on a multidisciplinary approach. In case of conflicts of interpretation, the multidisciplinary approach may be particularly useful, involving history, politics, ethnology, ritual anthropology (the history of religions), linguistics, human geography, demography, art history, law (convention studies) and hermeneutics. One-sided ethnological assessments and considerations based on colonial expeditions, such as that of Günther Tessmann, made it possible, for example, within the framework of the Berlin Conference of 1884 to 1885, to allocate African spaces and territories to European nations without hesitation. Alongside the assumed right to appropriate the African continent, its subsoil resources, fauna and flora, among other riches, the European nations also claimed the prerogative to appropriate its intangible heritage (despite deeming it inferior). These objects of African heritage were already covered by the provisions of the Berlin Convention of 1884/85 during the colonial period.[6]

Today, when we talk about the restitution of African objects, some European countries, like France, have to pass laws in order to repatriate these heritage objects, for the simple reason that the latter are considered to belong to the French State. For the most part, they were collected during the colonial period and France became their legal owner. This same Berlin conference of 1884/85 gave the colonizing states the right to control the colonised African societies,[7] including the execution of rituals. It was therefore possible for the European nations to control and monitor the dances and the production of artifacts of so-called secret associations such as the Ngi (Ngil) among the Fangs, the Mwiri and the Bwiti, to name but a few, among the peoples of southern Gabon. The colonial administrations and the Christian missions worked together to control and prohibit these secret associations, for fear that they might be capable of encouraging rebellion against the administrative and colonial authorities.

We know of the importance of the City of Lübeck in the collection and preservation of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial heritage, since merchants of this north German Hanseatic city were already present in Central

Africa as well as in other parts of Africa and the world. The arrival of these heritage objects at the Ethnographic Museum in Lübeck (*Völkerkunde-sammlung der Hansestadt Lübeck*) dates back to the middle of the 19th century with, for example, the collection of Heinrich Brehmer (1830–1866) who, as a trader, was in the geographical area of Central Africa. The Brehmer collection is one of the oldest ethnographic collections in the Lübeck museum from the Ogooué basin region of Gabon. The ethnographic collections of the Lübeck museum are also and above all connected with the German presence in Africa. The famous Fang expedition of Lübeck, led by Günther Tessmann between 1907 and 1909, is an example of this and fits in well with the redefinition at that time of the museum in Lübeck, which had been created a few years earlier.

Provenance research, or the history of ownership of a work of art, is a traditional part of museum practice. For the Central African objects stored in the Ethnographic Museum in Lübeck from today's regions of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and southern Cameroon, there was only minimal information available. This was significantly supplemented and documented by Tessmann's field research between 1907 and 1909. Knowledge pertaining to these objects has therefore made considerable progress in the context of their provenance. Let us also remember that Tessmann lived in this part of Africa because of a colonial treaty, which explains his specific ties to Central African companies.

It is between these two poles, one constituting above all the provenance, the other initiating the restitution, that it is advisable to highlight the parameters of a holistic view of heritage objects. In examining these parameters, we establish the steps that determine the path between origin and restitution. In our journey, we have thus far spoken of the "less visible"; that is, the ancient provenance or the loss of these objects for the communities of origin, and subsequently of the "more visible", or the actual location of the objects, currently in public and private collections, for example. Moving from these most visible heritage objects in the collections to the least visible aspects – their prior determination in the hands of their first owners, we will rely on two examples of heritage objects.

The first is a reliquary head, *nlo biaŋ*[8] or *eyima bieri*,[9] recorded under Inventory Number 70.13:1 and collected during the 1907–1909 expedition by Günther Tessmann on behalf of the Ethnographic Museum in Lübeck (Figure 1).

Figure 1 | Reliquary Head, Lübeck Ethnographic Collection, Inventory Number 70.13:1 (Collection Günther Tessmann) © Lübeck Ethnographic Collection (Photo: Ilona Ripke)

This reliquary head belongs to the *Melan*[10] cult or the "cult of the ancestors" among the Fangs of Central Africa. Tessmann informs us that these wooden carved "ancestor figures" have several names: *biaŋ* meaning "medicine", *biaŋ malăn* or simply *malăn*.[11] Starting from the "most visible" in our holistic approach, for this example of the carved head from the Tessmann collection we find information about the circumstances of the journey of this heritage object to the ethnographic museum in Lübeck. In his work *Die Pangwe Monographie*, vol. 2 (1913), Günther Tessmann provides information about the endogenous name of the object and the geographical origin of this ancestral figure (head), from the region of *Ntumu*[12] or *Mvai*[13] in New Cameroon, as well as about the social values and circumstances of its use.[14] According to Tessmann's analysis, Fang reliquary statuaries with "simple heads" attached to the reliquary case with a more or less long stem, seem to be the oldest figurines used to decorate reliquary boxes.

Tessmann continues with his interpretation by stating that a head could better serve the purpose of concealing the true contents of the reliquary case, as the Uninitiated (Women) would have to assume that the body was in the reliquary case and there would be no reason to look for anything else inside.[15] I do not agree to his interpretation, rather assume that this kind of heads served to mark the reliquary case as a sacral object which was reserved for initiated. The Fang community is patriarchal, so only males could be initiated in a dedicated rite.

We learn more about this object from the work of Louis Perrois, a French researcher and former director of the Museum of Arts and Traditions in Libreville, Gabon. According to his book devoted to Fang statuaries (1972), this reliquary head collected by Tessmann belongs to a sub-style known as "Betsi single heads", from the category of helmeted heads known as *nlo o ngo*.[16] Perrois also addresses the inaccuracy surrounding the exact origin of this object. He challenges the statement given by Tessmann when he says that this head-reliquary would be either *Ntumu* or *Mvai* and indicates that this imprecision on the part of Tessmann would be due to the fact that he would have obtained this object indirectly, that is to say that Tessmann did not directly collect this object himself but would have received it as part of a batch, hence his hypothetical indication of its origin.[17] Perrois finally locates the object among the Betsi of the Okano valley.[18]

Nevertheless, we have only very limited information about the conditions of acquisition for this specific heritage object. According to two concordant sources, Tessmann's diary and that of his draughtsman Hans Jobelmann, we

can affirm that during the expedition from Lübeck to the Fang area (from 1907 to 1909), Tessmann and his companions inflicted brutal violence in the villages in order to appropriate heritage objects.[19]

Another example sheds more light on the journey of African heritage objects. Recently the press informed about the circulation of an African heritage object that was appropriated by Europeans during the colonial era and in turn was appropriated by descendants of former colonial administrators. This is the case of a Fang mask of the secret society of *Ngil*, which was recently put up for auction by the descendants of a colonial administrator. According to the analysis by the Montpellier experts commissioned for the auction, this *Ngil* mask, probably sculpted at the end of the 19th century, was acquired in Gabon between 1917 and 1918 by René-Victor Edward Maurice Fournier (1873–1931).[20] It is important to note that it is not known which specific Fang community was the original owner, let alone its conditions of acquisition. If we rely on the few biographies published, the French colonial administrator Fournier was promoted on 20 May 1917 to lieutenant-governor of *Moyen-Congo*,[21] a position he held until his resignation on 16 May 1919.[22] According to some experts on ritual issues in Gabon, the traditional customary justice rites of several secret associations such as the *Ngil* society were abandoned in the 1910s, causing the creation of the devices that accompanied this ritual to cease.[23] But this particular *Ngil* ritual was still practised secretly around the 1950s and in a new form in certain villages in the north of Gabon, in the province of Woleu-Ntem.[24]

However, the question remains as to the precise origin of this mask, in which Fang or Pangwe region it was collected, to which community of origin this mask belongs, to which subgroup of the Pangwe (to continue the terminology of Günther Tessmann, who for example distinguishes between the Pangwe subgroups, of which the Fang is one), to which clan, and under which conditions the mask was collected. For this holistic examination, I classify the object with the following four parameters: provenance, circulation, destination and value, ultimately identifying this object as belonging to the *Ngil* ritual. Finally, to conclude the examination of the journey of heritage objects, I will adopt a completely different approach, manifested in the journey of a heritage object within the societies of origin, hitherto referred to as the communities of origin.

Figure 2 | White Masks, Lübeck Ethnographic Collection, Inventory Number 7621b+d (Collection Hermann Cleve) © Lübeck Ethnographic Collection (Photo: Ilona Ripke)

These two white masks pictured (Figure 2) are also from the Ethnographic Museum in Lübeck with Inventory Numbers 7621b and 7621d from the collection of the German military officer Hermann Cleve (1882–1914). According to the museum's entry book, these heirlooms, along with others belonging to this collector, arrived at the museum in 1914. Initially it was assumed that these two masks must be *Ngil* or *Ngi* masks. However, according to Louis Perrois, the categorisation of these two masks is questionable. In his book *Problèmes d'analyse de la sculpture traditionnelle du Gabon* (Problems of analysis of traditional Gabonese sculpture) published in 1977, Perrois classifies these white masks from the Lübeck ethnological collection as masks of the *ngontang* (white girl), a traditional Fang dance popular in Gabon.[25]

Before Perrois, Herbert Pepper (1912–2000)[26] and Pierre Sallée (1933–1987)[27] had already communicated information on the geographic origin,

circumstances of use, and ritual practices related to the category of white *ngontang* helmet masks. The *ngontang* dance and the circumstances in which this mask is worn have been known since the 1920s in the *Estuaire* and *Moyen-Ogooué* regions of Gabon. While the name of the mask evokes a young white girl, we note that the dancer in this performance is a man. This can be understood later in the context of the history of this heritage object.

Finally, according to information from Jacques Binet (1972) and Paulin Nguema-Obam (2005), we know today that the white mask *ngontang* does not refer to a history or legend among the Fangs, that the *ngontang* probably comes from another origin, and would be a borrowing from a Nigerian population that immigrated to Gabon at the end of the 19th century in the Lambarene area.[28] During my fieldwork in Equatorial Guinea in 2021, I was told that the *ngontang* is a dance of the Fangs of Gabon. When I arrived in Oyem in Gabon, my interlocutors confirmed that the *ngontang* came from Lambarene. This statement by the inhabitants of Oyem thus proved Paulin Nguema-Obam's observation that *ngontang* is a borrowing by the Gabonese people from a Nigerian tradition that arrived in Lambarene. This case demonstrates how crucial it is to consider circulation within Africa and also the limitations of first assumptions can be, even down to provenance from a single site, as this example from the Lübeck collection shows.

Nevertheless, the secure and precise determination of the origin of these two white masks from the Hermann Cleve collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Lübeck still remains unresolved. The hypothesis that these two masks are *Ngi* masks remains to be proven, because Tessmann does not mention the presence of a mask in the *Ngi* ritual[29] in the ceremonies that he was able to attend in his book *Die Pangwe* (vol. 2, 1913). It is important to mention here that Tessmann travelled through the regions of Equatorial Guinea, especially the Ntumu region, southern Cameroon, which is also dominated by the Ntumu and Mvai sub-groups, and through part of northern Gabon between 1907 and 1909 during his *Die Pangwe* expedition.[30] For his part, Tessmann mentions *Ngi* figures made of earth, impermeable earth, or clay at certain village sites.

During my excursions in the provinces of Wele-Nzas and Kie-Ntem in Equatorial Guinea, no one was able to provide information on the presence of a mask in the *Ngi* worship ceremony. And a further issue sheds doubt on the assumption that these are masks of the *ngontang* dance: their plastic form shows only one face. While several kinds of *ngontang* helmet mask are known according to research so far, these are all Janus-faced helmets, with two, three

or even up to six sides. The plurality of faces of the *ngontang* mask plays a central role in the practice of this mask dance and for the discernment of the spirits represented in it.

In conclusion, the provenance of these two white masks from the Hermann Cleve collection of the Ethnographic Museum of Lübeck remains inconclusive. Ultimately, it appears that they belong neither to the *Ngi* ritual nor to the *ngontang* dance.

In the holistic view of the heritage object we have indicated four parameters. By origin, we mean the populations that share the use of the heritage object, the community of manufacture, of application, of language and denomination, the latter also being the community of understanding and sharing of the meaning and practice. Simultaneously we have the name, we have the production of the object, the use during rituals or everyday work or the playful use, the learning to use and the transmission of the use.

The second parameter to be defined is the circulation of the heritage object from village to village, from population to population, from seller to buyer, to the partial expropriation and for a new appropriation of goods. Others (colonial administration, private collections and museums), either voluntarily (in cases of transmission through scholarship), or by administrative, ritual or commercial transmission.

The third parameter concerns the destination in private and public collections. This is a new form of appropriation, whether by purchase, ritual (missionaries) or convention (colonial administration). The purpose of public collections is to learn about the peoples to be colonised, whereas private collections are interested in the value of the objects with a view to expanding the patrimony of those who possess these collections.

Restitution seems to be the fourth parameter of the African heritage object. This pillar is still under construction as we are only just starting to erect it. This stage concerns the willingness of states or collection owners to return heritage objects to their communities of origin. It is a question of examining the historical, conventional, material and social conditions of acquisition, selecting objects for return and, once they have arrived at their destination, establishing optimal conditions for their preservation, presentation and social use.

In conclusion, knowing the details of the above parameters can significantly contribute to solutions of restitution, depending on the circumstances and various theories or specific speculations around the object in question, and depending on the legal or physical persons involved.

1 Rubin, William (1996) (Ed.): *Primitivismus in der Kunst des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, München; and see also Grisebach, Lucius (2008): *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner und die Kunst Kameruns*. Rietberg Museum, Zürich.
2 The ZKFL (*Zentrum für Kulturwissenschaftliche Forschung Lübeck*) has enabled me to conduct scientific research on the topic *Provenance and Restitution* with a scholarship for a doctoral project at the Ethnographic Collection Lübeck (*Völkerkundesammlung der Hansestadt Lübeck*) and to participate in this and other similar conferences. I would like to express my gratitude to the ZKFL for this support, which also gives me access to the Ethnographic Collection's inventory and archives.
3 Andersson, Efraim (1953): *Contribution à l'ethnographie des Kuta I*, Stockholm, p. 181.
4 Grébert, Fernand (1948): *Au Gabon (Afrique équatoriale française). Société des missions évangéliques de Paris*, Paris, p. 41.
5 I would like to acknowledge the valuable support I received during my field research, mainly from Don Jesús Ndong-Mba Nnegue, priest of the chapel *San Martin de pores y divino niño Jesús* of Andom-Mbon cdo (Mongomo) as well as from Dr Régis Ollomo, linguist of the Omar Bongo University of Libreville.
6 See Bley, Helmut (2005): "Künstliche Grenze, natürliches Afrika? Um die Berliner Kongokonferenz von 1884–1885 ranken sich allerhand Mythen", in: *Informationszentrum 3. Welt* 282, pp. 280–283, https://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/Bley-Kongokonferenz.htm, accessed 4 February 2023.
7 Ibid.; Eckert, Andreas (2013): "Die Berliner Afrika-Konferenz (1884/85)", in: Jürgen Zimmerer (Ed.): *Kein Platz an der Sonne. Erinnerungsorte der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte*, Frankfurt am Main, pp. 137–149.
8 The object's original Fang name. Information collected during my fieldwork survey in Equatorial Guinea and Gabon in 2021.
9 See Fernandez, James W. (1982): *Bwiti. An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa*, Princeton, New Jersey, p. 256.
10 The "Melan" rite is linked to ancestor worship among the Fang. The "melan" or "alan" is also the name of the plant with the scientific name *Alchornea floribunda Müll. Arg.* used in the rite. See Nguema-Obam, Paulin (2005): *Fang du Gabon. Les tambours de la tradition*, Paris, p. 101, see also Alexandre, Pierre; Binet, Jacques (2005): *Le groupe dit Pahouin (Fang – Boulou – Beti)*, Paris, p. 110.
11 See Tessmann, Günther (1913): *Die Pangwe. Völkerkundliche Monographie eines westafrikanischen* […]. *Ergebnisse der Lübecker Pangwe-Expedition 1907–1909 und früherer Forschungen 1904–1907.* Vol. 2, Berlin, p. 117.
12 Fang dialect variant. The Ntumu are located in the regional province of Gabon (Woleu-Ntem), in the south of Cameroon and in the Rio Muni in Equatorial Guinea; see Perrois, Louis (1972): *La statuaire fan. Gabon. Mémoires O.R.S.T.O.M.* N° 59. Paris, p. 13; see also Perrois, Louis (1985): *Art ancestral du Gabon. Dans les collections du musée Barbier-Mueller. Photographies Pierre- Alain Ferrazzini*, Genève, p. 230.
13 Fang dialect variant found in the Ntem region (river name in northern Gabon and southern Cameroon; see Perrois 1985, p. 230).
14 See Tessmann, 1913, *Die Pangwe*, Vol. 2, pp. 117–118.
15 Ibid., p. 117.
16 Perrois, 1972, *La statuaire fan*, p. 335.
17 Ibid., pp. 345–346.
18 Ibid., p. 13; 346.
19 See Templin, Brigitte (2015) (Ed.): *Günther Tessmann. Mein Leben – Tagebuch in 12 Bänden (Teil 2). Band 3.* Lübeck, p. 96; See also Templin, Brigitte; Böhme, Gottfried (Eds) (2017): *Hans Jobelmann. Aus Afrika… Tagebücher, Briefe, Zeichnungen und Photographien 1907–1909*, Lübeck, p. 76.

20 See https://magazine.interencheres.com/art-mobilier/un-masque-fang-de-la-societe-secrete-du-ngil-devoile-a-montpellier/; https://www.gabonreview.com/retrouve-un-important-masque-fang-arrive-aux-encheres-a-partir-de-196-millions-defrancs-cfa/; https://afrique.lalibre.be/69108/france-un-rarissime-masque-fang-du-gabon-aux-encheres-samedi/; https://www.antiquestrade-gazette.com/print-edition/2022/february/2529/international/fang-mask-helps-if-you-want-to-keep-a-secret/ (all accessed 4 February 2023); and "Vente d'un énième masque Nguil en France. Profanation, escroquerie en bande organisée, injure publique, humiliations?", in: *Echos du nord, Hebdomadaire Gabonais d'informations.* Vol. 17, no. 766 (18 April 2022), p. 5.

21 Another name for the territory of *Afrique-Équatoriale française* (AEF), which consisted exclusively of a territory corresponding with Gabon and another with the current Republic of Congo (Brazzaville).

22 See https://magazine.interencheres.com/art-mobilier/un-masque-fang-de-la-societe-secrete-du-ngil-devoile-a-montpellier/ (accessed 4 February 2023).

23 See Leroux, L.-C. (1925): "Etude sur le Ngil", in: *Bulletin de la Société de Recherche Congolaises* 8, p. 3–10; see also Laburthe-Tolra, Philippe (2009): *Les seigneurs de la forêt. Essai sur le passé historique, l'organisation sociale et les normes éthiques des anciens Beti du Cameroun*, Paris, p. 23.

24 See Cadet, Xavier (2009): *Histoire des Fang, peuple gabonais*, Paris, pp. 402–403.

25 See Perrois, Louis (1977): *Problèmes d'analyse de la sculpture traditionnelle du Gabon. Initiations – Documentations techniques. N°32. O.R.S.T.O.M.*, Paris, p. 66.

26 Herbert Pepper (1912–2000) was an ethnomusicologist at ORSTOM and made sound recordings of African life collected in the Congo and Gabon between 1941 and 1956 and published in 1958 in the form of a boxed set of 3 LPs. The populations Pepper surveyed are quite large: Babembe, Bakwele, Bateke, Bateke-koukouya, Fang, Fang-Ntumu, Koukouya, Kouyou, Pygmy, Pygmy: Bangombe, Pygmy babinga bangombe, Pygmy-babongo, Vili and Yombe.

27 Pierre Sallée's (1933–1987) edited sound recordings on the music of Gabon in 1961 were, at the end of his work, published in 1978 in a book entitled: *Two Studies on the Music of Gabon: A Musician among the Nkomi.* The social groups to which Pierre Sallée devoted his fieldwork are the Tékés of Gabon and the Nkomi (Myénè) in the province of Ogooué-Maritime in Gabon.

28 See Binet, Jacques (1972): *Sociétés de danse chez les Fang du Gabon*, Paris, p. 45; see also Nguema-Obam, Paulin (2005): *Fang du Gabon. Les tambours de la tradition*, Paris 2005, p. 67.

29 See Tessmann, 1913, Die Pangwe, Vol. 2, pp.78-94.

30 See Templin, Brigitte (Ed.) (2015): *Günther Tessmann. Mein Leben – Tagebuch in 12 Bänden* (Teil 2). Vol. 3, Lübeck.

I.

Dialogues between Theory and Practice
Approaches and Case Studies of Postcolonial Provenance Research

What is it about?

Attempts to Interpret the Biography of a Portrait Figure from the West Region of Cameroon

What is it about?

Attempts to Interpret the Biography of a Portrait Figure from the West Region of Cameroon

Bianca Baumann

Abstract

What is the aim of a provenance research on objects from colonial contexts, what can it achieve and what does it have to provide? How can the study be conducted so that it produces results that are relevant to museum practice, historiography and the societies of origin? How can it possibly withstand the tension of expectations? Using the example of a portrait figure that a Hanoverian colonial officer gave to the institution that was to become today's *Lower Saxony State Museum*, it will be shown to what extent combined methods allow a complex picture of interpretations around the figure's biography to emerge. To assemble diverse narratives and interpretations of the object and its changing ownership, as well as to be able to frame and evaluate contemporary questions about its whereabouts and handling, both anthropological and historiographic methods are applied. With the help of approaches of both disciplines historical conditions and social practices are reconstructed as well as contemporary attitudes and interests with regards to the object's past and future were revealed. The diversity of interpretations of the object's appropriation and corresponding conclusions that can be drawn for contemporary practice demonstrate the complexity of a provenance research on objects from colonial contexts and raise the question of what it is ultimately about.

De quoi s'agit-il ? Tentatives d'interprétation de la Biographie d'une statue de la région ouest du Cameroun (Résumé)

Quel est le but d'une recherche de provenance sur des objets issus du contexte colonial, que représente-t-elle et que doit-elle apporter ? Comment l'étude peut-elle être menée afin de livrer des résultats pertinents pour la pratique muséale, l'historiographie et les sociétés d'origine ? Comment peut-elle résister à la tension des attentes ? À partir de l'exemple d'une statue qu'un officier colonial hanovrien a offert à l'institution qui allait devenir l'actuel Musée National de Hanovre, nous allons découvrir dans quelle mesure les méthodes combinées permettent de dresser un tableau complexe d'interprétations autour de la biographie de cette statue. Des méthodes ethnologiques et historiographiques sont employées pour réunir divers discours et interprétations de l'objet et de son changement de propriétaire, ainsi que pour pouvoir définir et évaluer les questions contemporaines relatives à sa localisation et à sa conservation. Grâce aux approches des deux disciplines, les conditions historiques et les pratiques sociales ont été reconstituées et les attitudes et intérêts contemporains vis-à-vis du passé et de l'avenir de l'objet sont révélés. La diversité des interprétations de l'appropriation de l'objet et les conclusions qui en découlent pour la pratique contemporaine témoignent de la complexité d'une recherche de provenance sur des objets issus de contextes coloniaux et soulèvent la question de sa finalité.

This paper presents my attempts to interpret the biography of a portrait figure from the West Region of Cameroon and the questions that came up during my research.[1] One of the essential questions, I would say, still is, what is the essence and the aim of provenance research on objects from colonial contexts? In recent years, the topic has been increasingly discussed in Germany, research structures have been created and numerous projects have been launched to deal with historically sensitive collections.[2] But what questions do we need to raise and answer so that the research is not solely self-referential, that it does not only serve the interests of the museums as a justification for their collections, or remain nothing but another form of knowledge production for European museums? As Geertz urges, the task of anthropology "is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others [...] have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said".[3] I often asked myself, what are the interests of the "societies of origin"[4] regarding objects from colonial contexts? What questions are crucial for them and what kind of research is needed so as not to launch yet another paternalistic project, a new kind of "salvage anthropology".

In Germany, provenance research on ethnographic collections often focuses on the question of the constitution of colonial relations and how contact and exchange took place. Is the reconstruction of the actual appropriation processes just as relevant for the descendants of the previous owners or is it necessary to find and follow new paths? The spectrum of possibilities of an object's appropriation and its present-day evaluation is large. The question is, however, whether the specific contact situations and appropriation modalities of most objects can be reconstructed at all and who ultimately decides on the legitimacy of the appropriation. My approach focuses on how provenance research on objects from colonial contexts can be conducted to deliver results that are relevant for museum practice, a historiography as well as for the societies of origin.

Methodological Approach

I have taken a historiographical and anthropological approach to provenance research. To reconstruct the historical circumstances, various archival sources have been analysed such as documents of the German colonial administration, historical journals, travel literature and documents of the museum archives. However, these sources exclusively reflect the viewpoint of the colonisers. I have counteracted this problem by including diverse perspectives from Cameroon. Hence, I have conducted interviews with kings, notables, princes, museum experts, curators, scholars, students and the elder population to capture present-day evaluations and interpretations of the objects, the colonial past in general and the appropriation circumstances in particular as well as to find out their views on how to deal with objects from colonial contexts in European museums.

Collaboration with Cameroonian experts both in Cameroon and in Germany offered further access to research. By including individual views from the regions of origin, the ethnocentric and one-dimensional narrative of colonial history could be broken up and local knowledge was included in the analysis. Participant observation in Cameroon allowed a multifactorial insight into the meaning of material culture in Cameroon today and its social significance. However, the starting point of my investigation of colonial interactions was the object itself, its biography, social contexts, and relational settings.

Portrait Figure

One of the central objects of my research is a wooden figure from the West Region of Cameroon that is currently held at the Lower Saxony State Museum (Figure 1).

Figure 1 | Portrait Figure, Cameroon, Bakoven, held at Lower Saxony State Museum in Hanover, Ethnographic Collection © Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover (Photo: Kerstin Schmidt)

All Cameroonian experts and cooperation partners I have talked to, confirmed during the work with the collection, that this was a royal portrait figure that would clearly represent a king of West Cameroon. It is common practice for kings in the region to have a portrait figure made upon their accession to the throne. Such sculptures illustrate the history of the kingdom and continuity in politics, society and culture.

It is one of the few objects for which background information was provided by Wilko von Frese (1882–1915), a lieutenant of the German colonial forces who was based in Dschang. He sent the statue to the museum in 1910 and stated the figure was a "[g]ift of a chief, probably the portrait of his father"[5]. Likewise, "Bakowen"[6] was noted as the exact place of origin. No other object that von Frese gave to the museum in Hanover had such detailed information about its provenance. But to what extent does this seem credible? Would a king give such a portrait of his father as a gift?

Portrait figures are usually kept with those of their predecessors in a specifically designated house or room in the palace, often referred to as the "royal treasury".[7] The figures are regarded as evidence of the claim to the throne and are prestige objects that serve as cultural, but also religious symbols of authority. The king is responsible for preserving, conserving as well as protecting the material heritage of the kingdom and is not allowed to sell them or make them personal property as they belong to the community. However, he is allowed to pass them on as gifts or use them in diplomatic negotiations.[8]

Moreover, since the king acts as a link to the ancestors, the portrait figures are believed to move equally between the human and spiritual realms. With each enthronement, the new king builds a bridge to his ancestors. The ancestral figures are thus understood as the material embodiment of the ancestors and their spirit respectively.[9]

Taking these functions and ascriptions of meaning of the figure into account, it seems questionable that such a representation of a dignitary should have been passed on voluntarily, as transmitted by von Frese in the archives of the Lower Saxony State Museum. Such a portrait figure is considered inalienable as it is part of the cultural heritage of a kingdom, as all experts confirmed. It is not meant to ever leave it. According to Nicholas Thomas[10] and Igor Kopytoff,[11] inalienable things are only passed on in emergencies or exceptional situations and often must be kept secret. Was such a situation present in this case?

Consequently, one of the aims of my first research in Cameroon in November 2019 was to find "Bakowen", to trace the figure's history and seek

what is remembered of the German colonial past. The purpose was to identify undocumented contexts and perspectives of the descendants of the former owners. Together with Paule-Clisthène Dassi Koudjou, the PAESE cooperation partner and at that time museum director of the Batoufam Palace Museum, and Patrick Momo, who acted as intermediary and translator, we found Bakoven. In the conversation with H.M. Tchientcheu Kameni Gabriel, the King of Bakoven, he told us that the Germans initially recognised the kingdom, marked the borders between the kingdoms, but were strict and ruthless. Bakoven had been a large, influential kingdom, and both his grandfather and father had maintained good relations with the Germans.[12]

When I showed him a photo of the portrait figure, he said it was the statue of the former King of Bakoven. When asked how it might have fallen into the hands of Wilko von Frese, he replied:

> *At first, when the Germans came, they were very strict because they wanted to stay. But as they stayed in the region, they started to be kind with the population and had a good relation with them and the chefferie, so that the Chief would give statues as gifts to the Germans* […] *for the good relationship.*[13]

This statement did indeed come as a surprise. Despite the confirmation of the gift of the figure, the King of Bakoven expressed his expectations: He would welcome its return, as well as the construction of a museum or financial support.

During my next research stay in Cameroon, a further, now announced conversation took place in which the Notables of Bakoven also took part. In both conversations, the good relations between the Germans and the people of Bakoven were emphasised again and again. Although the gift was always confirmed, the conditions of a gift were attached to it. The grandparents had created a bond between Bakoven and Germany and this had to be maintained. A fulfilment of the alliances thus established was expected and extended to the museum – which after Sahlins would be defined as a generalised reciprocity:[14] They mentioned that for example infrastructure should be built. My background certainly influenced the request, as German constructions such as roads and bridges are renowned by many in Cameroon for their supposed sturdiness. Though, my influence was considerably overestimated.

Historical Context of the Object Appropriation

Wilko von Frese stayed in Cameroon between 1908 and 1910. During this time, he was involved in what the German colonisers called the "pacification of the Nkam-Nun region" – the area where Bakoven is located. This region was little known to the German colonial administration until 1907, as it was a mountainous territory that was difficult to access and considered dangerous. The intention was to build transport routes to be able to exploit natural resources of the so-called Hinterland, but the passage was not considered safe. This area was declared a restricted zone in October 1907 because the population was considered "not subdued" and Governor Theodor Seitz (1863–1949) started a military operation in October 1909.[15]

If one places the appropriation of the object in this context, it would be obvious that the figure was seized. The report of the expedition shows that punitive payments were made, and that the region was "cleansed of the enemy".[16] The taking of objects or even contact with the population in Bakoven was not documented. The suspicion of an unethical removal of the figure has been supported by the lieutenant's biography and the colonial archive but this is contradicted by the statements of the dignitaries in Bakoven itself.

In this region which is today called the Haut-Nkam, the colonial administration was first established during von Frese's time. The area consisted of numerous autonomous, centralised micro-states, which had their own borders, identities and founding histories.[17] The situation thus proved to be extremely complex: the Germans had to establish relations with each kingdom and the strategies of how the different groups confronted the colonial power were correspondingly diverse: Some practised direct resistance, others used passive forms of resistance and, for example, were not present when the Germans came. The King of Bana in contrast cooperated with the Germans, even before the military operation and the kingdom became an important base for them.[18] After the operation had ended a military post was established here, where Wilko von Frese was stationed for a short time.[19] This implies that the figure was not necessarily appropriated during the military operation but perhaps during Frese's later deployment as Bana is not far from Bakoven.

Therefore, the assessment of the object's appropriation, based on the colonial archive, is only partially successful as there are too many missing links that leave room for interpretation. A link to the military action may be possible but is not inevitable. The question remains as to who ultimately receives the interpretative sovereignty over the appropriation of the object and to what extent this is decisive for dealing with the object in the future.

Gifts in West Cameroon

Gift exchange played an important role pre-colonially in the region: gifts offered the possibility to establish or reaffirm inter-ethnic alliances and political relations, to express loyalty to the ruler or served as welcome gestures. This practice was continued in the colonial period by several rulers in contact with Europeans.

Colonial gifts were remembered repeatedly by my conversation partners: In Bana for example, I talked to the king, two of the oldest notables and the barber of the royal dynasty, all of whom consistently emphasised the good relations with the Germans. When I asked one of the notables how the objects might have come to Germany, he stated that they were not taken by force, but given as gifts and as such they were not supposed to be returned, an answer I have received several times, especially by the elder population. However, the good relations between Germans and the people of the West Region is a narrative one encounters often. The German colonial period is overshadowed by the French and its long and brutal independence conflict to which the Notables of Bakoven also referred.

In the academic discourse in Cameroon, by contrast, the humanist paradigm is predominantly at the centre and restitutions are expected: colonialism is related to the hegemonic imbalance, the excessive violence and racist ideology that formed the basis of the colonial project. Exchange on eye-level is highly questioned and ethical as well as moral questions regarding the appropriation and displacement of objects are brought into focus. Thus, the colonial gift exchange is also strongly questioned and leaves room for interpretation as to how far gifts were given voluntarily.[20]

By stating that the King of Bakoven gave von Frese a gift from the heart, as the notables said, his agency was emphasised. He is presented as an equal partner who would have passed on his portrait, similar to the way the Germans distributed portraits of the Kaiser during the colonial period which, however, carried completely different meanings and implications. In Cameroon, gifts rather emphasised the social relations, whereas the Germans were more concerned with presenting equivalent counter-gifts that corresponded to the value of the original gift, as one can find out in the colonial archive.[21] The cultural relativity of a symbolic act comes to light in the colonial exchange of gifts. One and the same event is thus interpreted differently from different perspectives and divergent reactions are expected.

The dignitaries of Bakoven aimed to build on the solidarity they assumed, by emphasising the exchange of gifts as a sign of the good relationship. By

doing so, they intended to get help launching projects in the kingdom. Reclaiming the statue itself was not the focus. Rather, they left it up to the German side to decide what would be offered in return.

Conclusion

It has been my intention to show that depending on a particular source or perspective, completely opposite conclusions can be drawn regarding an object's appropriation. The question is, what is ultimately crucial for future steps and engagements? A multi-perspective and multi-sited approach can help to weigh different possibilities of an appropriation. Plurality of perspectives and interpretations can help to conceive the subject in its complexity.

By combining anthropological and historiographical methods, it was possible to capture the historical context and depth as well as to embed and reflect on sources accordingly. What anthropology can contribute to, through a change of perspective and the inclusion of different knowledge systems, is to culturally situate and interpret modes of appropriation, to classify present perspectives and ascriptions of meaning as well as to find out about the questions and interests of the societies of origin.

In this case, it is not decisive whether the figure was forcibly removed or taken away with consent. In the end, there are expectations imposed on the museum in Hanover, as gifts are equally binding, and the relationship should be maintained today. Thus, the reactivation of the bond is at the centre of the demand. The museum object acquires a value as a link to the former ties. It is seen as an ethical duty of the museum to take responsibility and to negotiate solutions with the King of Bakoven as the dignitary claims a moral obligation to maintain the social relations.

In this regard, the example opens up the great potential that lies in provenance research on objects from colonial contexts in using the objects as a connection that brings the societies of the present place-of-repository and the former place-of-use into relation with each other and in renegotiating and re-evaluating the past and the future. Clifford's call for museums to function as contact zones, where "different cultural visions and community interests are negotiated", could finally be implemented.[22] It is above all today's generation of the societies of origin with whom discussions on dealing with the

objects must be initiated and with whom a consensus must be found. Hence, hearing their perspectives and attitudes on how to deal with these objects, what their wishes are and taking them seriously should, in my opinion, be a constitutive element of any provenance research on objects in ethnographic collections.

1 This text is an extract from a chapter of my forthcoming dissertation thesis. It represents the state of research as of June 2021, when the PAESE conference was held. In the meantime, the discourse has evolved rapidly, terms have changed, and numerous new publications have emerged.

2 On the current debate on ethnographic collections and on "postcolonial provenance research" see, among others, Brandstetter, Anna-Maria; Hierholzer, Vera (2018) (Eds): *Nicht nur Raubkunst. Sensible Dinge in Museen und universitären Sammlungen*, Göttingen; Edenheiser, Iris; Förster, Larissa (2019) (Eds): *Museumsethnologie – Eine Einführung. Theorien – Debatten – Praktiken*, Berlin; Förster, Larissa (2016): "Sensible Sammlungen und koloniale Provenienzforschung in ethnologischen Museen. Debatten, Projekte, Perspektiven", in: Sabine Schulze; Silke Reuther (Eds): *Raubkunst? Silber aus ehemals jüdischem Besitz – wie gehen Museen damit um?*, Hamburg, pp. 42–45; Förster, Larissa (2017): "Aus aktuellem Anlass: Kommentar zur Debatte um das Humboldt Forum. Es geht um mehr als Raubkunst: Ethnologische Provenienzforschung zwischen Erstcheck und Sisyphusarbeit", on: Carmah, http://www.carmah.berlin/reflections/ethnologische-provenienzforschung-zwischen-erstcheck-und/, accessed 30 March 2023; Förster, Larissa; Edenheiser, Iris; Fründt, Sarah; Hartmann, Heike (2018) (Eds): *Provenienzforschung in ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit. Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte*, Berlin; Förster, Larissa; Edenheiser, Iris; Fründt, Sarah (2018): „Eine Tagung zu postkolonialer Provenienzforschung. Zur Einführung", in: Ibid., pp. 13–36; Oswald, Margareta; Rodatus, Verena (2017): "Decolonizing Research, Cosmo-optimistic Collaboration?", in: *Museum Worlds*, Vol. 5, no. 1; Weber-Sinn, Kristin; Ivanov, Paola (2020): "'Collaborative' provenance research – About the (im)possibility of smashing colonial frameworks", in: *Museum and Society*, Vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 66–81.

3 Geertz, Clifford (1973): *The Interpretation of Culture. Selected Essays*, New York, p. 30.

4 For a critical discussion of the term of "societies of origin" see Abiti, Nelson Adebo; Laely, Thomas (2021): "Towards a renewed concept of museum in Africa – and in Europe", on: *Zeitgeschichte online*, https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/themen/towards-renewed-concept-museum-africa-and-europe, accessed 13 March 2023; Förster, Larissa (2019): "Der Umgang mit der Kolonialzeit. Provenienz und Rückgabe, in: Edenheiser, Iris; Förster, Larissa (2019) (Eds): *Museumsethnologie – Eine Einführung. Theorien – Debatten – Praktiken*, Berlin, p. 83; Weber-Sinn; Ivanov, 2020, *'Collaborative' provenance research*, p. 75.

5 Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover, Department of Ethnology, Archive, Notes on the collection from Wilko von Frese, undated, unsigned: „Geschenk eines Häuptlings, wohl Porträt seines Vaters" (translation by the author).

6 Historical spelling of Bakoven.

7 Fubah Alubafi, Mathias (2016): "Museums in the palaces of the Cameroon Grassfields. Concerns about accessibility and sustainability". *Human Sciences Research Council (Policy Brief)*, pp. 2–3; Jones, Erica P. (2016): "A Lending Museum. The Movement of Objects and the Impact of the Museum Space in the Grassfields (Cameroon)", in: *African Arts*, Vol. 49, no. 2, p. 17.

8 Fouellefak Kana, Célestine Colette; Malabon, Darice (2017): "Sculpture et rites chez les Bamiléké du Cameroun. L'exemple des rites Nang ko'o et Nkang des chefferies Foto et Foréké-Dschang", in: Célestine Colette Fouellefak Kana und Ladislas Nzessé (Eds): *Patrimoine culturel africain. Matériau pour l'histoire, outil de développement*, Paris, p. 61 ; Galitzine-Loumpet, Alexandra (2016): "Reconsidering Patrimonialization in the Bamun Kingdom. Heritage, Image, and Politics from 1906 to the Present", in: *African Arts*, Vol. 49, no. 2, p. 69; Tanefo, Jean Marie Fô (2012): *La Chefferie traditionnelle. Hier, aujourd'hui et demain.* Collection „Retour à la source", [s.l.], p. 39.

9 Fubah Alubafi, Mathias; Kaunda, Chammah J. (2019): "Embodied ancestors: Religious objects, moral actions and well-being in the Cameroon Western Grassfields", in: *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, Vol. 75, no. 1, p. 1; Galitzine-Loumpet, 2016, *Reconsidering Patrimonialization*, p. 69; Geary, Christraud M. (1983): *Things of the palace. A catalogue of the Bamum Palace Museum*

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10 Thomas, Nicholas (1991): *Entangled Objects. Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*, Cambridge.

11 Kopytoff, Igor (1986): "The Cultural Biography of Things. Commoditization as Process", in: Appadurai, Arjun (Ed.): *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, pp. 64–91.

12 Interview H.M. Tientcheu Kameni Gabriel with Bianca Baumann, 20 November 2019, Bakoven/Cameroon.

13 Interview H.M. Tientcheu Kameni Gabriel with Bianca Baumann, 20 November 2019, Bakoven/Cameroon, translated from the Fe'fe' by Patrick Momo.

14 Sahlins, Marshall (1965): "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange", in: Banton, Michael (Ed.): *Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*, London, pp. 139–236.

15 Hoffmann, Florian (2007): *Die kaiserliche Schutztruppe und ihr Offizierskorps*, Vol. 1 (Okkupation und Militärverwaltung in Kamerun, Etablierung und Institutionalisierung des kolonialen Gewaltmonopols 1891–1914, Göttingen, pp. 200–202

16 Federal Archives (*Bundesarchiv*, BArch) Berlin, R 1001/4293, Rausch, final report, 19 February 1910, fol. 278–282.

17 Galitzine-Loumpet, Alexandra (2009): "Displaced objects, objects in exile? Changing virtues of Cameroon objects in the West", in: Anderson, Jaynie (Ed.): *Crossing cultures. Conflict, migration and convergence*, Carlton, p. 621.

18 BArch Berlin, R 1001/3354, Gnügge, report, 20 December 1908, fol. 53–54.

19 BArch Berlin, R 1001/4293, Seitz, report, 24 March 1910, fol. 275–277.

20 See amongst others Njoya, Idrissou (2017): "Die Geschichte der Abwesenheit des Mandú-yénú", in: Heller, Mareike (Ed): *No Humboldt 21! Dekoloniale Einwände gegen das Humboldt-Forum*, Berlin, pp. 64–71.

21 BArch Berlin, R 1001/4102, File „Geschenke an Häuptlinge in Kamerun und in den Nachbarkolonien und Gegengeschenke", May 1885–June 1911.

22 Clifford, James (Ed.) (1997): *Routes. Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*, Cambridge, p. 8.

II.

Collecting Strategies and Collectors’ Networks

Stratégies de collecte et réseaux de collectionneurs dans les colonies européennes

Introduction

Collecting Strategies and Collectors' Networks

Introduction

Jennifer Tadge

In the colonies, Europeans with a broad range of educational and professional backgrounds were active as collectors and thus as suppliers of objects for museums in their home countries. They included, for example, scientists, missionaries, traders, colonial officials, but also military men such as members of the German Colonial Forces ("*Schutztruppen*"). These collectors were usually well connected with each other and thus already formed networks. Museum directors also established networks of their own with possible suppliers of objects in the colonies, which enabled them to obtain the objects they coveted. Because of this multidimensional interconnectedness of collectors, collections and museums, the study of these networks of object accumulation and distribution is important across institutions.

Military personnel, as well as other types of collectors such as merchants, maintained extensive networks in various colonies where they obtained ethnographic objects as "by-products" – or such was the pretext – of their business activities and passed them on to (museum) collections. The situation was similar regarding churches and societies whose networks consisted of missionaries. Additional networks connected museums in Germany with Germans living overseas. These emigrants, in turn, were in touch with each other and supplied the museums of their native cities with ethnographic objects.

In some cases, objects of individual collectors are found scattered between various collections. In Germany this is due, among other things, to the role played by the former Royal Ethnographic Museum (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) in Berlin. All objects coming from ventures funded by the former German Empire had to be offered to this museum first. These so-called "doublets" were subsequently sold or given as gifts or in exchange for other objects to museums and other institutions all over the Empire.

Other central factors in provenance research on collections from colonial contexts are the collection strategies and circumstances under which objects were obtained by the networked collectors. This is where colonial contexts of violence (such as punitive expeditions) come into focus regarding the acquisition of objects, in addition to the possibilities of purchase, exchange, or gifts. Both dimensions – collectors' networks and collecting strategies – are important starting points for provenance research on object holdings from colonial contexts and are therefore the focus of this chapter.

The following contributions address specific issues concerning collectors, their networks and connections, as well as the methods of acquisition they employed. These include analyses of circumstances of acquisition, including punitive expeditions in colonial-era Cameroon, research on colonial world trade networks in West Africa used specifically by German merchants, the network of Lutheran missionaries in Central Australia and their methods of accumulating and distributing objects, and collectors' networks connecting museum directors and expatriates (as well as the latter's specific networks with each other) and their collecting strategies.

II.

Collecting Strategies and Collectors' Networks

Colonial Collecting Strategies

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Ndzodo Awono

Abstract

Based on the analysis of the Cameroon collection in the *Übersee-Museum* Bremen, the following chapter names nine strategies with the help of which the colonial masters appropriated objects of all kinds under different circumstances in Cameroon. This shows how diverse the possibilities of acquiring objects were and how they were used. Examples of these collecting strategies were punitive and scientific expeditions, trials and war reparations as well as the economic activities of companies, recreational journeys, missionary activities and other forms of purchasing and exchanging. Outlining the different fields and strategies of appropriation of objects during the colonial period is not only intended to raise awareness of the inequalities inherent in the contexts of acquisition, but also to serve as a framework and starting point for a deeper analysis that examines the respective behaviours in the individual fields as well as to quantify the practices highlighted in more detail.

Stratégies de collecte coloniale (Résumé)

À partir de l'analyse de la collection camerounaise de l'Übersee-Museum de Brême, le chapitre suivant énumère neuf stratégies qui ont permis aux colonisateurs de s'approprier toutes sortes d'objets dans différentes circonstances au Cameroun. Cela montre l'étendue des possibilités pour se procurer des objets et leur utilisation. Parmi les différentes stratégies de collecte, nous pouvons citer les expéditions punitives et scientifiques, les procès et les indemnités de guerre, ainsi que les activités économiques des entreprises, les voyages récréatifs, les activités missionnaires et d'autres formes d'achat et d'échange. La mise en évidence des différents domaines et des stratégies d'appropriation des objets pendant la période coloniale n'a pas seulement pour objectif de sensibiliser sur les inégalités inhérentes aux contextes d'acquisition, elle constitue également un cadre et un point de départ pour une analyse plus approfondie qui examine les comportements respectifs dans les différents domaines, ainsi que pour quantifier plus en détails les pratiques observées.

Introduction

A strategy is a plan developed in order to achieve a goal. One of the goals of the colonisers was the acquisition of non-European cultural objects. This chapter seeks to identify the possible opportunities or circumstances that helped German colonial authorities,[1] missionaries and enterprises to collect cultural treasures, animals and other objects of interest in the colonies.

Based on my work on the Cameroon collection at the Overseas Museum (*Übersee-Museum*) in Bremen from March 2017 to February 2020 as part of the cooperative project between the University of Hamburg and the museum, I have identified nine strategies that I present below and briefly substantiate with examples. The project focused on the provenance and cultural significance of the objects from the former German colonies of Cameroon, Southwest Africa and East Africa, but also on their circumstances of acquisition in the colonies, their various owners and the ways in which they were acquired by the museum. The project was based on primary sources such as archives, but also on oral sources, in particular on the culture of memory in the communities of origin.

Colonial Wars or Punitive Expeditions

Colonial wars or punitive expeditions refer to the use of military force against colonised people under the pretext of the "pacification" of their territories or combatting slavery and robbery. Sometimes the aim of these military operations was to put an end to the trading advantages of the "natives", and in their course colonial rulers came into possession of many types of artefacts, including human remains. In March 1899 Captain Oltwig von Kamptz (1857–1921) led a so-called punitive expedition against the Lamido Mohaman Lamou of Tibati.[2] The booty from the sack of the Lamido palace included everything that the treasure and armoury of a Muslim ruler would be expected to hold, such as weapons, elephant tusks, animal skins, household items, clothes, symbols of power and so on (Figure 1).[3]

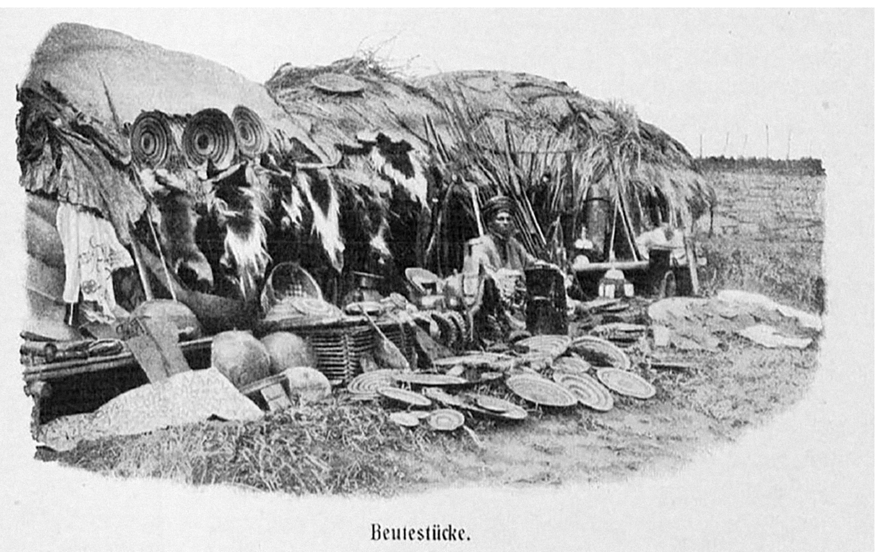

Figure 1 | Booty from the looting of the palace of the Lamido of Tibati, March 1899 (Source: Dominik, Hans (1901): *Kamerun, sechs Kriegs- und Friedensjahre in deutschen Tropen*, Berlin, p. 277)

Three months earlier, the town of Ngilla in the south of Tibati was captured and plundered: Shields, spears, swords, quivers, arrows, tusks and drums can easily be identified in the picture (Figure 2).

Human remains were often part of these collections. For some German colonial officers like Hans Dominik (1870–1910) for example, cutting off the head of fallen enemies was accepted military practice.[4] The skull, which is in the Cameroon collection of the Overseas Museum Bremen, belongs to a Maka resistance fighter whose execution was ordered by Dominik during the war against the groups Omvang and Maka between 1909 and 1910.[5]

Figure 2 | Booty from the looting of the Vute town Ngilla, January 1899 (Source: Kolonial-Abteilung des Auswärtigen Amts (1899): *Deutsches Kolonialblatt. Amtsblatt für die deutschen Schutzgebiete des Deutschen Reichs,* 1899 (10): p. 847)

Inspection Tours and Meetings with Local Rulers

Visits to and meetings with local rulers were suitable occasions for the colonial authorities to collect objects. One year after the attack against the town of Marua in North Cameroon in January 1902, Hans Dominik summoned all Lamibe and Djaoroube (chiefs of the villages) of Marua and its neighbouring villages and confiscated their weapons.[6] After his appointment as "Resident" of North Cameroon in 1904, the German colonial officer Wilhelm Langheld (1874–1915) visited the Mandara Mountains and the region between Garua and Tibati. His first tour was devoted to the inhabitants of the Mandara Mountains. He was accompanied by German officers (Strümpell, Stieber, Heßler, Schmidt), 90 soldiers, 140 carriers and about 70 servants, interpreters, scribes and other employees. There were occasional fights between his troops and the local groups. During the fights against the Giddir-Wuhum in December 1904, Langheld took away poisoned arrows and ordered the place to be looted. In January 1905 Langheld's troops defeated the Lam. Langheld reported on the gifts received from the Arnados (chiefs of the non-Muslim ethnic groups in northern Cameroon) who came to pledge allegiance to him after both these wars. The second tour led to Ngaundere, where throne disputes between the Lamido Dalil on one side, his Sarki Yaki (Minister of War) and the son of the former Lamido Maigalli on the other side, had to be settled. On the way, Langheld received two poisoned arrows from one of his African soldiers after an incident with locals in the village of Gobi. In Gadenyato, Langheld received as a greeting from Maigalli two big elephant tusks and a large quantity of rubber. Langheld continued his tour until Tibati where he received from the locals an eagle, a raven and a colobus monkey, which he later handed over to the Berlin Zoo. On the way back to Garua, Langheld received 100 Maria Theresa thaler from Lamido Rey Buba as an overdue tribute payment.[7]

Scientific Expeditions

The concept of a "scientific expedition" refers to those expeditions whose main aim was to study the culture and history of colonised people as well as the geography, the flora and fauna of the colonies. During the "Pangwe Expedition"[8] in southern Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea between 1907 und 1909, Günter Tessmann (1884–1969) reported on ethnographic objects he collected during attacks on villages, while attending traditional ceremonies or settling disputes. He also received many such objects as gifts.[9] These "gifts", however, were not freely given to him but out of fear: Tessmann was accompanied by soldiers and would not hesitate to order punishment and to use force. The term "scientific expedition" was also used to refer to border demarcation work such as the expedition in East Cameroon (*Ostgrenze-Expedition*) between 1905 and 1907 led by the German officer Freiherr von Seefried (1873–1914). Kurt Strümpell (1872–1947), the Deputy Resident in the *Residentur* Adamaua-Bornu, reported on 11 September 1907 that the localities were liable to pay tribute to the German East Cameroon Frontier Expedition.[10] Although Seefried did not specify the nature of the tributes, it can be assumed that they consisted of different kinds of artefacts.

Economic Activities

European companies opened branches and outlets in the colonial territories, not only to sell industrial products, but also and above all to import products from the colonies to Europe. Exports to Europe included not only agricultural products or natural resources but also cultural goods. For example, Ludwig Broeckmann (born 1855), the managing director of the Bremen Tabakbau-Gesellschaft Bakossi and co-owner of the cigar factory F. W. Haase, stayed between September and December 1913 in what is known today as the region of Southwest Cameroon, where he specialised in collecting objects from the group Bakossi. A letter of 28 January 1914 from the Bremen Tabakbau-Gesellschaft Bakossi m.b.H. shows that the managing director of the company collected objects for the Übersee-Museum Bremen.[11] Other

German businessmen and companies such as Adolf Diehl (1870–1943) director of the Gesellschaft Nordwest-Kamerun,[12] Max Ohling, owner of the shop *Kumilla* in the district of Bangandu near Molundu in Southeast Cameroon, or companies such as the "Gesellschaft Süd-Kamerun", were also involved in collecting objects.[13]

Non-Corporate Expeditions

Collections also originated through non-military and non-corporate expeditions. This section focuses particularly on Ernst Vollbehr (1876–1960), a traveller with the largest collection in the museum. Vollbehr went through West Cameroon and along the coast between November 1911 and January 1912, and collected different types of objects. According to his reports, most of the objects he appropriated were gifts he received from local rulers, artefacts he purchased, or abandoned items. On the way to Fumban between 12 and 14 December 1911, he received from the chief of the village Babanki-Tongo a richly carved chief's chair and one of his porcupine-like caps, and Chief Senge of Babungo also presented him with a freshly made sword. On 15 December in Fumban the Bamun King Njoya personally presented the explorer with two dance masks used at the welcome ceremony. In addition, Vollbehr received valuable old ethnographic objects from Njoya and valuable carvings, old bronze pipes, a whole costume of a Bamun rider, a house model and other artefacts from Njoya's mother. On 20 December he received objects used by women during a wedding as counter-gifts from the chief of the village of Bangam: long, richly decorated, beaded fly whisks, bronze horns, beautifully coloured bast bags and beaded caps. Vollbehr also received objects as gifts from rulers of other villages, including Mbo, Dschang and Bamengang, and removed abandoned objects such as the "chief's door carvings" from the former residence of Bangola. Vollbehr also reported to have bought an old bead headdress for dancing in Bangam for the cheap price of 4.50 DM, a colourfully decorated canoe with complete equipment in Kribi, and some musical instruments from children in Longji near Kribi.[14]

However, Vollbehr is not the only traveller whose collection is in the museum. Other Germans, such as Emil Reiche, stayed in Cameroon in neither

a military nor a corporate capacity. According to a letter from his son, Hans Reiche, of 23 April 1931 to the administration of the Ethnological Museum (*Museum für Völkerkunde*) Bremen, Emil Reiche visited Cameroon twice (in 1896 and 1898). He had collected the object later given to the museum during one of these trips.[15]

Missionary Activities

The success of the missionary work was dependent on the learning of non-European languages,[16] something that gave the missions access to local cultures and their symbols. The collecting strategies used by missionaries included conversion and the use of violence.[17] Conversion to Christianity involved the abandonment or confiscation of those symbols of the colonised societies that the European missionaries considered incompatible with the Christian religion. Sometimes missionaries used force to take possession of these objects. Réné Bureau (1929–2004), a French ethno-sociologist and Africanist, reports without reference to a particular collection on missionaries who fought on the side of the colonial troops against the local groups in the coastal region of Cameroon.[18] The literature emphasises the military character of the use of violence by missionaries.[19]

Trials

One of the aims of trials held during expeditions, exploratory journeys or research trips was to demonstrate the power of the Germans. It should be remembered that colonial officials and expedition leaders assumed different executive, judicial and legislative functions during their work.[20] The trials were not based on fixed rules, and the accused persons were exposed to unfair treatment. The aim of the trials was to keep the “blacks” submissive.[21] Although there is little mention of the appropriation of objects during expeditions by means of justice in the travel reports of Europeans, some of them nevertheless used the settling of disputes or the dispense of justice to collect

cultural treasures. It was a summary justice, whose decisions were handed down by unqualified Europeans and immediately applied. Günter Tessmann (1884–1969), German ethnologist and explorer, visited Cameroon between 1904 and 1914, where he led two research or exploratory expeditions, namely the Pangwe Expedition (1907–1909) and the Sangha-Lobaye Expedition (1913–1914). He reported on a "palaver" or trial in which the "chiefs", fearing punishment, handed over valuable gifts, including wooden masks.[22]

War Reparations

Compensation was imposed on local rulers defeated in colonial wars. After the capture of Tibati, Captain von Kamptz sentenced the fugitive Lamido Mohaman Lamou to pay 300 tusks, 50 cows and 50 donkeys or the equivalent.[23] According to Christine Seige, most Vute rulers and the Lamido of Tibati lost a large part of their reserves of elephant tusks due to the high war reparations imposed on them.[24] In some regions, such as South and East Cameroon, these compensations were paid not only to the expedition or station leaders, but also to the German trading companies.[25] It is also possible that some rulers offered their precious items in order to compensate for a lack of elephant tusks or rubber. This kind of war compensation in favour of colonial collections was very common and gave colonial rulers access to precious or prestigious objects. Rather than putting an end to this practice, which was common among local groups before colonisation, the colonial masters increasingly drew on it in order to meet the demands of German museums. Most colonial wars ended with a tribute that the militarily defeated local chiefs had to pay to the colonial administration, especially to the expedition leaders. It is difficult to find a victorious expedition where the local chiefs were not condemned to do so.

Between Purchasing and Exchanging

Trading took place everywhere in the colony. In some regions, such as the Bamun territory in West Cameroon, Germans traded directly with rulers, craftsmen and women.[26] Speaking about the participation of women in the trade with objects, Marie Pauline Thorbecke (1882–1971) reported in Fumban, the Bamun capital, of hundreds of women from whom she and her husband Franz Thorbecke (1875–1945) had bought pots, baskets, jewellery and pipes.[27] During purchase negotiations, collectors would take advantage of their position and the ignorance of the people in order to defraud them. In 1894, for example, Captain Curt von Morgen (1858–1928) bought an elephant tusk weighing 50 pounds from the Vute at Ndumba for about 70 pfennigs. On the coast, the value of this tusk was 450 marks.[28] In the literature, reference is mostly made to purchase negotiations and rarely to purchase receipts, a practice that was, however, common in Europe but not used in colonial trade with ethnographic objects, as can be seen from the following examples. In a letter to Karl Graf von Linden (1838–1910), the co-founder of the Linden Museum, also known as the *Museum für Länder- und Völkerkunde* in Stuttgart, the German colonial officer Richard Hirtler (1872–1916) claims to have bought dance rattles from a local ruler in West Cameroon.[29] Günter Tessmann wrote about objects he bought during the Pangwe Expedition.[30] Vollbehr reports on a valuable dance ornament that he bought for a mere 4.50 marks during his second stay in Cameroon between 1912 and 1913.[31]

In many cases, the groups of origin did not trade directly with the Germans. With a few exceptions, the Haussa merchants in Cameroon played the middlemen between Germans and locals. After the capture of Tibati in 1899 by the German colonial troops, for example, the Haussa trade quickly developed in the Sanaga plain. From Ngaundere, Tibati, Yoko, East Cameroon and neighbouring regions to the coast via Yaoundé, the Haussa maintained a trade with outlets in these places, selling to the European factories the items they had purchased from locals. Ivory was the primary commodity sold to Europeans after the colonial conquest. Amulets, jewellery (glass beads, rings), leather goods, wickerwork, clothes and other articles of daily use were also sold (Figure 3).[32]

Figure 3 | The Market of Kumbo, today in the region of Northwest Cameroon (Source: A postcard, probably from the German colonial period, edited by the *Afrikanische Frucht-Comp. A. G., Hamburg-Kamerun*)

The objects also came into the possession of Europeans by means of exchange. This was essentially fraud on a large scale, whereby inexpensive trading goods from Europe, such as mirrors, spoons, tobacco, clothes or alcohol, were exchanged for valuable artefacts such as symbols of power, religious and other important objects.

Although reports from Cameroon do not mention such a practice, elsewhere objects were also used to pay for medical treatment. In Togo, for example, the doctor Max Martin (1878–1907) received objects as payment for medical treatment in the towns of Lome and Anecho in 1906.[33] This was clearly not a justified price for the treatment and thus a fundamentally unfair procedure. Was this way of appropriating objects in exchange for medical care an isolated case? Certainly, the methods of acquisition of certain collections by physicians and other health care workers in the colonial period cannot be elucidated without considering such a practice.

Conclusion

With regard to the above analysis, I argue that Europeans had the possibility to collect ethnographic objects in almost all fields of colonial activity. It is difficult to find a sector whose actors were not involved in colonial collecting. For German colonial rulers and officers, wars were the most efficient way to appropriate objects. This chapter has examined some collecting methods that were recorded during work on the Cameroon collection at the Overseas Museum Bremen, in the hope that future research will identify further colonial collecting strategies.

A next step, which would exceed the scope of this chapter, would be to examine in which of the above-mentioned ways most of the objects were taken, to what extent local authorities were involved in these activities, and how the nature of these collecting practices and the individual exchanges can be classified further as having been legal, forced, coerced, or shaped in other ways by power imbalances. Nevertheless, according to my research at the Overseas Museum Bremen, almost 49 percent of the Cameroon collection belonged to colonial officers, of whom a good part – around a quarter of the whole collection – would certainly come from punitive expeditions. This percentage would be even higher if there were detailed reports on the circumstances of acquisition of all other collections that came to the museum via the military. It is difficult to say how many objects were legally acquired, received as gifts or purchased at fair value. The collections of traders and others represent about 25 percent. But it should be noted that the most important traders of ethnographic objects, such as the J.F.G Umlauff Company and Julius Konietzko (1886–1952) in Hamburg, were not in Cameroon. The missionary collection represents 3 percent and that of recreational travellers around 12 percent of the total Cameroon collection at the Overseas Museum Bremen. The analysis in this chapter thus shows, in comparison to the Cameroon collection of the Linden Museum Stuttgart, for example, that military officers of the so-called "*Schutztruppe für Kamerun*"[34] played a central role in the creation of the collection.[35]

1 Military officers and civilian officials, as well as expedition and district leaders.
2 DKB *(Deutsches Kolonialblatt – Amtsblatt für die Schutzgebiete in Afrika und der Südsee*, ed. Deutsche Kolonialzentralverwaltung im Reichsministerium für Wiederaufbau, Berlin, Vol. 10, 1899): pp. 838–849.
3 Dominik, Hans (1901): *Kamerun, sechs Kriegs- und Friedensjahre in deutschen Tropen*, Berlin, p. 276. This booty was acquired in 1902 by the Städtisches Museum für Natur-, Völker- und Handelskunde, known today as the *Übersee-Museum Bremen*.
4 Dominik, 1901, *Kamerun*, p. 94; Dominik, Hans (1908): *Vom Atlantik zum Tschadsee, Kriegs- und Forschungsfahrten in Kamerun*, Berlin, p. 132, 264.
5 Übersee-Museum Bremen, Konietzko file.
6 Dominik, 1908, *Vom Atlantik zum Tschadsee*, p. 204.
7 Langheld, Wilhelm (1909): *Zwanzig Jahre in deutschen Kolonien*, Berlin, p. 383–402.
8 The expedition was led on behalf of the Lübeck Ethnographic Collection (*Museum für Völkerkunde der Hansestadt Lübeck*) in cooperation with the Royal Zoological Museum (*Königliches Zoologisches Museum*) in Berlin, see Tessmann, Günther (1913): *Die Pangwe. Völkerkundliche Monographie eines* […]. *Ergebnisse der Lübecker Pangwe-Expedition 1907–1909 und früherer Forschungen 1904–1907*, Vol. 1, Berlin.
9 Templin, Brigitte (2015) (Ed.): *Günther Tessmann. Mein Leben – Tagebuch in 12 Bänden* (Teil 2), Part III: Lübeck, p. 123, 133.
10 Federal Archives (BArch) Berlin, File R 1001/3714, Vermessung der deutsch-französischen Grenze im Osten von Kamerun (Ostkamerun-Grenzexpedition Adolf von Seefried 1905 ff.), Vol. 2, Mai 1906 – Nov. 1911, fol. 103.
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13 Übersee-Museum Bremen, Inventory Book 1907.
14 Vollbehr, Ernst (1912): *Mit Pinsel und Palette durch Kamerun*, Leipzig.
15 Übersee-Museum Bremen, File "Erhaltene Korrespondenz vom 1. Mai 1932 bis 30. Sept. 1933", Vol. 3: Emil Reiche stayed twice in Cameroon, in 1896 and 1898.
16 Habermas, Rebekka (2013): "Intermediaries, Kaufleute, Missionare, Forscher und Diakonissen. Akteure und Akteurinnen im Wissenstransfer: Einführung", in: Rebekka Habermas, Alexandra Przyrembel (Eds): *Von Käfern, Märkten und Menschen. Kolonialismus und Wissen in der Moderne*, Göttingen, pp. 27–60.
17 van Beurden, Jos (2017): *Treasures in Trusted Hands. Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects*, Leiden, p. 86.
18 Bureau, Réné (1996): *Le peuple du fleuve. Sociologie de la conversion chez les Douala*, Éditions Karthala, Paris, p. 23.
19 Franz Michael Zahn, cited by Briskorn, Bettina von (2000): *Zur Sammlungsgeschichte afrikanischer Ethnographica im Übersee-Museum Bremen 1841–1945*, Bremen, p. 132; Jakob Keller cited by Gardi, Bernard (1994): *Kunst in Kamerun, Museum für Völkerkunde und Schweizerisches Museum für Volkskunde*, Basel, p. 22.
20 Ulrike Schaper (2012): *Koloniale Verhandlungen. Gerichtsbarkeit, Verwaltung und Herrschaft in Kamerun* 1884–1916, Frankfurt an Main, p. 157.
21 Ibid., p. 164.
22 Templin, 2015, *Günther Tessmann*, pp. 120–122.
23 DKB 10 (1899): p. 846.

24 Seige, Christine (2002): "Von allen begehrt: Die Haussa-Händler in Zentralkamerun zwischen Fulbe-Herrschern, Vute Häuptlingen und deutschen Kolonisten" in: Anke Reichenbach, Christine Seige und Bernhard Streck (Eds): *Wirtschaften, Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Wolfgang Liedtke, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Ethnologie der Universität Leipzig* (Ethnographie, Vol. 2), Gehren, p. 206–230.
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30 Templin, 2015, *Günther Tessmann*, p. 127, 131.
31 Vollbehr, 1912, *Mit Pinsel und Palette*, pp. 165–166.
32 Seige, 2002, *Von allen begehrt*, pp. 206–230.
33 Georg August University Göttingen, Ethnographic Collection, File "Sammlungs-Eingänge 1.4.1937 bis 31.3.1938", no. 17.
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II.

Collecting Strategies and Collectors’ Networks

Provenance Research on Hamburg’s Colonial World Trade Networks

Collecting Strategies and Collectors' Networks

Provenance Research on Hamburg's Colonial World Trade Networks

Jamie Dau

Abstract

In the late 19th and early 20th century, numerous trading posts in many regions of West Africa served as ports of call for German merchants. These trading posts were an integral part of the colonial world trade network. In the Hamburg context, this is particularly evident in the large number of ethnographic objects from West Africa in the collections of the *Museum am Rothenbaum (MARKK)* in Hamburg, Germany. However, colonial world trade, arguably the largest collectors' network of former European colonies of its time, has long been disregarded in the historical reappraisal of ethnological museum collections. Suspicions of dubious acquisitions have not been considered comparable to the appropriation practices of military and scientific individuals in colonial contexts. The provenance research project at the *MARKK*, ongoing since July 2020, focuses specifically on traders who "collected" ethnographic objects, as well as on object biographies.

Recherche de provenance sur les réseaux commerciaux mondiaux de l'époque coloniale de Hambourg (Résumé)

À la fin du XIXème siècle et au début du XXème siècle, de nombreux comptoirs dans différentes régions d'Afrique de l'Ouest ont servi d'escale aux marchands allemands. Ces comptoirs faisaient partie intégrante du réseau commercial mondial de l'époque coloniale. Dans le contexte de Hambourg, cela se traduit notamment par la présence d'un grand nombre d'objets ethnographiques d'Afrique de l'Ouest au sein des collections du Museum am Rothenbaum (MARKK) à Hambourg en Allemagne. Cependant, le commerce colonial mondial, probablement le plus grand réseau de collectionneurs des anciennes colonies européennes de l'époque, a longtemps été oublié dans la réévaluation historique des collections des musées ethnologiques. Les soupçons d'acquisitions douteuses n'ont pas été considérés comme comparables aux pratiques d'appropriation des militaires et des scientifiques dans les contextes coloniaux. Le projet de recherche de provenance du MARKK, en cours depuis juillet 2020, met l'accent sur les marchands qui ont «collecté» des objets ethnographiques, ainsi que sur les biographies des objets.

Provenance Research on Hamburg's Colonial World Trade Networks

In recent years, public interest has increasingly focused on ethnographic museums whose collections of non-European art and artifacts were "acquired" in the age of colonialism and served, among other things, to establish and disseminate racist narratives. Colonial structures extended from the founding idea of such museums deep into the identity of the former ethnographic museums (*Völkerkundemuseen*). The effects can still be seen today. In the new millennium, for the first time criticism comes not only from representatives and from citizens of formerly colonised countries but also from a broad public in Europe.[1] Between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, countless cultural objects were *translocated* to Europe, many of which were colonial looted goods.[2] As early as the 1970s, there was a debate about the potential restitution of cultural property.[3] However, requests for restitution – especially from African states – were either rejected or sat out at the time, the current holders referring to formal legal arguments and the allegedly better storage conditions in Western collections, among other aspects.[4]

In Germany, the informed public began to address questions referring to colonial history in 2002 during reflections on the use of the rebuilt Berlin Palace (now home to the *Humboldt Forum*). Not least since the presentation of the founding directorate of the Humboldt Forum in 2015,[5] the discussion has regularly filled the feature pages of the German press. This public debate became more intensive with Emmanuel Macron's speech at the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso (2017) in which he addressed the prospect of restitution of looted cultural heritage to African states,[6] as well as with the publication of the report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy (2018).[7] The central demand of the latter is a reversal of the burden of proof in favour of those who reclaim cultural property.[8]

Since 2021, a provenance research project on trade networks as the basis for the distribution of colonial ethnographic objects from West Africa and Oceania and the procurers of collection goods for the former Ethnological Museum (*Museum für Völkerkunde*) in Hamburg between 1860 and 1920 has been conducted at the same institution, today with the name *Museum am Rothenbaum* (*MARKK*). This chapter focuses on the investigations throughout the first project year in which exclusively objects from West Africa (especially from Nigeria and Cameroon) were considered. One of the targets of the project is to investigate the circumstances in which ethnographic objects were appropriated and to substantiate suspicious cases with regard to colonial injustice. At the same time, the project aims to examine the role of Hamburg's trading companies in the world trade network of the late 19th and early 20th century.

"The critical and differentiated examination of role models and power structures that have their origins in colonialism"[9] can be traced by researching an object's or a collection's history, including the chain of ownership, meaning the affiliation and appropriation history of objects. Primarily, provenance research should involve cooperation with partners from the objects' countries of origin in order to better understand their meaning and history. It is therefore necessary to contextualise the objects regarding their economic, political, spiritual and social value.[10] By reconstructing the objects' original context, provenance research also focuses on the local actors' scope of actions, possibilities of resistance and possible processes in a colonial context. The broader history of interrelations thus brings a clearer understanding regarding aspects such as reciprocal appropriations, influences and exchanges.[11] To meet this objective, provenance researchers carefully inspect artefacts and closely investigate the historical documentation.[12]

By communicating with the cooperation partners from the formerly colonised regions, Eurocentric ways of thinking can be counterbalanced.[13] Colonially informed classification categories are a good example of an approach that can be readjusted with the help of said partners.[14] Of course, this intercultural cooperation can bring various challenges: there could be technical problems while communicating digitally and/or language difficulties. Sometimes even the need to break with rigid structures of formal knowledge production could arise.[15] Nevertheless, these challenges must be overcome in order to decolonise the research.

Research Procedure and Results from the First Year

Provenance research on the *MARKK's* West Africa collections initially aimed to identify relevant object holdings. Before the project started, it had not been determined which collection items were to be included in the research. This had the advantage of gaining an overview of the existing holdings before taking a closer look at certain items in a second step. A different approach (with a focus on individual objects consigned by only one person, for instance) would not have been expedient for a basic research project with a duration of initially twelve months.

To determine the holdings to be investigated certain criteria were established that the items had to fulfil: First, the objects had to have been received by the museum (or its predecessor institutions) between 1860 and 1920. Whether they were donations or purchases was initially irrelevant. Second, the objects had to come from certain geographical regions. For this purpose, contingents were defined that could also be mapped in databases using so-called location thesauri. Forming contingents according to ethnic groups (meaning across recent national borders) would not have been expedient for the overview approach chosen here, since collection holdings by no means always show a one-to-one allocation with regard to their makers and thus there could have been duplications within the contingents.

Nevertheless, the ethnic group of the respective makers of objects was certainly relevant in the later consideration of the objects in order to draw specific conclusions about possible places or regions of origin within the national borders. This was relevant, for example, when distinguishing between an object

from the so-called Cross River region on the border of Cameroon and Nigeria, or an object from the south of Cameroon, close to the borders with the two recent states of Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. However, both objects were sometimes produced and collected on the territory of present-day Cameroon.

The established regional contingents according to already existing location thesauri from west to east along the West African Atlantic coastline were Guinea Bissau (this thesaurus includes the Bissagos Islands and Guinea), Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey / Republic of Benin, Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea / Gabon / Cameroon. This classification should also be considered in the context of colonial history, as most of the objects in the *MARKK's* West Africa collections come from regions where the strongest colonial presence of (German or Hamburg) trading companies were based.[16]

The *MARKK's* collections do not contain any ethnographic objects from the area of today's Republic of Côte d'Ivoire that should have been included in the study after filtering according to inclusion criteria (no consignments before 1920 and later consignments by ethnographic object dealers).

Criteria for inclusion in the study were:

- Objects originate from regions along the West African coastal strip (collections south of the Sahara) and have a current inventory match (i.e., are present in the museum)
- collection and/or consignment period between 1860 and 1920
- broader context of Hamburg's world trade (only persons/collectors who were associated with the merchant class and related seafaring and overseas trade)
- not resulting from military or scientific expeditions (e.g. Mecklenburg Expedition)
- no consignments of ethnographic object dealers (e.g. Julius Konietzko or the firm J. F. G. Umlauff)

The persons associated with the respective location thesaurus contingents were identified while determining the holdings to be examined. A distinction was made between already known and previously unknown individuals. Since extensive research is already available on some Hamburg trading houses (such as the merchant shipping company C. Woermann[17]), these were included in the investigation (as employers of individuals associated with the museum, for instance), but due to time constraints were not taken into account given their over-exposed position within the Hamburg trading network.

The focus was primarily on the previously unknown individuals whose consignments were examined in the light of their respective circumstances of acquisition. It transpired that not every individual investigated had actually been active on the ground in West Africa. Rather, a number of the persons researched apparently relied on acquisition opportunities and structures created by intermediaries.

Since it is not possible to separate research on the objects in focus and the consignors associated with them in a meaningful way, during the research all sources consulted were evaluated with regard to available information on the objects themselves and on the consignors. First, the documentation available at the *MARKK*, consisting of historical incoming and outgoing books, item lists, historical catalogue cards as well as available photographic material, was analysed and reviewed. In addition, the records in the *MARKK* archives were systematically searched for clues along certain key words (such as the names of consigning individuals). The documents consulted were also digitised so that the material could be made available to colleagues in both Germany and, above all, West Africa. It was therefore necessary to translate the documentation.

Due to the importance of the holdings within the West Africa collection of the *MARKK* and the large number of objects from this region, the focus in establishing a research cooperation with partners in West Africa was placed on those holdings that originate from Nigeria. Even before the start of the project, the director of the *MARKK* had already held talks with Dr Babajide Ololajulo from the University of Ibadan, who had declared his willingness to cooperate and agreed to be responsible for local research. Two other colleagues in Nigeria joined the cooperation thanks to his mediation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic joint research on site was impossible. The framework conditions of the cooperation as well as milestones to be achieved and any limitations were therefore revisited (for example journeys to northern Nigeria were not possible due to the critical security situation) in a kick-off meeting via Zoom. A weekly jour fixe was agreed upon, which always took place on Fridays, so that on the one hand the results of the previous days could be discussed and, on the other, the upcoming research activities for the coming week could be prepared and planned together. Considering the overall short project duration, the weekly update turned out to be very practical, as the colleagues on site were able to react quickly to new results from Hamburg and vice versa.

At the beginning of the cooperation, an overview of the collection items to be examined was shared with the colleagues in the form of database extracts. In addition, the information available on the actors up to that point

was passed on to the cooperation partners. Finally, the collection of objects from Nigeria was divided into work packages according to the above-mentioned research questions of the project, as the ethnographic objects to be examined come from different regions of the country (a large number of Yoruba works from the west of Nigeria and objects from other producers from the Calabar area in the east of the country).

Finally, two different research approaches were pursued. Abisola Lawal Ruykat from the University of Ibadan travelled to relevant (historical) locations in southern Nigeria where there had been branch offices of Hamburg trading houses. On site, she conducted interviews with local informants. The aim was to talk to people who could remember information about the colonial collecting activities of Europeans in the respective region, with a focus on the concrete circumstances of acquisition. Joseph Ayodokun (also from the University of Ibadan), conducted archival research in Ibadan, Lagos and Calabar.

Location Thesaurus Contingents and Consignors' Biographies

After completion of the research project, all data records entered in the *MARKK* database will be transferred to the German Lost Art Foundation's "Proveana" database.

Since 2020, some 500 objects and their associated consignors have been examined. In addition, more than 150 objects from the *MARKK's* Benin collection were published on the website of the German Contact Point for Colonial Contexts, Berlin (*Kontaktstelle* für *Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten*).[18] Since many of the 50 or so players associated with the Benin collection were active in Hamburg's colonial trading environment, the research results gathered so far on the consignors of the Hamburg collection will be included in the datasets handed to the German Lost Art Foundation, as well as to the Digital Benin research team.

Startseite | Afrika_DZK-Projekt_Handelsnetzwerke_Guinea-Bissau

Afrika_DZK-Projekt_Handelsnetzwerke_Guinea-Bissau (36 Datensätze) sortiert nach: Inv.-Nr./Standort

Museumsobjekt

Bild	Invent...	Objektbezeichnung	Spender/Veräußerer lt. In...	Eingangsdat...	Herkunft	Herkunft laut Postenliste	Herkunft laut Inventarbuch	Ethnie
	C 1161	Schnupftabakdose aus Horn mit Deckel	H. v. Linstow	19. Sept. 1885	Afrika/Westafrika/Guinea-Bissau/Bissag		Bissagos-Archipel / Bissagos-Ins. / FB 4 [Murdock Klassifikation]	<Afrika>/Bidyogo
	C 1162	Schnupftabakdose aus Horn, beschnitzt, mit Deckel	H. v. Linstow	19. Sept. 1885	Afrika/Westafrika/Guinea-Bissau/Bissag		Bissagos-Archipel / Bissagos-Ins. / FB 4 [Murdock Klassifikation]	<Afrika>/Bidyogo
	C 1163	Speer	H. v. Linstow	19. Sept. 1885	Afrika/Westafrika/Guinea-Bissau/Bissag		Bissagos-Archipel / Bissagos-Ins. / FB 4 [Murdock Klassifikation]	<Afrika>/Bidyogo
	C 1164	Speer	H. v. Linstow	19. Sept. 1885	Afrika/Westafrika/Guinea-Bissau/Bissag		Bissagos-Archipel / Bissagos-Ins. / FB 4 [Murdock Klassifikation]	<Afrika>/Bidyogo
	C 1165	Speer	H. v. Linstow	19. Sept. 1885	Afrika/Westafrika/Guinea-Bissau/Bissag		Bissagos-Archipel / Bissagos-Ins. / FB 4 [Murdock Klassifikation]	<Afrika>/Bidyogo
	C 1166	Speer	H. v. Linstow	19. Sept. 1885	Afrika/Westafrika/Guinea-Bissau/Bissag		Bissagos-Archipel / Bissagos-Ins. / FB 4 [Murdock Klassifikation]	<Afrika>/Bidyogo
	C 1170	Holzsessel	H. v. Linstow	19. Sept. 1885	Afrika/Westafrika/Guinea-Bissau/Bissag		Bissagos-Archipel / Bissagos-Ins. / FB 4 [Murdock Klassifikation]	<Afrika>/Bidyogo
	C 1345	Löffel aus Holz, beschnitzt (sitzende Figur)	Dr. Heinr. Traun	29. August 1889	Afrika/Westafrika/Guinea-Bissau/Bissag		Bissagos-Ins / Bissagos-Ins. / FB 4 [Murdock Klassifikation]	<Afrika>/Bidyogo
	C 1346	Löffel aus Holz	Dr. Heinr. Traun	29. August 1889	Afrika/Westafrika/Guinea-Bissau/Bissag		Bissagos-Ins / Bissagos-Ins. / FB 4 [Murdock Klassifikation]	<Afrika>/Bidyogo

Figure 1 | Guinea Bissau location thesaurus, exemplary object selection, items managed with *IMDASpro* version 6.3.43 © *MARKK* Hamburg 2021.

Table 1 | Objects examined in the West Africa Inventory, as of summer 2021.

Location thesaurus	Number of objects
Guinea Bissau (including Bissagos Archipelago)/Guinea	34
Sierra Leone	9
Liberia	12
Ghana	34
Togo	61
Dahomey (today Republic of Benin)	14
Nigeria (including Gaiser Collection, without Benin Collection)	55 (+69)
Equatorial Guinea/Gabon/Cameroon	134

Case Study: A Gelede mask from West Africa

Figure 2 | Gelede mask, undocumented Yoruba artist, 19th century. Donation Lizzy Büsch 1934, Wood, painted, *MARKK* Hamburg, Inventory Number 34.59:1 © *MARKK* Hamburg (Photo: Paul Schimweg)

Gelede masks (see Figure 2) are made by members of the Yoruba people (an ethnic group living mainly in the southwest of present-day Nigeria) and used in social and ritual contexts. The wooden masks promote peace and happiness and usually consist of an elaborately carved head attachment and a costume made of various fabrics. The typical attachment depicts a human head carrying a tray. This serves as a "stage" on which to project the ideals of the society in sculptural metaphors. Mostly, Gelede performances take place during the annual festival in honour of Iya Nla, the Great Mother.[19] By looking at the iconography and materiality of the objects, general conclusions can be made about the artists who create the masks, while in most cases the identities of previous owners and makers are undocumented.

In 1934, a person named "Ms. L. Büsch" donated such a Gelede mask (Inventory Number 34.59:1, see Figure 2) to the former Hamburg Ethnological Museum (today *MARKK*). The identity of the donor was unknown at *MARKK*. Beyond an entry note in the so-called "Postenliste" (giving barely any information other than the address of the donor), there was no documentation available in the museum. The only additional information was a historical inventory card of the mask itself.

Based on the object itself, its style and iconography as well as the information on the inventory card, we might assume that the mask stems from West Africa and must have been translocated to Europe before 1934 (year of donation). Given the historical context, it appears likely that it was acquired before 1918. It also seems probable that the donor of the object, "Ms. L. Büsch", was associated with a Hamburg shipping or trading company, as literally shiploads of ethnographic objects from West Africa came to Hamburg via trading companies using the harbour.[20]

In December 1876, an import/export company was founded by Johann ("John") Witt (1833–1915) and Oscar Theodor Büsch (1851–1891). It specialised in trading raw materials (e.g. palm hearts) from West Africa and set up factories for this purpose in Lagos in present-day Nigeria.[21] Even before founding the company, John Witt worked for the Hamburg firm *G. L. Gaiser* in Africa and represented the city of Hamburg as consul in East Africa and Zanzibar.[22]

The company maintained two steamships, "Johann" and "Kassandra", which shipped trading goods and commodities between Hamburg, Marseille and Lagos on a regular basis. While we might assume that the Gelede mask as well as other artefacts from West Africa were brought to Hamburg via this trade route and finally passed into the private possession of the Büsch family, it remained unclear who the donor "Ms. L. Büsch" had been. When checking the genealogy of the Büsch family, no family member with a first name starting with the letter "L" could be identified. It was only by finding and contacting living descendants of the Büsch family and interviewing them that it turned out that "Ms. L. Büsch" was actually a person named *Susanne Elisabeth Büsch* (1854–1951), who signed all personal and even official correspondence with her nickname "Lizzy". She was the daughter of the Hamburg merchant Carl Gustav Adolf Lattmann (1811–1894) and his wife Johanna Elisabeth Lattmann, *née* Amsinck (1819–1883). Lizzy Büsch was married to Oscar Theodor Büsch, one of the co-founders of the Witt & Büsch company.[23]

"Lizzy" Büsch presumably came into possession of the ethnographic objects through the trade connections of her husband. Since Büsch never visited his factories in Africa himself,[24] it can be assumed that the objects were "acquired" either by Witt or another employee of the trading company in the area of present-day Nigeria. Due to a lack of sources, one can only speculate about the exact circumstances of the acquisition. Although there are clear indications of the itineraries by which the objects reached Europe, there is a lack of information on the history of the objects at the *place of removal*, which is often the case in provenance research.

The biggest shortcoming of the study discussed in this chapter is certainly the impossibility to ascertain the affiliation history of the object(s), describing the history of the piece in question up to its acquisition at the point of removal from its original surroundings. Unfortunately, in the contexts studied in this project, the producers and previous owners are rarely documented. This is a problem best addressed by means of research on-site; to date, however, the investigations of the colleagues in Nigeria have been inconclusive, with no further details on who the producers or previous owners of objects currently housed at *MARKK* were. Nevertheless, the cooperation was fruitful with regard to possible restitution claims as the cultural significance of objects can only be determined through dialogue.

Outlook

As already indicated, in addition to research on object biographies and the associated individuals, one major goal of the project is the investigation of the Hamburg world trade networks. With the geographical focus on West Africa, only part of the scope of this network has been covered so far.

Currently, the approach implemented for the West African context is applied to a two-year study of the *MARKK* collections that were acquired by persons who were active in the colonial Hamburg trade network in Oceania. There were numerous trading stations on many Pacific islands that served as ports of call for German merchants and were an integral part of colonial world trade in the late 19th and early 20th century.[25] In the Hamburg context, this is particularly evident in the large number of ethnographic objects from Oceania in the *MARKK* collections.[26]

With a focus on merchants operating in Hamburg and their activities in German overseas territories in Oceania, the expansion is also a promising project in that persons involved often did not limit their economic interests to specific regions of the network, but rather were active in multiple locales. The company *Hernsheim & Co* for instance, founded by the brothers Franz and Eduard Hernsheim, was primarily active in the copra trade in the Pacific region, particularly in the region of the Bismarck Archipelago and the Marshall Islands, until they established branches in the French Mandate Territory of Cameroon from 1919 after the end of the First World War.[27] This once again emphasises the scope of Hamburg's trade network.

Conclusions

Hamburg world trade connected the global spheres of German colonialism. Although the complex construct of colonial interdependencies cannot be explained solely in economic terms, trade played a constituent role in the history of the collections of the former Hamburg Ethnological Museum (today *MARKK*). The inter- and transcolonial cross-connections between the different players and the acquisition histories are still reflected in the museum

inventories today. On a geographical or political level, ethnographic objects can be defined by the global networks in which they were traded and/or by the interaction of various colonial and non-colonial players through which they came to the museum. Furthermore, even well-documented translocation biographies are usually not complete: Unsubstantiated conjectures are often part of the provenance chain. The impossibility of a complete documentation is due to omissions in the history of science and politics. Projects to complete this knowledge are subject to time and financial restrictions on both sides (society of origin and museum) but can be fruitful for every party involved. In addition to examining claims for restitution, future museum work should focus on the necessary reappraisal of violent contexts of origin and a new approach to interpretive sovereignty.

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II.

Collecting Strategies and Collectors’ Networks

Museums, Missionaries and Middlemen

German Ethnographic Museums and their Lutheran Missionary Collectors in Central Australia (1890 to 1914)

Collecting Strategies and Collectors' Networks

Museums, Missionaries and Middlemen

German Ethnographic Museums and their Lutheran Missionary Collectors in Central Australia (1890 to 1914)

Olaf Geerken

Abstract

Two German Lutheran missionaries at the Central Australian mission station of Hermannsburg were particularly instrumental in supplying German museums with substantial collections of Aboriginal ethnographica: Carl Strehlow and Oskar Liebler.

Prompted by various reports on the Aranda people of Central Australia, German museum directors contacted, encouraged, and guided the missionaries to collect ethnographic information and materials for their museums from the early 1900s, until November 1913, when the Australian Government proclaimed an export ban on ethnographica.

By examining original correspondence between these two missionaries, museum directors and their middlemen, this paper outlines this German 'quasi-colonial' collectors' network.

Musées, missionnaires et intermédiaires. Les musées ethnographiques allemands et leurs collectionneurs missionnaires luthériens en Australie centrale des années 1980 à 1914 (Résumé)

Deux missionnaires luthériens allemands de la station missionnaire d'Hermannsburg en Australie centrale ont joué un rôle essentiel en fournissant aux musées allemands d'importantes collections d'ethnographie aborigène: Carl Strehlow et Oskar Liebler.

À la suite de divers rapports sur le peuple Arrernte d'Australie centrale, les directeurs de musées allemands ont contacté, encouragé et guidé les missionnaires afin qu'ils collectent des informations et des matériaux ethnographiques pour leurs musées à partir du début des années 1900 jusqu'en novembre 1913, lorsque le gouvernement australien a proclamé l'interdiction d'exporter des objets ethnographiques.

En examinant la correspondance originale entre ces deux missionnaires, les directeurs de musées et leurs intermédiaires, cet article décrit ce réseau de collectionneurs allemands «quasi coloniaux».

Setting the Scene

From 1838 German Lutheran migrants were among the first settlers to arrive in larger numbers in the newly proclaimed colony of South Australia, and early mission efforts by the Lutherans among the coastal Aboriginal population started as early as 1840.

Publicity surrounding inland exploration expeditions in the second half of the 19th century raised awareness of Aboriginal people in remote inland Australia. In the early 1870s the Lutheran synod in Adelaide applied to the government for land to establish a mission in the centre approx. 130km west of the newly established telegraph station at Alice Springs, and in 1877 the Hermannsburg Mission Society in Germany dispatched missionaries Hermann Kempe (1844–1910) and Wilhelm Schwarz (1842–1920) to establish the new Hermannsburg mission. They were later joined by Louis Schulze (1851–1924).

By 1891 Kempe, Schulze and Schwarz had left the Hermannsburg mission, and were replaced in 1894 by the Lutheran missionary Carl Strehlow (1871–1922), who would remain at the mission until his death in 1922.[1] Between

June 1910 to April 1912 Carl Strehlow left Hermannsburg for an extended holiday in Germany and was replaced by the young and inexperienced missionary Oskar Liebler (1884–1943), who would remain at Hermannsburg until late 1913.

Academic Interest in the Aranda[2]

The mid to late 19th century saw the beginnings of modern anthropology, the science of race and the application of Darwin's theory of evolution to cultures.[3] This also influenced the German museum sector.

From the late 19th century German museum directors and academics were sending questionnaires to 'embedded' individuals in the colonies, trying to map the cultures of the world. Kempe's 1883 published paper on the Aranda, for example, was a direct response to such a questionnaire from anthropologist and doctor Heinrich Ploss (1819–1885) from Leipzig.[4] Colonial impact and ensuing cultural change were an issue, as was the search for the 'original' human cultural form. It was the time of the 'human zoos', or human shows, touring Europe, the USA and Australia, to present the 'primitive other' to the cruel curiosity of civilisation,[5] trying to justify the colonial oppression of the colonised by reflecting, intentionally or unintentionally, the 'primitive other' in the eyes of the civilised observers.

What made the early Lutheran missionaries so valuable as informants on the Aranda people at the time, as indeed also today, was the Lutherans' training in language and cultural work as an integral part of their mission. Lutheran missionary training colleges, such as in Hermannsburg and Neuendettelsau, not only trained prospective missionaries in theology, but also in Linguistics and cultural awareness and sensitivity, as they had to rely on the welcome and acceptance by the 'host' communities. The Lutheran missionaries thus brought a relatively non-judgmental linguistic and cultural curiosity to the Aranda people at Hermannsburg around the time of, and soon after, first contact.[6] Both Schulze and Kempe published early accounts on their contacts and observations of the Aranda, and it was Schulze who, in 1891, brought the religious significance of Aboriginal secret-sacred ceremonial objects, the *Tjurunga*, to the attention of the wider public. [7]

Carl Strehlow, von Leonhardi and the Frankfurt Connection

Much has been written on Carl Strehlow's time at Hermannsburg,[8] so I will here only attempt to sketch out his association with the Ethnological Museum in Frankfurt[9] in relation to his object collection.

Carl Strehlow's association with the Ethnological Museum in Frankfurt was established through Moritz Freiherr von Leonhardi (1856–1910) in 1901. Leonhardi, among other things, was an independent scholar who had his interest in Australian Aboriginal people triggered by Australian Lutheran missionaries' accounts in the Mission Society newsletters, including by Carl Strehlow. Already in 1899, Leonhardi forwarded an extensive questionnaire to the Lutheran Mission Society in Neuendettelsau/ Bavaria and asked for the questionnaire to be sent to missionaries in Australia.[10] Whether Carl Strehlow had received this questionnaire is unclear, but by 1901 Leonhardi was corresponding directly with Strehlow.[11] In his first letters Leonhardi set the tone for the future research collaboration, asking Strehlow for specific comment and critique on aspects of Spencer and Gillen's 1899 publication 'Native Tribes of Central Australia', and explicitly placing value on the unique position of 'the missionary' as an informant due to his 'intimate acquaintance with the natives', as well as his ability to communicate in their language[12] (something both Strehlow and Leonhardi criticised Spencer and Gillen for not being able to do). The correspondence between the two, and Strehlow's manuscripts on Aranda culture and religion, culminated in Leonhardi editing, and the Frankfurt Ethnological Museum publishing, the first volume of Strehlow's *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien*[13] (the Aranda and Loritja Tribes of Central Australia) in 1907.

From at least 1906 onwards Leonhardi and Strehlow also discussed the collection of artefacts, as well as biological specimens, and in April 1907, the year the first volume of "Die Aranda" was published, Leonhardi received the first shipment of artefacts and insects, for which Leonhardi paid Strehlow 1000 Marks.[14] Through Leonhardi's personal patronage for the newly founded Ethnological Museum in Frankfurt, an exclusive relationship developed, where Carl Strehlow collected artefacts, sent those to Leonhardi, who in turn sold or gifted them to the museum. Apart from a small number of artefacts sent to Germany by other Hermannsburg missionaries e.g. Nicol Wettengel (1869–1923) or Johannes Bogner (1860–1930) at the time, Strehlow became

the key collector of Aranda materials for a German institution, until at least 1910, when he was temporarily relieved by Oskar Liebler.

At least one other museum director attempted to get Strehlow to collect for them as well, but it was Leonhardi's insistence on being the sole contact for Strehlow, and Strehlow's commitment to Leonhardi,[15] that cemented their exclusive relationship. Wilhelm Foy, then director at the Ethnological Museum in Cologne,[16] also had approached Carl Strehlow directly from 1907 onwards, asking him for assistance to build an Aranda collection.[17] However, Leonhardi repeatedly directed Strehlow not to share information or objects with anybody else but him, thus essentially developing a monopoly on Aranda ethnographica in Germany.[18]

As Frankfurt's Strehlow collection grew with further Strehlow consignments sent in 1908, 1909, 1910 and 1913, Leonhardi and, following his death in 1910, the Frankfurt Museum, increasingly traded in duplicates with other German museums. Still, Leonhardi insisted that Strehlow should deal with him exclusively, and that the competitive interest of other museums, particularly in his Aranda *Tjurunga*, should see Strehlow achieve good prices.[19]

Strehlow kept inventory lists of items he had sent to Leonhardi, the originals of which are held by the Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs, an archive established to hold most of Carl's son Ted Strehlow's documentary legacy. From those lists it can be estimated that, between 1907 and 1913, Carl had sent over 1000 ethnographic objects and more than 300 biological specimens to Leonhardi.

Oskar Liebler

How and why exactly Oskar Liebler started collecting is not all together clear. I have found no documentary evidence yet to show discussions between Strehlow and Liebler on this topic. It seems likely, though, that the Aranda people, who were already trading objects for food rations with Strehlow, were at least willing to continue to do so with Liebler.[20]

Correspondence between Oskar Liebler's father Georg Heinrich Liebler, and the Freiburg Museum[21] in the first half of 1911 indicates that Liebler may have been initially encouraged by an acquaintance in Bohemia to collect

insects. It appears that this acquaintance had the insect collection sent to a friend of his, entomologist Arthur Speyer in Strasbourg, who asked Liebler's father to send him all zoological specimen, and also weapons, tools, jewellery etc., he could get, for which, he stated, Oskar could earn "many thousands".[22]

It appears that Oskar Liebler had sent a first small consignment of Aranda objects to his father in January 1911, which his father then offered to various museums, and sold at least to Freiburg and Munich museums in March/ April 1911.[23] Obviously Strehlow's exclusive commitment to Leonhardi did not apply to the Lieblers. It may be that this initial collection, offered in small consignments to different museums at reasonable prices, was intended as a 'teaser' to test the market. After all, Georg Heinrich Liebler was a secular high school teacher, and Oskar had started his career in the wool and textile business before becoming a missionary.[24] In any case, the 'teaser' was successful, and at least the Munich Museum[25] was willing to purchase a systematic collection of Aranda objects,[26] possibly seeing an opportunity to compete with the Aranda collection in Frankfurt.

With the arrival of a larger Liebler consignment in early 1912, Liebler's father handed negotiations and museum dealings over to Oskar's father-in-law, Pastor Karl Küffner.[27] From here, all correspondence between the various museums and Oskar Liebler went via Küffner, and in March and April 1912, following some negotiations over price, this first collection of about 450 Objects was sold to the museum in Munich for 4600 Marks.[28]

Munich seems to have been impressed by the Liebler collection, as well as Oskar's documentation attached to the objects. On 23 June 1912 Dr Lehmann sent Liebler a very extensive questionnaire, as well as detailed instructions on how to collect information,[29] which Oskar answered on 3 January 1913, at the same time offering to sell another consignment of 5 cases weighing over 350kg to Munich.[30]

The relationship appears to have soured from there, and tough negotiations over prices ensued with Küffner and Oskar Liebler over the remainder of the year, with the museum arguing that the asking price was too high for objects presumably produced for 'trade'. Küffner in return argued for the value of the objects, particularly of the unique secret-sacred objects, as not many people were in positions of trust with the Aranda people to be able to collect them. After threatening to sell the whole collection to another museum if Munich was not willing to pay the requested 3,600 Marks,[31] they finally settled on 2,500 Marks for the whole of the 1913 consignment in mid-1914.[32]

During these negotiations, on 26 September 1913, the Munich Museum approached Karl Weule (1864–1926) at the Museum Leipzig, and Wilhelm Foy

at Cologne Museum for their assessments of the Liebler collections, as they also were in negotiations over Liebler objects. Fearing being played out against each other by Küffner to achieve higher prices (as indicated by Küffner previously when he threatened to sell the collection elsewhere), Munich asked for their willingness to inform each other in relation to Liebler purchases.[33]

While it appears that at least Freiburg, Munich, Stuttgart[34] and Hamburg were supplied by Liebler/ Küffner directly, a different trail emerges for the Lieber collection at the Ethnological Museum in Leipzig.[35] Already in 1907 Director Karl Weule of the Museum Leipzig enlisted his personal contact Walter Schmidt in Australia to collect Australian artefacts.[36] Schmidt was a businessman and metals trader with close family links to Leipzig, who at the time was a director of the "Australian Metal Company" in Melbourne, a subsidiary company of the German Metal Company ("*Metallgesellschaft*") with seat in Frankfurt.

In response to Weule's request for Australian objects Schmidt attempted to enlist the services of South Australian Lutheran missionary Johann Georg Reuther (1861–1914) in 1909. Reuther confirmed to Schmidt that *Tjurunga* are particularly difficult to get hold of, and only people of trust with necessary language skills may have a chance to acquire them from Aboriginal people. He suggested to undertake an expedition into the centre to collect artefacts and *Tjurunga* for Leipzig.[37] However, Leipzig was not able to fund such an expedition,[38] and Schmidt proceeded to procure objects from other parts of Australia through his other local contacts, among them Herbert Basedow (1888–1933),[39] and attempted to arrange a trade between Leipzig and the South Australian Museum,[40] who Reuther had previously sold his collection to.[41]

Word about Liebler must have gotten around, for by mid-1911 Schmidt was in correspondence with Liebler,[42] and by January 1912 Schmidt had received a large collection of artefacts and *Tjurunga* from Liebler,[43] which he then shipped to Leipzig.

There is an interesting exchange between Schmidt and Weule concerning Liebler's capacity to keep collecting following Carl Strehlow's return to Hermannsburg in April 1912, as Strehlow "is the boss" and "only collects for Frankfurt".[44] Weule nevertheless asked Schmidt to direct Liebler to keep collecting, despite Strehlow,[45] and by mid-1912 Schmidt had shipped two more consignments to Leipzig on German ships. [46]

In 1913, following his return to Hermannsburg, Carl Strehlow was collecting again for Frankfurt, but, as Frankfurt directors Francis Sarg (1840–1925) and Bernhard Hagen (1853–1919) wrote to him, the German market for Aranda objects had effectively been "spoilt" by "his colleague Liebler" flooding the market with vast amounts of objects at dumping prices[47] (although, as we have seen, it appears that the museums themselves had been driving a hard bargain).

While the Strehlow collection appears straight forward through the exclusive connection with Leonhardi and Frankfurt, this is not the case with the Liebler collections. Until a full inventory of Liebler objects at all German, indeed European museums[48] has been conducted, it is impossible to know who he supplied, nor to estimate how many objects he exported from Central Australia. Crucial sets of correspondence, the letters between Oskar Liebler and his father and his father-in-law Küffner, as well as the Küffner correspondence with the various museums, appear to have been lost.

1913–14 and the Export Restriction

While the total number of Liebler objects in overseas museums is yet to be determined, it certainly was large enough, together with Strehlow's and other German missionaries' exports, to cause significant concern in Australian museum circles. Already in early 1913, in correspondence between Lutheran church officials in Adelaide and Oskar Liebler, there are indications of an Australian government move to restrict the export of "ethnological specimens".[49] Key to this move appear to have been Australian museum directors who were concerned about the large number of ethnographic objects and human remains which were being exported to overseas museums, while they themselves struggled to compile their own collections.[50]

Their lobbying resulted in the Australian government proclaiming an export restriction in November 1913, banning the export of Aboriginal artefacts without permission of the director of an Australian museum.[51] The swift enforcement of this restriction lead to both Strehlow and Liebler each having a last consignment of Central Australian objects impounded at Adelaide port in January 1914. Strehlow's shipment appears to have been destined for Cologne,[52] while Liebler hints at St Petersburg as at least one of the destinations

of his shipment.[53] Both missionaries were essentially forced to sell their collections to the South Australian Museum at a much-reduced price of what they could have achieved in Germany.

Closing Remarks

The reading of original correspondence between museums, Central Australian missionaries and their middlemen shows that there was great interest and competition among German museums and academics in ethnographica from, and information on, the Aranda people, due to their perceived 'unspoilt' and 'primitive' status within the human evolution and Totemism debates at the time.[54]

The German museum directors appear to have been instrumental in encouraging the missionaries to collect Central Australian artefacts and ethnological information, directing the missionaries in what and how to collect through questionnaires or direct instructions, and providing a lucrative market for their collections. As public employees, they established and maintained a quasi-colonial network of German collectors and middlemen, akin to those used in the actual German colonies, to procure the Aranda artefacts for their museums.

1 An event described by his son, Strehlow, T.G.H. (1969): *Journey to Horseshoe Bend*, Sydney; as well as in much detail by his grandson Strehlow, John (2019): *The Tale of Frieda Keysser,* Vol. 2, London, pp. 1008–1057.
2 The current spelling of this language name is 'Arrernte', however, for consistency's sake I will use the previous spelling 'Aranda', as it appears in the original correspondence, throughout this text.
3 Darwin's "*Origin of Species*" was originally published in 1859 and translated into German in 1860; "*The Descent of Man*" was published in 1871 and translated in 1871.
4 Kempe, Hermann (1883): „Zur Sittenkunde der Centralaustralischen Schwarzen", in: *Mittheilungen des Vereins für Erdkunde zu Halle*, Vol. 7, p. 52.
5 McKay, Judith; Memmott, Paul (2016): "Staged Savagery: Archibald Meston and his Indigenous Exhibits", in: *Aboriginal History,* Vol. 40, pp. 181–203; Jones, Philip (1996): *'A Box of Native Things': Ethnographic Collectors and the South Australian Museum 1830s – 1930s*; unpublished PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, p. 260, https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/handle/2440/18923, accessed 24/9/2021.
6 See e.g. Kenny, Anna (2017): "Early Ethnographic Work at the Hermannsburg Mission in Central Australia, 1877 – 1910", in: Peterson, Nicolas; Kenny, Anna (Eds): *German Ethnography in Australia*, Acton ACT, pp. 169–195.
7 Kempe, 1883, *Zur Sittenkunde*, pp.52–56, and Schulze, Louis (1891): "The Aborigines of the Upper and Middle Finke River: their Habits and Customs, with Introductory Notes on the Physical and Natural History Features of the Country, in: *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, Volume 14, pp.210–246.
8 See e.g. Strehlow, John (2011): *The Tale of Frieda Keysser*, Vol. 1, London; Strehlow, 2019, *The Tale of Frieda Keysser*, Vol. 2; Kenny, Anna (2017): *The Aranda's Pepa – An Introduction to Carl Strehlow's Masterpiece Die Aranda und Loritja Stämme in Zentral-Australien (1907–1920)*, Acton ACT.
9 *Städtisches Museum für Völkerkunde*, today *Weltkulturen Museum* Frankfurt am Main.
10 Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Bayern, Nuremberg, 4.3, Vol. 1. 42/41: Letter April 1899;
11 See also Kenny, Anna (2005): "A sketch portrait: Carl Strehlow's German editor Baron Moritz von Leonhardi", in: Kenny, Anna; Mitchell, Scott (Eds): *Strehlow Research Centre Occasional Paper Number 4: Collaboration and Language*, Alice Springs, pp. 54–70.
12 Strehlow Research Centre, Folder: "von Leonhardi: Translations Chronological Order", Letter from von Leonhardi to Carl Strehlow, 10 September 1901.
13 Strehlow, Carl (1907): *Die Aranda und Loritja Stämme in Zentral-Australien*, Vol. 1, Frankfurt.
14 Strehlow Research Centre, Folder "German Corres. Von Leonhardi, Volker Notes", Letters von Leonhardi to Carl Strehlow, 23 April 1907 and 10 September 1907.
15 Ibid., Folder "Carl Strehlow Correspondence, Shorthand Transcripts, Vol.1", Letter C. Strehlow to W. Foy, 11 March 1908.
16 Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum Cologne.
17 Strehlow Research Centre, Folder "German Corres. Von Leonhardi, Volker Notes": Letter W. Foy to C. Strehlow, 5 September 1907; Ibid., Folder "von Leonhardi: Translations Chronological Order": Letter W. Foy to C. Strehlow, 7 January 1908; Ibid., Folder "German Correspondence relating to the publication of Die Aranda und Loritja Stämme; Photocopies and Translations": Letter W. Foy to C. Strehlow, 3 June 1908.
18 Ibid., Folder "German Corres. Von Leonhardi, Volker Notes": Letters v. Leonhardi to C. Strehlow, 10 July 1907, 5 September 1907, 10 January 1908, 8 March 1908.
19 Ibid.
20 Strehlow, 2019, *The Tale of Frieda Keysser*, p. 194.
21 *Museum Natur und Mensch* Freiburg.

22 Ibid., Letter G. H. Liebler to Stadtrat [Fieke?], 8 June 1911.
23 Ibid., Folder „Lenders Liebler Marquart Meyer": Letter G. H. Lielber to Freiburg Museum, 8 May 1911; Ibid. G. H. Liebler to Scherman, Munich Museum, 1 June 1911.
24 Strehlow, 2019, *The Tale of Frieda Keysser*, p. 19, 307–310.
25 *Museum Fünf Kontinente* Munich.
26 Ibid., Folder "Lenders Liebler Marquart Meyer": Letter Scherman to G. H. Liebler, 26 March 1912.
27 Ibid., Letter G. H. Liebler to Scherman, Munich Museum, 31 March 1912.
28 Ibid., Receipt Pastor Küffner, 26 April 1912.
29 Ibid., Letter Lehmann to Pastor Küffner, 23 June 1912.
30 Ibid., Letter O. Liebler to Lehmann, 3 January 1913.
31 Ibid., Letter Pastor Küffner to Scherman, 18 February 1914 and 29 April 1914.
32 Ibid., Letter Pastor Küffner to Scherman, 10 June 1914.
33 Ibid., Letter Scherman or Lehmann to K. Weule, 26 September 1913.
34 See Schlatter, Gerhardt (1985): *Bumerang und Schwirrholz: Eine Einführung in die traditionelle Kultur australischer Aborigines*, Berlin, which discusses the collection at the Linden Museum Stuttgart, purchased from Lieber on 13 March 1913.
35 *Grassi Museum* Leipzig
36 Ibid., 1910/74: Letter W. Schmidt to K. Weule, 5 February 1909.
37 Ibid., Letter W. Schmidt to K. Weule, incl. Letter by Reuther, 5 February 1909.
38 Ibid., Letter W. Schmidt to K. Weule, 26 June 1909.
39 Ibid., 1912/35: Letter W. Schmidt to K. Weule, 8 August 1911.
40 Ibid., 1910/74: Letter W. Schmidt to K. Weule, 5 February 1909.
41 Ibid., Letter W. Schmidt to K. Weule, 8 March 1909.
42 Ibid., 1912/35: Letter W. Schmidt To K. Weule, 28 August 1911.
43 Ibid., Letter W. Schmidt to K. Weule, 22 January 1912.
44 Ibid., Letter W. Schmidt to K. Weule, 1 March 1912.
45 Ibid., Draft letter, K. Weule to W. Schmidt, undated.
46 Ibid., Letter W. Schmidt to K. Weule, 17 July 1912.
47 Strehlow Research Centre, Folder: German Correspondence relating to the publication of Die Aranda und Loritja Stämme; Photocopies and Translations: Letters Sarg to C. Strehlow, 24 April 1913 [FS1913-1-1]; Ibid., Letter Hagen to C. Strehlow, 10 September 1913 [BH 1913-1-1].
48 Liebler objects are known to exist in at least one Swiss collection, and there are indications that other European museums as far as St Petersburg may have been supplied, either by Liebler/ Küffner, or through museum trade.
49 Lutheran Archives, Adelaide, BoxN7, Folder "Imm Synod FRM Kaibel Correspondence Copy Book 1912–1913 (transcriptions)": Letters Kaibel to O. Liebler, 11 February 1913 and 23 September 1913.
50 See Jones, 1996, *'A Box of Native Things'*, p. 250; for a more detailed discussion Fforde, Cressida; Aranui, Amber; Knapman, Gareth; Thurnbull, Paul (2020): "Inhuman and very Mischievous Traffic", in: Fforde, Cressida; McKeown, C. Timothy; Keeler, Honor (Eds) (2020): *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Repatriation: Return, Reconcile, Renew,* London, New York, pp. 381–399.
51 Ibid., p. 389.
52 Strehlow's copy of his inventory lists shows a consignment of 200 objects in 1914 marked as "Sent to Cologne", which is identical to the list of Strehlow objects received in 1914 (marked 23 April 1914) at the South Australian Museum Adelaide [AA315_1].
53 *Museum Fünf Kontinente* Munich, Folder "Lenders Liebler Marquart Meyer": Letter O. Liebler to Scherman, 6 February 1914.
54 The correspondence viewed by the author primarily relates to museum collections in Munich, Leipzig, Frankfurt and Freiburg. Possible correspondence in other museums, such as Stuttgart, Cologne, and Hamburg, have not yet been viewed.

II.

Collecting Strategies and Collectors’ Networks

The World in Showcases

The Collectors’ Networks of the Roemer-Museum Hildesheim and the Growth of the Ethnographic Collection, 1844–1914

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Sabine Lang

Abstract

The *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum* Hildesheim is a museum whose collections cover several disciplines: Natural History, Egyptology, Art, Hildesheim city history and prehistory, and Ethnology. Many, but by no means all ethnographic objects were collected in colonial contexts. The contribution will present results of the PAESE subproject at the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum*, whose focus was on collectors' networks and collecting strategies from the beginnings of the *Roemer-Museum* 1844/45 until World War I. While the museum's directors used their international networks to increase not only the ethnographic but also the natural history holdings, the focus of this contribution is on the impact of these networks on the growth of the ethnographic collection. Two basic types of networks can be distinguished: professional, personal, and political networks of the directors themselves; and a network connecting Hildesheim-born expatriates with their native city and sometimes also with each other.

Le monde dans des vitrines. Les réseaux de collectionneurs du musée Roemer de Hildesheim et le développement de la collection ethnographique, 1844–1914 (Résumé)

Le musée Roemer et Pelizaeus de Hildesheim est un musée dont les collections englobent plusieurs disciplines: l'histoire naturelle, l'égyptologie, l'art, l'histoire et la préhistoire de la ville de Hildesheim et l'ethnologie. De nombreux objets ethnographiques, mais pas tous, ont été collectés dans des contextes coloniaux. L'article va présenter les résultats du sous-projet PAESE au musée Roemer et Pelizaeus, qui se concentre sur les réseaux de collectionneurs et les stratégies de collecte depuis les débuts du musée Roemer 1844/45 jusqu'à la Première Guerre mondiale. Alors que les directeurs de musées ont eu recours à leurs réseaux internationaux pour enrichir non seulement les collections ethnographiques mais aussi les collections d'histoire naturelle, cette contribution porte essentiellement sur les conséquences de ces réseaux sur le développement de la collection ethnographique. Nous pouvons distinguer deux types de réseaux: les réseaux professionnels, personnels et politiques des directeurs eux-mêmes; et un réseau reliant les expatriés nés à Hildesheim à leur ville natale et parfois aussi entre eux.

The Collections of the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum* Hildesheim

In 1844 a Museum Society (*Museumsverein*) was founded by a group of Hildesheim citizens for the purpose of "sparking more interest in nature, fostering profound knowledge of the latter, disseminating knowledge of old and new art, yet without excluding other scholarly disciplines such as history, ethnography, the study of antiquities, numismatics, etc."[1] Under the name of City Museum (*Städtisches Museum*), the museum opened in 1845, at first in two small exhibition rooms. As the collections increased, a secularised medieval church was bought to provide more exhibition space. In the mid-1880s it was complemented by a large neo-Gothic museum building. In 1894, after the death of museum co-founder Dr. Hermann Roemer (1816–1894), the museum was renamed *Roemer-Museum*. In 1911 the *Pelizaeus-Museum*, housed in a medieval orphanage, was bought and added to the complex of buildings. It served to exhibit Egyptian and other antiquities, most of them donated by the Cairo-based merchant Wilhelm Pelizaeus. Hence today's name of the twin museums*: Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum*.[2]

From its very beginnings, the *Roemer-Museum* has been laid out as a "Mehrspartenmuseum", that is, a multidisciplinary museum whose collections cover Natural History with more than 200,000 specimens from zoology, geology, mineralogy, palaeontology, and botany; Art with a collection of paintings and sculptures, ca. 1,000 works; as well as a graphics collection comprising about 10,000 sheets of printed graphic works; City History with a collection of ca. 50,000 objects (including prehistory and archaeology); and, last but not least, Ethnology with about 12,000 objects. The Egyptology holdings of the *Pelizaeus-Museum* comprise more than 8,000 objects.[3]

When the City Museum opened in 1845, the ethnographic collection consisted of 28 ethnographic objects, including "weapons and tools from the Sandwich Islands" [Hawai'i] that had been given the museum as a gift by a certain Louis Fromm.[4] Today, there are about 12,000 objects from all parts of the world, including:

- The German colonies, 1884–1914/18: Cameroon, Togo, "German East Africa", "German Southwest Africa", "German New Guinea" (the north-eastern part of what is today Papua New Guinea, Bismarck-Archipelago, parts of Micronesia), and Kiauchou (China).
- Collections predating the establishment of German colonial rule. These include, for example, objects collected in Oceania prior to 1879 on behalf of the Godeffroy trading company (Hamburg)[5] and objects collected by expeditions to Africa funded by the German African Society (*Deutsche Afrikanische Gesellschaft*) of which Hermann Roemer was a member.
- Colonies of other colonial powers, such as Australia, the Dutch East Indies, India, British New Guinea, the Cape Colony, and Belgian Congo. For example, Hermann Muhlert (1816–1870), a native of Hildesheim, served in the Dutch Army as a military doctor in the Dutch East Indies (today: Indonesia) from 1840 until his retirement in 1862; when stationed on Sulawesi he compiled a collection of ethnographic objects which he presented to the *Roemer-Museum*.[6]
- Independent states, such as the Unites States of America, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and other nations in South America that had freed themselves from colonial rule in the early 19th (as in the case of Latin America) or late 18th century (as in the case of the U.S.A.). Examples include objects collected by Johan Adrian Jacobsen in Alaska in 1882/83 and by Karl von den Steinen in Brazil in 1887/1888.[7]

The PAESE Subproject at the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum*

The focus of the PAESE subproject at the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum* (RPM), entitled "The Colonial Ethnological Collections in the Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim: Reconstruction of Collection Biographies and Regional Networks", was on networks from the founding of the *Roemer-Museum* in 1844/45 until World War I. These include the collectors' networks of museum directors Hermann Roemer (1816–1894, director 1873–1894), Achilles Andreae (1859–1905, director 1894–1905), and Rudolf Hauthal (1854–1928, director 1905/06–1925) and the impact of these networks on the ethnographic collection, which grew significantly from the 1870s until World War I. The museum's collecting strategy may best be summarised as "if we can get and afford it, let's go for it". This may seem random, but there was actually a system behind that strategy. In line with the museum founders' vision of a "world museum", the ethnographic collection was laid out as what might be called a "world collection". That way, the Hildesheim Museum acquired objects from all parts of the world. In some cases they were bought from other museums, from collectors themselves, or from professional traders. In many others they were gifts. In the period between 1844 and 1914, the City Museum/*Roemer-Museum* received about 350 ethnographic gifts; most of these were presented by citizens of Hildesheim and were not large collections but consisted of one or a few objects.[8]

The role played by collectors born in Hildesheim is emphasised in a guide to the collections of the *Roemer-Museum* published in 1922: "The ethnographic collection, featuring beautiful exhibits of superb quality, is presented in showrooms 1–7. A large part of the objects were gifts by natives of Hildesheim, whose occupation or travels had taken them to countries overseas."[9]

One of the primary goals of provenance research in the face of current debates on dealing with objects, particularly from colonial contexts, in ethnographic collections is the clarification of circumstances under which they were collected. Such clarification requires essential information, most importantly the name/identity of the collector. Other helpful information includes the place where the object was collected, and the time of collection, for example, in the context of "punitive expeditions". While such provenance research was an essential part of the Hildesheim subproject, this contribution will focus on the collectors' networks

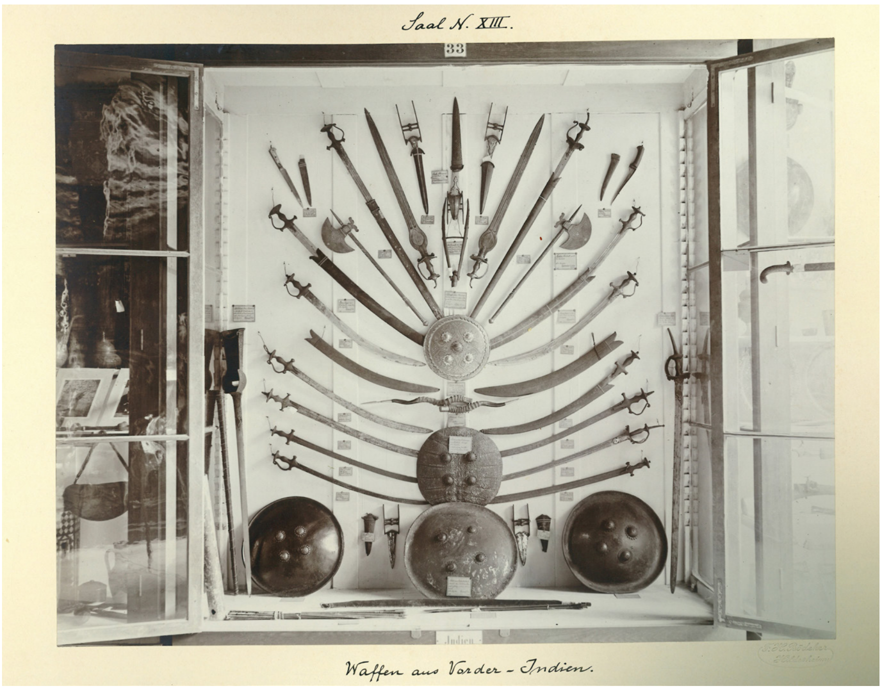


Figure 1 | The Carl Massolles collection of antique Indian weapons on display at the Roemer-Museum. Massolles was a native of Hildesheim. Photo by F. H. Boedeker, ca. 1903. © Hildesheim City Archives [*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*] Best. 979-2, Nr. 3, p. 11

rather than on provenance in the sense of circumstances of acquisition. The various networks under research include dozens of collectors. The Hildesheim City Archives keep an abundance of documents relating to the ethnographic collection of the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum*. In addition, comprehensive information on gifts and purchases is found in the *Annual Reports* of the Hildesheim Museum Society, 1845–1906. Two basic types of networks can be distinguished:

- Professional, personal, and political networks of the directors themselves. Hermann Roemer will be used as an example in this context.
- A network connecting Hildesheim-born expatriates with their native city: there were a considerable number of Hildesheim-born people who took up residence in foreign countries, where they collected ethnographic objects and natural history specimens and sent these to the Roemer-Museum. In some cases, there also existed small networks connecting such emigrants with each other.

The large number of collectors under study in the subproject at Hildesheim is both a challenge and a chance. Research on many collectors who lived in many parts of the world is time-consuming. On the other hand, it allows general statements on the possibilities and limitations of clarifying the circumstances of acquisition based not only on one collector or few collectors but on many collectors.

Networks Connecting Hildesheim to the World

Let us now turn to Hermann Roemer and his networks. Roemer was director of the Hildesheim City Museum from 1873 until 1894. In addition, he held influential positions in politics and in societies promoting the exploration of Africa. Particularly the latter could be used to the benefit of the ethnographic collection at the Hildesheim City Museum. From 1867 until 1890 Roemer was a member of the Reichstag (parliament) in Berlin.[10] In Berlin he was acquainted with Adolf Bastian (1826–1905), the director of the Royal Museum of Ethnology.

In the 1870s, Roemer became co-founder of the Berlin Society for the Exploration of Equatorial Africa (*Berliner Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des aequatorialen Afrika*) in 1873, a member of the German African Society (*Deutsche Afrikanische Gesellschaft*) founded in 1876, and a member of the successor organization African Society in Germany (*Afrikanische Gesellschaft in Deutschland*) founded in 1878.[11] These societies funded expeditions to Africa,[12] and thanks to Roemer's membership the Hildesheim Museum received objects collected on expeditions predating the establishment of German colonies: Richard Böhm (1854–1884, Central Africa, 1880), Eduard Robert Flegel (1852–1886, Niger region, 1880), and Johann Maria Hildebrandt (1847–1881, East Africa, 1875).[13]

Ludwig "Louis" Gottfried Dyes (1831–1903), a native of Hildesheim and cousin of Hermann Roemer's, became a key figure in Roemer's network due to his extensive business contacts. Dyes was Imperial and Royal Consul General of Austria in Bremen, and a merchant with business connections to various parts of the world such as the Cape, Transvaal, Mexico, Japan, and Burma.[14] These he used for acquiring collections for the Hildesheim Museum, which he presented with objects collected by various people from

his network. Examples include ethnographic objects from Oceania (Otto Zembsch, 1841–1911,[15] Otto von dem Busch, b. 1856), Namibia (Carl Höpfner, 1857–1900), and South Africa (Zulu, collector unknown). Like Roemer, Dyes was acquainted with Adolf Bastian,[16] and he also had political contacts up to the highest levels.[17] His business acquaintances included Adolf Lüderitz (1834–1886),[18] which explains how Dyes obtained objects collected by Carl Höpfner on his expeditions in southern Africa in the early 1880s prior to the establishment of the German colony of "German Southwest Africa". Due to their acquaintance with Bastian, either Dyes or Roemer may also have arranged the transfer of objects from the prestigious Jacobsen (Alaska) and von den Steinen (Brazil) collections, which came from the Royal Museum of Ethnology Berlin to the Hildesheim City Museum in the 1880s.

Apart from these networks of Roemer and his successors, there existed networks connecting Hildesheim-born expatriates with their native city and sometimes also with each other. Many people who had settled down or travelled overseas remained faithful both to their native city and to its museum that they had known from childhood. They collected natural history specimens and ethnographic objects, which they gave or sold to the City Museum. Some of these collections were small while others might consist of hundreds of objects.

The network connecting Hildesheim-born collectors with the *Roemer-Museum* may be illustrated by some prominent cases. Ernst Ohlmer (1847–1927) was born in Betheln near Hildesheim. He went to sea as a young man, was cast up on the Chinese coast, and entered service with Maritime Customs in the Chinese Empire in 1868. He eventually became Maritime Customs Director and compiled an exquisite collection of Chinese porcelain for the *Roemer-Museum*.[19]

Another Hildesheim-born collector was merchant Ludwig August Stelling whose Amsterdam-based business had a branch in Sulawesi, from where he sent ethnographic objects and zoological specimens to the *Roemer-Museum*.[20] Mining engineer Albert Götting, in turn, moved from Hildesheim to Bolivia, then to Chile, and provided the museum with archaeological, mineralogical, and ethnographic objects.[21] The merchant Conrad Machens compiled a large ethnographic collection in Fiji.[22] Carl Massolles, the son of a Hildesheim plumber, established himself as a piano and organ builder in Belgaum, India, where he bought old weapons from local *rajahs* and *nawabs* and sold that collection to the *Roemer-Museum* in 1895.[23] Physician Dr Marheinecke had moved to St. Louis on the Mississippi River, where he gathered ancient Native American stone tools in his vineyard and sent them to Hildesheim in the late

1870s, together with a letter in which he expressed his homesickness for his beloved native city.[24] Early collections are represented by ethnographic objects acquired in Texas by Hermann Roemer's brother, Ferdinand, in the late 1840s,[25] and the abovementioned collection complied by Hermann Muhlert in Sulawesi in the mid-1850s.

The importance of the ethnographic collections of the *Roemer-Museum* decreased during Hauthal's term as director. With regard to non-European cultures, he was mainly interested in Peruvian "antiquities", and he used his network in the Andes to compile an outstanding collection for the *Roemer-Museum*.[26] Hauthal believed that the "world museum" as designed by Hermann Roemer, Achilles Andreae, and Edgar Walden,[27] was outdated. He decided to make local history (*Heimatkunde*) the new focus of the museum: "The programmatic expression of this reorientation was the establishment of a 'patriotic collection', a hodgepodge consisting mainly of weapons and flags of the former Hannover army [...] and historical clothing from the region. [...] That way, Hauthal brought the formerly open-minded *Roemer-Museum* a provincial attitude that was to leave its imprint on the museum's further development."[28] Nevertheless there was still an influx of ethnographic objects. Until his death in World War I, Edgar Walden continued to provide the museum with doublets from the Royal Museum of Ethnology Berlin where he was employed.[29] Hauthal himself occasionally acquired ethnographic objects or collections. And people continued to give objects to the *Roemer-Museum* whose renown still reached far beyond Hildesheim and Lower Saxony.

Conclusion

In order to get a full picture, and thus a deeper understanding, of the collecting strategies and practices of European museums, it is necessary to go beyond research on selected case examples. We need to find out what broader networks existed, how they were established, and how they worked. If we may generalise from the example of the Hildesheim City Museum/*Roemer-Museum*, we can assume that many if not most ethnographic objects were not given or sold by "big-name collectors" such as the more or less prominent members of the German Colonial Force who sent huge quantities not

only of ethnographic objects but also of natural history specimens from the German colonies to the Royal Museum of Ethnology (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) in Berlin.

We can assume that museums outside the imperial capital received most of their ethnographic objects in the context of local and translocal networks such as those described in the present contribution. To be sure, Hermann Roemer used his political network (and the networks of Louis Dyes) to provide the museum with significant contributions by prominent figures such as Höpfner, Böhm, Flegel, Hildebrandt, and Zembsch. However, these objects make up only a small fraction of the ethnographic collection as a whole. A substantial number of objects and collections, some of them outstanding, came from citizens of Hildesheim or natives of Hildesheim living abroad, such as Stelling, Massolles, Ohlmer, Machens, and Muhlert.

Others were offered the museum by people living in other parts first of the German Confederation (1815–1866), then of the German Empire (1871–1918), due to the renown enjoyed by the City Museum/*Roemer-Museum* far beyond the boundaries of Hildesheim. These connections between the museum and collectors, spanning many parts of the globe like a spider's web with the *Roemer-Museum* at its centre, constitute another type of network. The collecting strategies and practices of the museum become apparent from the interplay between these formal and less formal networks made up of a multitude of diverse actors.

1 Quoted in Alphei, Cord (1998): "Der Hildesheimer Museumsverein 1844–1911", in: Rudolf Keck (Ed.): *Gesammelte Welten. Das Erbe der Brüder Roemer und die Museumskultur in Hildesheim (1844–1994)*, Hildesheim, pp. 417–448, p. 423.
2 For outlines of the museum's history see Alphei, 1998), "*Der Hildesheimer Museumsverein*"; Boetzkes, Manfred (1998): "Welten in Vitrinen. 150 Jahre Roemer-Museum. Texte und Bilder einer Ausstellung", in: Rudolf Keck (Ed.): *Gesammelte Welten. Das Erbe der Brüder Roemer und die Museumskultur in Hildesheim (1844–1994)*, Hildesheim, pp. 465–508.
3 Brief overviews of the collections at the RPM are provided on its homepage http://www.rpmuseum.de/ueber-uns/sammlungen.html, accessed 20 May 2023.
4 *Erster Jahres-Bericht über den Verein für Kunde der Natur und der Kunst im Fürstenthum Hildesheim und in der Stadt Goslar (1845),* Hildesheim, p. 9.
5 On the Godeffroy trading company and its collecting activities see Scheps, *Birgit (2005): Das verkaufte Museum. Die Südsee-Unternehmungen des Handelshauses Joh. Ces. Godeffroy & Sohn, Hamburg, und die Sammlungen "Museum Godeffroy"*, Keltern-Weiler.
6 For a biographical sketch of Muhlert's see Lang, Sabine; Nicklisch, Andrea (2021): *Den Sammlern auf der Spur. Provenienzforschung zu kolonialen Kontexten am Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim 2017/18*, (Veröffentlichungen des Netzwerks Provenienzforschung in Niedersachsen, Vol. 2), Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.742, accessed 10 May 2023, pp. 114–116.
7 The Jacobsen and von den Steinen objects at the Roemer-Museum are discussed in Lang and Nicklisch 2021, *Den Sammlern auf der Spur*, pp. 80–97 and 98–109.
8 This becomes evident from the reports of the Museumsverein (*Verein für Kunde der Natur und der Kunst im Fürstenthum Hildesheim und in der Stadt Goslar*) that were published from 1845 until 1906. They list objects given to the museum.
9 Anonymous (1922): *Führer durch die Sammlungen des Roemer-Museums in Hildesheim*, Hildesheim, p. 6.
10 See Raffert, Joachim (1998): "Hermann Roemer als Parlamentarier. Hildesheims erster Abgeordneter im Deutschen Reichstag", in: Rudolf Keck (Ed.): *Gesammelte Welten. Das Erbe der Brüder Roemer und die Museumskultur in Hildesheim (1844–1994)*, Hildesheim, pp. 203–242.
11 Ibid., p. 223.
12 On these expeditions funded by the "Afrikanische Gesellschaft" see Schnee, Heinrich (1920) (Ed.): *Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon*, Vol. 2, Leipzig, pp. 21–22, on http://www.ub.bildarchiv-dkg.uni-frankfurt.de/Bildprojekt/Lexikon/php/suche_db.php?suchname=Afrikanische_Gesellschaft_und_Afrikafonds, accessed 12 May 2023.
13 Objects are attributed to these collectors in the inventory books of the Roemer-Museum. In addition, Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 462, "Erwerbungen für die Afrika-Sammlung, 1882–1900", contains a list entitled "Doublets from the Flegel Collection" (1883) as well as a list "For Hildesheim: Doublets Afrikanische Gesellschaft, Afrikanische Expedition Dr. Böhm" (1883).
14 For these business connections see, for example, letters by Dyes to Roemer in Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 408, "Schenkung von ethnographischen Gegenständen durch den Generalkonsul Louis Dyes aus Bremen, 1872–1899".
15 Dyes' acquaintance with Zembsch may have been due to the fact that both were consuls. At the time he collected the ethnographic objects, Zembsch was Consul of the German Empire in Samoa, cf. https://sammlung-digital.lindenmuseum.de/de/objekt/trinkschale_351, accessed 10 May 2023.
16 The role played by Dyes' business and diplomatic connections in the acquisition of ethnographic objects, as well as the acquaintance of both Dyes and Roemer with Bastian, become apparent from letters in Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 408, "Schenkung von ethnographischen Gegenständen durch den Generalkonsul Louis Dyes aus Bremen, 1873–1899".

17 In April 1884 Dyes, together with businessmen Adolf Lüderitz and Adolf Woermann, had a conversation with Chancellor Otto von Bismarck about German colonial ambitions; see Zimmermann, Alfred (1914): *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonialpolitik*, Berlin, pp. 68–69.
18 Like Lüderitz, Dyes had business interests in Southern Africa. He imported raw wool from the Cape and Transvaal; cf. Anonymous: "Reicher Kaufmann verwirklicht sich prunkvollen Traum vom Sommersitz", in: *Hildesheimer Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 August 1994, no pag. We can assume that Dyes, like Lüderitz, expected to profit from the exploitation of resources in Southwest Africa.
19 For a biographical sketch see Schulz, Regine (2015): "Ernst Ohlmer und seine Sammlung. Von China nach Hildesheim", in: Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum (Ed.): *Drache, Phönix, Fledermaus. Meisterwerke chinesischer Kunst aus dem Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim* (exhibition catalogue), Hildesheim, pp. 22–29.
20 See documents in Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 241, "Völkerkunde: Geschenke an die Völkerkundeabteilung, 1882–1929".
21 See Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741 Nr. 415, "Briefe von Albert Götting und Julio Braun aus Bolivien und Chile an das Roemer-Museum, 1895–1897".
22 Machens and his collection were the subject of a special exhibition at the City Museum (*Stadtmuseum*) Hildesheim, "Fidschi-Machens: Ein Hildesheimer in der Südsee" (3 October 2008–3 May 2009); see also Lütgert, Stephan A. (2009): *Conrad Machens – ein Kaufmannsleben zwischen Deutschland und Fidschi,* Husum.
23 Letters, lists and descriptions of objects, etc., are found in Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 195, "Erwerbung der Waffensammlung des Piano- und Orgelbauers Carl Masolles für die Völkerkundesammlung, 1893–1895".
24 Hildesheim City Archives (*Stadtarchiv Hildesheim*) Best. 741, Nr. 419, "Erwerb von nordamerikanischen Steinwaffen von Herrn E. Marheineke aus den USA, einer südamerikanischen Sammlung von Alwine Wallis aus Detmold und einer Indianersammlung aus Bolivien und Paraguay von Siegfried Bauer aus Bonn, 1879–1888".
25 On Ferdinand Roemer's travels in Texas and his encounters with the local Native Americans – the Comanches – see Roemer, Ferdinand (1849): *Texas. Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf deutsche Auswanderung und die physischen Verhältnisse des Landes*, Bonn. (English translation 1995: *Roemer's Texas 1845 to 1847. With Particular Reference to German Immigration and the Physical Appearance of the Country: Described Through Personal Observation.* Translated from the German by Oswald Mueller, Fort Worth, Texas.)
26 Boetzkes, 1998, *Welten in Vitrinen*, p. 480.
27 Edgar Walden, a cultural anthropologist, had been interim director of the Roemer-Museum in 1905/06. For his biography see Lang and Nicklisch (2021): *Den Sammlern auf der Spur*, pp. 53–74.
28 Boetzkes, 1998, *Welten in Vitrinen*, p. 482.
29 Lang and Nicklisch, 2021, *Den Sammlern auf der Spur*, pp. 61, 69.

III.

Managing, Using and Researching Objects in Collections

Gestion, utilisation et recherche d'objets dans les collections

Introduction

Managing, Using and Researching Objects in Collections

Introduction

Hannah Stieglitz

In their introductory handbook on colonialism Jürgen Osterhammel and Jan C. Jansen described colonisation as a phenomenon of "colossal Ambiguity".[1] This attribution is perfectly applicable to the field of postcolonial provenance research which is demanding insights of disciplines abound. Cultural materials with a colonial background have been distributed globally to various Museums, teaching or private collections bigger and smaller in their size by countless people and institutions in differing moments in history. Looking beyond histories of acquisition, ownership, and object biographies this field of research also strives to contribute to a wider understanding of the genesis of these very collections and institutions.[2] The contributions in this Chapter focus on what happens in the aftermath of the collection and acquisition when the cultural goods become part of a collection. They provide insights into different institutions and ways of dealing with objects and grasp challenges of current provenance research in relation to practices of managing, using and researching objects in collections. Not only do we learn about specific means of documenting (or not-documenting) in individual collection settings, but the multiplicity of sources also including their limits and the people connected to both.

In her article *Paule-Clisthène Dassi Koudjou* gives critical insights into the bigger picture by comparing the very concepts of conservation of African heritage in Germany on the one hand and Cameroon on the other. In her comparison it becomes clear that African and European notions of heritage and conservation of value and preservation differ in existential ways and the loss of cultural goods has been more than a material loss in the aftermath of colonialism. She pleads for community museums as carriers of cultural heritage as they enable a conservation in relation to and with the people who made the objects as there are multiple ways of keeping and valuing objects in a museum.

Martin Nadarzinski describes the questioning procedures of provenance research in the Ethnographic Collection for the German Institute of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (*Deutsches Institut für tropische und subtropische Landwirtschaft*) in Witzenhausen, Germany. An institution which was founded during the German colonialism and dedicated to the education of young men to become colonial farmers. The challenges and obstacles and the specifics of two Namibian objects in this private collection demonstrate the time and personnel needed for further research that could connect these objects to their history and enable concrete steps like their repatriation.

Katharina Nowak presents a convolute of artefacts from Papua New Guinea which was collected by the German colonial official Wilhelm Knappe (1855–1910) and is now placed at the Museum of Thuringian Folklore in Erfurt, Germany, as the 'South Seas Collection'. She focuses on practices creating knowledge by dealing with these objects in historical and contemporary settings. It becomes clear that it matters how the items were collected and how they came to Germany. How they were classified, researched, and exhibited shaped the notion of them.

Hannah Stieglitz traces the colonial provenances of three East African rattles in the Ethnographic Collection of the Georg-August-University Göttingen, Germany and the stories revealed by their documentation. She argues that the ways in which the rattles have been documented as objects of the collection has led to a fragmentation of knowledge that has been shaped by the people who acquired and inventoried them rather than by the people who made and used them. The gaps in the documentation refer to the absence of stories which enable the questioning of the processes of (colonial) knowledge production.

1 Osterhammel, Jürgen; Jansen, Jan C. (20178): *Kolonialismus. Geschichte, Formen, Folgen*. München, p. 8.

2 Förster, Larissa; Eidenheiser, Iris; Fründt, Sarah; Hartmann, Heike (Eds): *Provenienzforschung zu ethnographischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit. Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte.* Elektronische Publikation zur Tagung „Provenienzforschung in ethnologischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit", Museum Fünf Kontinente, München, 7./8. April 2017, Berlin 2018, https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/handle/18452/19769, accessed 20 April 2023, p. 18.

III.

Managing, Using and Researching Objects in Collections

Colonial Entanglement, “South Sea” Imaginations and Knowledge Production

Managing, Using and Researching Objects in Collections

Colonial Entanglement, “South Sea” Imaginations and Knowledge Production

Katharina Nowak

Abstract

My chapter focuses on a collection that came to Germany from Pacific Islands during the German colonial period. It was named the “South Sea Collection” by Wilhelm Knappe (1855–1910) and is housed by the Museum of Thuringian Folklore (*Museum für Thüringer Volkskunde*) in Erfurt. Knappe was a German diplomat and colonial official. I am interested in different epistemic practices through which knowledge is produced in dealing with these objects in historical and contemporary contexts, including the everyday cultures from which they originated. The chapter examines the practices of collectors and dealers, curators and scholars who have gathered these objects from their everyday or ritual contexts (sometimes using force and power), mobilised them, shipped them to Germany and sold, stored, researched, curated, and still curate them in the context of museums. How are and were these objects remembered and forgotten, conceived and classified, produced and used, stolen or exchanged, researched and exhibited? In conclusion I will address current questions concerning the collection.

L'enchevêtrement colonial, l'imaginaire des « mers du Sud » et la production de savoir (Résumé)

Mon chapitre est axé sur une collection qui est arrivée en Allemagne en provenance des îles du Pacifique pendant la période coloniale allemande. Cette collection a été nommée la «Collection de la mer du Sud» par Wilhelm Knappe (1855–1910) et est conservée au musée du folklore de Thuringe (Museum für Thüringer Volkskunde) à Erfurt. Wilhelm Knappe était un diplomate allemand et un fonctionnaire colonial. Je m'intéresse aux différentes pratiques épistémiques par lesquelles les connaissances se développent lors de la gestion de ces objets dans des contextes historiques et contemporains, notamment dans les cultures quotidiennes dont ils sont issus. Ce chapitre se penche sur les pratiques des collectionneurs et des marchands, des conservateurs et des spécialistes, qui ont rassemblé ces objets dans leur contexte quotidien ou rituel (en ayant parfois recours à la force et au pouvoir), qui les ont mobilisés, qui les ont expédiés en Allemagne et vendus, qui les ont stockés, qui ont fait des recherches, qui les ont conservés et qui les conservent toujours dans le contexte des musées. Comment ces objets sont-ils et ont-ils été perpétués et oubliés, conçus et répertoriés, produits et utilisés, volés ou échangés, recherchés et exposés ? En conclusion, j'aborderai les questions actuelles concernant la collection.

Introduction

The current public and critical discourse on how to deal with objects from colonial contexts addresses political questions but also the need for European museums to reappraise their holdings. In addition to provenance research;[1] that is, the reconstruction of object biographies, other perspectives, such as collaborative research with people from the societies of origin or participant observation in the field, are relevant for the collections concerned.[2] This chapter contributes to the decolonisation of knowledge production through museum collections. The perspective is interdisciplinary in nature, as it has implications for ethnology, museology and historical studies, as well as for cultural and social anthropology in the narrower sense, and draws on the theoretical and methodological foundations of the aforementioned disciplines. In addition to a global, transnational perspective, this chapter contributes to work critical of power and domination, with a special focus on postcolonial structures.[3]

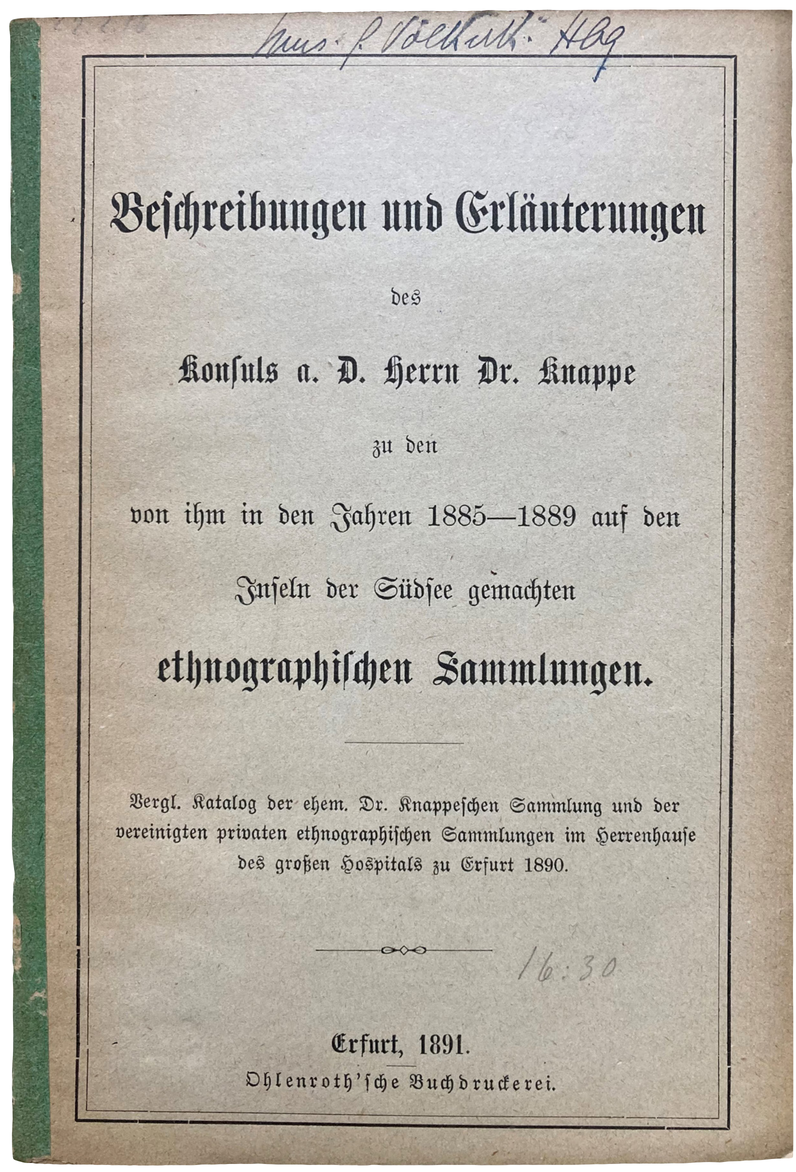
The Collection

This chapter focuses on a group of 900 objects in the ethnographic museum, which came into a German collection during the colonial period. They originate from what is now called Papua New Guinea (PNG), Marshall Island, Samoa and other islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, then German colonies.[4] The group of objects form the so-called "South Sea Collection" appropriated by Wilhelm Knappe (1855–1910),[5] a German colonial official, and it is housed by the Museum of Thuringian Folklore in Erfurt.

I am interested in different epistemic practices that produce knowledge in dealing with these objects – both in the historical and contemporary contexts. The everyday cultures from which they originally came; as well as in relation to the practices of collectors and traders, curators and scientists who took these objects out of their everyday or ritual contexts (sometimes using force and power), mobilised them, shipped them to Germany and sold, stored, researched and curated them in museums to this day.[6] How are these objects made and forgotten, conceived and classified, manufactured and used, stolen or exchanged, researched and exhibited? I use a broad, comparative concept of knowledge in the sense of Fredrik Barth,[7] which not only includes academically produced knowledge, but all knowledge that people use to interpret and act in the world – *models of and models for* – as Clifford Geertz says.[8]

Objects can have different meanings for different actors. From a museum perspective, they can be semiotic characters. From an anthropological point of view, for example in Marilyn Strathern's works or in actor–network theory,[9] they are active actors. What were their meanings for their societies of origin? The epistemic practices of different groups of actors produce different "truths" and ontologies. I am interested in the hierarchical order of these truths and their interactions with power.

I examine the connections of knowledge or knowledge production with positions of power in terms of the "situated knowledges"[10] regarding the so-called South Sea Collection in Erfurt.[11] The incorporation of historical and ethnological methods and approaches practiced in this work suggests that the Global South and the Global North must be seen simultaneously and as part of a globally intertwined modernity, although they participate in it under asymmetrical conditions.[12] In this context, a differentiated view of



Beschreibungen und Erläuterungen

des

Konsuls a. D. Herrn Dr. Knappe

zu den

von ihm in den Jahren 1885—1889 auf den

Inseln der Südsee gemachten

ethnographischen Sammlungen.

Vergl. Katalog der ehem. Dr. Knappeschen Sammlung und der vereinigten privaten ethnographischen Sammlungen im Herrenhause des großen Hospitals zu Erfurt 1890.

Erfurt, 1891.

Ohlenroth'sche Buchdruckerei.

Figure 1 | Cover page "Descriptions and Explanations" 1891 by Wilhelm Knappe
(Source: *Beschreibungen und Erläuterungen des Konsuls a.D. Herrn Dr. Knappe zu den von ihm in den Jahren 1885–1889 auf den Inseln der Südsee gemachten ethnographischen Sammlungen*, Erfurt 1891)
© (Photo: Katharina Nowak)

(historical) colonisation is necessary: for example, racist settlement colonies proceeded differently to former plantation economies.

Source and archive material supports the reconstruction of the history[13] of the collection. I then analyse the interests and attributions of value of Knappe from the sources of the museum archive. There are also inventory books and inventory cards in Erfurt.

The descriptions of the collection published by Knappe in 1890 imply that he was interested in the stories behind the people and things, addressing aspects such as the manufacture and materiality of the objects in his self-written catalogue of 1890 and descriptions and explanations of 1891.[14] Presumably, however, he wished to secure the (scientific) value of the collection.

There is also relevant archival material in the city archives of Erfurt, such as newspaper clippings, correspondence in the form of letters and contracts, and digitised photos of glass plates. In order to carry out a broader contextualisation of the objects in the colonial setting and from different perspectives, I am also working with colonial and oral history sources from the 1960s and 1970s, which I hope to find in the National Archive in Port Moresby, PNG. Additional important sources include the exhibition catalogue, newspaper articles and the exhibitions themselves. Other archival sources of importance to the project are located in the Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin.

Epistemic Practices

The original 900 objects have been in Erfurt since 1889.[15] These objects were appropriated in 1885–86 by the colonial official Wilhelm Knappe.[16] From 1886 to 1887, Knappe was the first Imperial Commissioner of the Marshall Islands at Jaluit and from 1888 to 1889 the Consul in Samoa.[17] Today the collection still consists of about 600 objects from Melanesia.[18] Knappe appropriated cultural materials at the Huon Peninsula and the Bismarck Archipelago, among other places. In 1886 he travelled up a stretch of the Kaiserin Augusta River (Sepik River in PNG)[19] and, with Carl Schrader (Astronomer, 1852–1930), Max Hollrung (Scientist, 1858–1937) and Georg von Schleinitz (German Naval Officer, 1834–1910), he travelled 300 nautical miles (555.6 km)

inland along the Sepik, aboard the steamer *Ottilie*.[20] He also took part in a number of expeditions, including the research trip of the German New Guinea Company from 28 July to 10 August 1886.

Upon Knappe's return to the "South Sea" as a colonial official in 1889, he left the collection in his hometown of Erfurt,[21] where it remains part of the Museum of Thuringian Folklore today. In a publication from 2005 the museum stated that the collection came to Erfurt through "civic engagement".[22] The objects are utilitarian and cult objects such as musical instruments, jewellery and weapons.[23] Knappe also created an extensive photographic archive with photographs from his stay in Samoa and the Marshall Islands. Some objects were exchanged with the Royal Ethnographic Museum (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) Berlin in June 1928,[24] including the ancestor board, leaf paintings and a feather shield. Previously, the collection had already been requested by Felix Luschan (1854–1924) himself for the first German colonial exhibition[25] in Berlin-Treptow, but was rejected.[26]

The objects were initially presented in the *Große Hospital*, now the Museum of Thuringian Folklore.[27] Unfortunately, there is no documentation for this beyond sketches for the display tables.[28] But the objects remained accessible in the order of the first exhibition in 1890. However, if one reads the exhibitions of the time as sources, there are three narratives, each set in the period and telling of the different exhibitions.

During the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, the aim had been to rearrange the collection, but this plan was abandoned due to lack of personnel and postponed to the early 1930s. During the Third Reich in 1941, the collection attracted the attention of a city official who advocated for a profound expansion.[29] The objects were increasingly given a propagandistic function, where their scientific value was superseded by a pedagogically deployed display of strength. Knappe's influence, which had already diminished, was lost entirely when the "Knappe Collection" was renamed the "South Sea Collection", thus shifting the focus to the territory to be conquered or regained. The notion of colonisation was to be symbolised by a future colonial museum and the popularisation of the colonial idea was to be guaranteed by appealing to the youth.

The objects had very different missions to fulfil: As ethnological objects they were to educate, as "exotic" objects they were to entertain, and as colonial objects they were to enhance the prestige of the city.[30] "The colonial" was thus variously consumable at the exhibitions without always being interpreted as such. Less mutable were the colonial stereotypes, which in Knappe's

case also corresponded to contemporary narratives of the "original primitive peoples".[31] These followed the idea that the people in the colonies were fundamentally different from the population in the Global North. The culture of the "others" was perceived to be inferior in this respect because it could only exist in contact with its European counterpart.

In the post-war period, the collection was not forgotten, but was exhibited again in 1966 and 1873.[32] After the museum brought back individual pieces to the *Große Hospital* in Erfurt, the South Sea Collection was shown on new premises and on the first floor in 1966.

The Collection was also exhibited in a similar constellation in 1973, at the "request of many citizens"[33] as a newspaper article claimed. The "Stone Age motif" was almost completely dropped in the newspaper articles, which instead emphasised the lack of contact with the outside world and the prehistoric classless form of society. The people originally from these territories otherwise tended to be side-lined. Narratives about them served only to distinguish them from the hegemonic group in question. In this context, explicit reference was made to the over-modelled ancestral skulls and "the large outrigger boat with mast and sail – the only one of its kind in the East Germany"[34], supporting the narrative of the "primitive stranger". It is noticeable in the photos of the exhibition space that more objects were exhibited than in 1966.[35] The fact that the new exhibition would display "more extensive material"[36] had already been announced. This was also intended to offer scientists in particular a "rich field of activity"[37], but no reference is made to youth.

Even though the collection then disappeared again into the depot in Erfurt, the regional museum landscape of East Germany continued to show interest in the subject. In 1977, part of the collection was loaned to neighbouring Gotha for two years, where the museum there displayed it together with objects from other collections under the title "Oceania – Cultures of Distant Peoples".[38] Once again, the outrigger boat was pointed out as a special attraction, set up in Gotha for the first time complete with sails, and has since been touted as a jewel of the collection.[39]

Today, the Museum of Thuringian Folklore exhibits the South Sea Collection in the so-called *Benary-Speicher*, a warehouse building built in 1887 as a storage facility for the Benary seed company. It was not until the beginning of the year 2000 that the objects moved there on a long-term basis,[40] having undergone extensive restoration before the exhibition opened its doors in March 2001.[41] Individual exhibits were prepared in display cases and on tables, while the majority – as in most museums – were stored in boxes.[42] In the

years that followed, the collection was open to visitors almost every Wednesday afternoon and sometimes on other days; with quarterly guided tours and smaller special exhibitions. Then, in a special exhibition, the South Sea Collection was made partly accessible to the public together with artworks from the Erfurt Art Gallery (*Kunsthalle*) under the title "Journeys to Paradise – The Erfurt South Sea Collection reflected in art". Although the aim of the exhibition was to break with the stereotype of the "South Sea paradise"[43], in fact the exhibition and publication both reproduced this stereotype rather than deconstructing it.[44] Both the title and the catalogue of the exhibition suggest the colonial ideas and exotic fantasies of the "South Sea paradise", which fail to indicate a critical examination from a postcolonial perspective. Unfortunately, the exhibition and the catalogue were only partially successful.

Most recently, in 2012, the museum organised an exhibition together with the *Iwalewa House* of the University of Bayreuth entitled "In Dialogue: Contemporary South Sea Art and the South Sea Collection of the Museum of Thuringian Folklore".[45] The closures, re-openings and varying scopes of exhibitions recorded between 1890 and 2005 indicate changing interests and opportunities. Currently, the South Sea Collection can only be visited upon prior request and there are no fixed opening hours.[46]

Conclusion

In examining which and how knowledge about the objects was produced; for example, what knowledge about Europeans the local producers of objects (during the colonial period) had, this chapter has explained the changes in meanings and functions of the objects. What functions will the objects have in the future? To answer this question, the collection must be digitally accessible and contact must be made with Melanesia to inquire about their needs and wishes. But in PNG as well as in Europe, there is often a lack of financial resources for everyday museum practice. These findings from ethnographic and historical research seek to visualise different epistemic practices. They ask how these different practices are related to each other and how their articulation might be appropriately, innovatively and symmetrically represented in exhibition projects and in museum work. The analysis from different perspectives is not possible without cooperation with actors from the societies of origin.

It would be neocolonial to once again use the societies of origin for our interests, under the guise of science, to interrogate and enrich ourselves with their knowledge, under the pretext of "cooperation". Will the Indigenous people there really be helped if German scientists go there without speaking the language, without knowing what they are triggering, both emotionally (re-traumata) and socially (disputes about land and jurisdiction). Moreover, research projects are usually limited in time. The restitution debates of recent years, triggered by the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, are putting museums under pressure. Quick action is demanded. We have finally learned to listen and acknowledge the injustice. Of course, the cultures wish to see their cultural material returned. Of course, there are scientists and sometimes museums in the societies of origin. Yes, there are also legal hurdles. But that is not what this is about, it's about our collaborative partners from Oceania. We are holding privileged debates about colonialism and the collecting mania of the Europeans.

Provenance research, once the local source study has been completed, should primarily involve collaboration with partners from the objects' countries of origin. Collaboration can illuminate the meanings and histories of the objects and shed light on knowledge production. Ontological contextualisation can bring forth an understanding of reciprocal appropriations and transnational exchanges. Reconstructions allow for knowledge production that also allows for resistance and brings to light local as well as colonial stereotypes and classifications. Challenges in collaboration, such as differing levels of access to digital media and infrastructure, must be overcome in order for postcolonial provenance research to decolonise knowledge production.

Archival documents

BArch Berlin: Federal Archives of the Federal Republic of Germany Berlin-Lichterfelde, therein:

- R 1001/2977 General conditions in Kaiser Wilhelms Land and in the Bismarck Archipelago (Allgemeine Verhältnisse im Kaiser-Wilhelms-Land und im Bismarck-Archipel).
- KA III Gr.28 Administrative cases (Verwaltungssachen), Vol. 2.

MfTV: Archive Museum for Thuringian Folklore Erfurt, therein:

- File Knappe Collection.
- Card catalogue of the Knappe collection.
- Digital photos of the exhibitions 1966, 1973/74 and 2005.

PA AA Berlin: Political Archive of the Foreign Office Berlin, therein:

- Personnel files Wilhelm Knappe:
- P1: 7534, P1: 7537, P1: 7538, P1 7539, P1 7541, P1 7542, P1 7544.

StArch Erfurt: City Archive Erfurt, therein:

- 1-2/322-3843 Museum of Natural History, General.
- 1-2/322-4838 South Sea Collection (Knappe).
- 1-2/322-4898 Museum, advertising.
- 3/8 Newspapers: Thüringer Allgemeine, Thüringer Volkswacht, Erfurter Wochenzeitung, Thüringer Tageblatt, Thüringer Landeszeitung, Thüringer Neuste Nachrichten, Das Volk, Erfurter Allgemeine.
- 4-0 II B 127 Catalog: Katalog der ehemaligen Dr. Knappe'schen Sammlung und der vereinigten privaten ethnographischen Sammlungen im Herrenhause des großen Hospitals zu Erfurt, 1890.
- 4-0 II B 128 Descriptions and explanations: Beschreibungen und Erläuterungen des Konsuls a.D. Herrn Dr. Knappe zu den von ihm in den Jahren 1885–1889 auf den Inseln der Südsee gemachten ethnographischen Sammlungen, 1891 by Wilhelm Knappe, Ohlenroth'sche Buchdruckerei Erfurt, Erfurt 1891.
- 4-0 E 8/ b 30 Communications of the Vereins für Geschichte und Alterthumskunde
- 6_0_18A7_003 Photo: Reopening Knappe-Sammlung.
- 7/141-202 Floor plans of the rooms of the *Große Hospital*.
- 5/5 Museums in general, therein: South Sea Collection.

1 Provenance research is a concept of the Global North that is infused with Western notions of property and the individual. I would like to distance myself from this in order to provide a different perspective. Use of the term "provenance research" here only serves to understand the method, which I in turn try to decolonise through collaboration in my PhD project.
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3 I would like to question the objects' production, their circulation, their appropriation and usage, their museum functions, and their meanings today, shedding light on this from multiple perspectives.
4 For introductory literature on Melanesia, see Sillitoe, Paul (2000): *Social Change in Melanesia. Development und History*, Cambridge.
5 A critical reappraisal of the person Wilhelm Knappe is given by Hoes, Charlotte M. (2022): "Wie hast du's mit der Wissenschaft? Zur Kolonialität der Erfurter 'Südseesammlung'", in: *Historische Anthropologie*, Vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 100–109. See also Hoes, Charlotte M. (2019): "Die Erfurter 'Südseesammlung'", on https://decolonizeerfurt.wordpress.com/die-erfurter-suedseesammlung/, accessed 10 March 2023.
6 Theoretically framed by Mauss, Marcel (1990 [1925]): *Die Gabe: Form und Funktion des Austauschs in archaischen Gesellschaften*, Frankfurt am Main.
7 Barth, Fredrik (2002): "An Anthropology of Knowledge", in: *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 1–18.
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13 In the sense of Thomas, Nicolas (1991): *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*, Cambridge, MA; London.
14 Cf. Figure 1.
15 Municipal Archive Erfurt (*Stadtarchiv Erfurt*, StArch), File 4-0 II B 127, "Katalog der ehemaligen Dr. Knappe'schen Sammlung und der vereinigten privaten ethnographischen Sammlungen im Herrenhause des großen Hospitals zu Erfurt, 1890".
16 Ibid.
17 Mückler, Hermann (2016): *Die Marshall-Inseln und Nauru in deutscher Kolonialzeit*, Berlin.
18 Höfer, Iris (2005): "Bejubelt, beargwöhnt, vergessen: Die Stadt Erfurt und ihre Knappe-Sammlung", in: Moritz and Schierz, 2005, *Reisen ins Paradies*, pp. 101–118; p. 101.
19 Melk-Koch, Marion (2005): "Die Südsee", in: Moritz and Schierz, 2005, *Reisen ins Paradies*, pp. 15–19, p. 18.
20 Raßloff, Steffen (2005): *Wilhelm Knappe (1855–1910). Staatsmann und Völkerkundler im Blickpunkt deutscher Weltpolitik*, Jena, p. 95.

21 Ibid, p. 68.
22 Moritz and Schierz, 2005, *Reisen ins Paradies,* p. 13, in the preface, translated KN.
23 Höfer, 2005, *Bejubelt, beargwöhnt, vergessen*, pp. 106f.
24 Melk-Koch, 2005, *Die Südsee*, p. 51.
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27 Höfer, 2005, *Bejubelt, beargwöhnt, vergessen*, p. 109 and 112.
28 Municipal Archive Erfurt, file 7/141-202, floor plans of the *Große Hospital*.
29 Museum for Thuringian Folklore, Archive, digital photos of the exhibitions.
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31 Municipal Archive Erfurt, "Beschreibungen und Erläuterungen des Konsuls a.D. Herrn Dr. Knappe zu den von ihm in den Jahren 1885–1889 auf den Inseln der Südsee gemachten ethnographischen Sammlungen", 1891 von Wilhelm Knappe, Erfurt 1891, excerpt: "Die hier ausgestellten Gegenstände stammen ausschließlich aus dem Deutsch-Neu-Guinea. Dieses Gebiet ist erst in den letzten Jahren näher erforscht worden, während es bis 1884 von Weißen kaum betreten war. Die Erzeugnisse sind sämtlich noch mit den primitivsten, nur im Lande hergestellten Werkzeugen fabriziert, insbesondere ist kein Metall, sondern nur Holz, Stein, Muscheln und Knochen als Material verwendet. Selbstverständlich waren Eisen und aus Eisen und Stahl gemachte Werkzeuge, die bei näherer Bekanntschaft sofort am meisten gesuchten Tauschartikel, und schon nach kurzer Zeit wurden die alten Werkzeuge nicht mehr verwendet, während man im Übrigen an den alten Sitten und Gebräuchen noch festhielt und daher die Erzeugnisse ihrer Arbeit und Industrie noch dieselben blieben. Heute schon findet man an der Küste von Kaiser Wilhelmsland fast nur mit eisernen Werkzeugen hergestellte Geräte, während die in diesem Schrank ausgestellten Gegenstände noch sämtlich mit den einheimischen primitiven Werkzeugen angefertigt worden sind."
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33 Municipal Archive Erfurt, 3/8, Thüringer Neuste Nachrichten, 20 July 1973, translated KN.
34 Municipal Archive Erfurt, 3/8, Thüringer Tageblatt, 17 July 1973, translated KN.
35 Museum for Thuringian Folklore, Archive, digital photos of the exhibitions.
36 Municipal Archive Erfurt, 3/8, Thüringer Neuste Nachrichten, 20 July 1973, translated KN.
37 Ibid.
38 Höfer, 2005, *Bejubelt, beargwöhnt, vergessen*, p. 114, translated KN.
39 Ibid., p. 114.
40 Moritz and Schierz, 2005, *Reisen ins Paradies*, p. 13.
41 Ibid.
42 Museum for Thuringian Folklore, Archive, digital photos of the exhibitions.
43 Moritz and Schierz, 2005, *Reisen ins Paradies,* p. 13 in the preface.
44 See Hoes, 2022, *Wie hast du's mit der Wissenschaft?*
45 Website of the City of Erfurt, https://www.erfurt.de/ef/de/service/aktuelles/pm/2012/106267.html, accessed 13 March 2023, translated KN.
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III.

Managing, Using and Researching Objects in Collections

Managing, Using and Researching Objects in Collections

Conservation of African Cultural Heritage

A Comparative Study between Cameroon and Germany

Paule-Clisthène Dassi Koudjou

Abstract

The conservation of cultural heritage is a concern common to all peoples. But the techniques differ from one space to another depending on the environment, customs, traditions and context. This paper is a comparative study of the conservation of African cultural heritage in a European and an African country – Germany and Cameroon. Here, I will relate the techniques of conservation of cultural heritage according to the model of German museums and those practiced by the Cameroonian peoples before and after independence. I also address the significance of cultural goods commonly called "objects" for the peoples who produced them and those who keep them in Western museums. This analysis will lead on to the role played by the community museums of traditional chiefdoms in heritage conservation. Finally, I will also look at the daily use of these heritage items conserved in community museums for ceremonies and rituals within the community, and the denaturing of these items by the uninitiated (collectors, art galleries, etc.) or the international museum institutions that conserve them. This comparative study will not only refocus the global vision on issues of conservation of African cultural heritage, but also show the important role of these assets for the communities that produced them as well as the negative impact of their loss for the community.

Conservation du patrimoine culturel africain. Une étude comparative entre le Cameroun et l'Allemagne (Résumé)

La conservation du patrimoine culturel est une préoccupation commune à tous les peuples. Mais les techniques diffèrent d'un espace à l'autre, en fonction de l'environnement, des coutumes et traditions et du contexte. Ce document est une étude comparative sur la conservation du patrimoine culturel africain en Europe (Allemagne) et en Afrique (Cameroun). Je décrirai les techniques de conservation du patrimoine culturel selon le modèle des musées allemands et celles pratiquées par les peuples camerounais avant et après l'indépendance. J'aimerais également présenter la place des biens culturels, communément appelés «objets», pour les peuples qui les ont produits et ceux qui les ont conservés dans les musées occidentaux. Cette analyse permettra d'identifier le rôle joué par les musées communautaires des chefferies traditionnelles dans la conservation du patrimoine. Je parlerai ensuite de l'utilisation quotidienne de ces biens patrimoniaux conservés dans des musées communautaires pour des cérémonies et des rituels au sein de la communauté et de leur dénaturation. Cette étude comparative permettra non seulement de recentrer la vision globale sur les questions de conservation du patrimoine culturel africain, mais aussi de montrer la place importante de ces biens pour les communautés qui les ont produits ainsi que les conséquences négatives de leur perte pour la communauté.

Understanding African Cultural Heritage

The conservation of cultural heritage is a concern common to all peoples. However, techniques differ from one region to another depending on the environment, customs, traditions and context. Over time, the concern to preserve heritage has become globalised, and UNESCO has made this its focus. In the 1972 Convention, the actors involved put forward the five principles of heritage conservation, abbreviated as the five "Cs", namely: the conservation of these properties, the credibility of the information transmitted, the development of capacities for safeguarding them, communication around them, and the enhancement of communities by involving them in the work of safeguarding and promoting this heritage.[1]

The work I am doing is a comparative study between the conservation techniques of African cultural heritage in Europe (Germany) and in Africa

(Cameroon). I present the relationship between the modes and means of conservation of cultural heritage according to the model of German museums and those practiced by the Cameroonian people before and after independence. This work also addresses the significance of cultural goods commonly called "objects", "art objects" or "ethnographic objects" according to the views[2] of the people who produced them and/or those who preserve them in museums.

This analysis highlights the important role played by the community museums of the traditional chieftaincies of West Cameroon in the day-to-day conservation of this heritage and the challenges they face through the constraints of exhibiting a living heritage. It is a question of showing the patrimonialisation of these "objects" through their daily uses as well as the role they play in the perpetuation of certain rites, thanks to the continuity of their use, thus ensuring the sociological equilibrium of the producing peoples. This comparative study will not only refocus on the issues around the conservation of African cultural heritage, but also show the importance of these goods for the communities that produced them and the negative impact of their loss for the community.

Cultural heritage can be defined as tangible or intangible assets of certain artistic and/or historical importance that belong either to a private entity (person, company, association, etc.) or to a public entity (municipality, department, region, country, etc.).[3]

Heritage is therefore understood as all goods received from parents or ancestors.[4] It is a treasure, a wealth passed on to the younger generation by the parents. We are all called upon to preserve it in order to pass it on to future generations. Unfortunately, these heritages can sometimes be controversial; some of them are the objects of covetousness and spoliation, while others have been destroyed by wars and armed conflicts of all kinds for centuries. Preservation and safeguarding actions are therefore implemented by states and governments. As far as Cameroon is concerned, the laws of 1991 and 2013 as well as the different conventions ratified by the country help in the conservation and preservation of the national heritage.[5]

The notion of African cultural heritage is complex because it is understood and defined according to the place in which it is found. For the producer peoples it is understood as "the very essence of community life because from early childhood the young person is educated in values through the reading of signs and symbols on objects".[6] Initially considered inferior to Western art, movable heritage was progressively considered objects of curiosity,[7] then as primitive art, and today as ethnographic objects.

Contact with other peoples has greatly influenced our understanding and conservation techniques. Numerous missions to explore the African continent were undertaken during the colonial and post-colonial periods by European countries, mostly for purposes of conquest and discovery. These missions led to the controversial removal of a large quantity of African treasures and cultural goods that were taken to the European metropolises, and Cameroon was not spared. Most of these goods were and are royal, cultural and ritual objects of great importance for the phisical and spiritual stability of communities.

Research into the origins of these objects shows the complexity and blurring of the documents concerning the modes of acquisition between their villages or communities of origin and the museum institutions that conserve them today. The words of Mr Picard, curator of the Natural History Museum in La Rochelle, illustrate this well: "We do not know the circumstances in which Petit-Renaud acquired this mask, nor the other pieces. The natives were hostile to the whites. He was attacked by the blacks. He also organised them".[8] In order to give value to "their objects", the collector put what he liked on the note or the transport slip. These heritages, which are today mostly kept in Western museums, are the pride of the institutions that hold them, to the detriment of the producing communities.

Western Understanding and Conservation of African Cultural Heritage

Originally regarded as objects of curiosity, African heritage objects and goods were presented by collectors as trophies of conquest from colonised territories. They were displayed in private homes and were the objects of covetousness for many. It was an advantage or privilege for collectors to own them. Their stylistics and forms differed from classical Western art, the latter mostly taking the form of paintings and stone sculptures. This so-called "exotic art", because of its new stylistics and forms, attracted a great deal of attention, first from explorers, then from colonists and officials of the colonial administration and also from antiques dealers. They were first exhibited in cabinets of curiosity, then in the great art galleries and on the Western marketplace. Their value was established on the basis of the stories told by the collectors, which often distorted the true history of the objects and increased their market value.

Today, these heritage items are kept in museums as part of permanent and temporary exhibitions. Here, the objects are taken in the true sense of the word, they are *elements* that no longer has a life of their own. They have been taken out of their contexts of manufacture and use. Through the Fourmies documentation by the collector or the sales registers, it may or may not be possible to retrace the more or less true "history" of an object and to identify the community that produced it as well as its function. But its value is more related to the beauty, the lines, the shape of the object, the style of sculpture, the creator. The aim of Western collectors and museum is to take care of the material element while forgetting the spiritual and functional side of object. The objects are preserved in the strictest manner, the museums are placed under alarms and video surveillance, the objects are placed under glass, in showcases, constantly cleaned and treated on a daily basis, and are called a "collection". They all have an inventory number, are registered in databases and are the objects of study and research for scientists. Those not on display are kept in well-organised and structured storerooms and are surrounded by teams of curators, managers, restorers and others to ensure their safety and longevity.

Africa's Understanding and Conservation of its Cultural Heritage

Long considered as objects of worship, the African cultural heritage is considered by Africans on several dimensions: material, customary and spiritual. It represents the link between the different forces of nature, humans and their environment.

Here, the object or property belongs to a people or population and has value only in terms of the symbolism and reason for which it was made. It is also seen as any being with a soul that is born, lives and dies. It is a god, a source of inspiration, it helps to protect, increases the fertility and nutrition of the earth, or serves to purify and repel evil spells. In the daily lives of couples, it is used for fertility rituals for both humans and animals. It helps to develop knowledge and understanding of life. It also allows the reading and prediction of the future.

The tangible and intangible dimensions associated with an African heritage property are never dissociated from each other. The production process

of a movable African cultural heritage property is almost always associated with a natural immovable space called a sacred place (like waterfalls, rocks, trees, etc.). This is done according to the charges that one wants it to carry and the event or ritual that is associated with it.

We can take the example of carved wooden statues or statuettes from the regions of Cameroon, which have made many collectors happy, representing kings and their first wives or queen mothers, highly prized and present in Western museums, and which are the symbol of power, a new life or a new era for a society, a community or a people. This is demonstrated by Pierre Harter when he says that "these sculptures are always made during the lifetime of those they are intended to portray, from the beginning of their reign, and usually within the first two years".[9] The establishment of a new power among the so-called Fulani Grassfield, with the accession of a new monarch to the throne, was symbolically celebrated by the production of new carved statues or statuettes. Each new monarch had to have a statue or statuette carved of himself, and a second statue made of his first wife.[10] These statues were always accompanied by other symbolic objects such as face masks or crests representing the new monarch's close associates. All these objects were and are used in the ceremony or ritual of the public enthronement of the king. Through them, the number of rulers in a kingdom could be determined simply by counting these statues or statuettes. In addition to these objects symbolising royalty, other objects were used on a daily basis for bringing fertility, blessing, purification, commemoration and other rituals in villages and communities. The preservation of each of these objects was and still is ensured by one or more custodians appointed for this purpose by the family, social group, community or village. As with the conservation of their heritage in the West with the establishment of museums, for centuries Africans have developed specific conservation spaces and put in place particular treatments for the perpetuation of their heritage.

These conservation structures or spaces differ from one environment to another depending on the size of the community. In a family, the head of the family has the heavy responsibility of looking after the heritage. In a community or grouping, heritage assets are kept in the centre of the village, at the chieftaincy, where a people's hut is built for this purpose. This hut is not only used for the conservation of property, but also for gatherings of the sons and daughters of the group or clan. It is important to note here that, just like humans or other living beings, objects or goods of the African and Cameroonian tangible cultural heritage have a life span, and when they reach their age

limit they die. They are then replaced by a second one that is similar to the previous one, produced under the same conditions, and receives the same symbolic charge as the first, thus enabling it to fulfil the same functions. This mode of transmission from one object to another allows for not only the transmission of power but also the perpetuation and conservation of the techniques of manufacture and production from generation to generation.

The Concept of the Museum and the Conservation of African Cultural Heritage in Africa

Since its General Assembly on 24 August 2022 in Prague, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) has been reflecting on a new and more inclusive definition for the institution of the museum. Thus, the museum is now defined as a permanent, profit-making institution at the service of society, dedicated to the research, collection, conservation, interpretation and exhibition of tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, it encourages diversity. Museums operate and communicate ethically and professionally, involving diverse communities. They offer their audiences diverse experiences of education, entertainment, reflection and knowledge-sharing.[11]

This definition of a museum by ICOM clearly shows the functions of the museum, namely:

- The acquisition function, which is the mode and means by which the museum acquires collections. This is done by purchase, donation, bequest or loan.
- The conservation function, which can be considered the main function of a museum in order to pass on these assets from generation to generation. It must be done in agreement and partnership with the producing populations.
- The study or educational function, importantly allowing the documentation, study and understanding of cultures and civilisations thanks to the wealth of information provided by the collections.
- The exhibition function, which is the function of promotion, knowledge, discovery and sale of cultures and museum institutions.

Museums in their present form are the successors of the cabinets of curiosities set up by antique dealers and collectors since antiquity. They have evolved over time to become large museum institutions and have spread throughout the world.[12] In Africa, the end of colonisation and the proclamations of independence led to the creation of national museums in the new independent states as symbols of freedom, unity and the reconciliation of peoples. However, these museums are rarely visited by Africans because they are not part of the local culture and Africans do not recognise themselves in these institutions. In Cameroon, an alarming observation notes the very low numbers of Cameroonian visitors to museums in order to know "their history".[13] Rather, they are more frequented by students and researchers writing theses and dissertations. Although efforts are being made to sensitise the local and national community to the importance of museums, this alarming fact remains. The bulk of the visitors are Western nationals who are either tourists or working in the country. Based on this observation, the question arises which museum might hold relevance for Cameroonians. This question can be answered by the culture and ancient traditions or conservation methods put in place by the Indigenous peoples: the large people's hut in the traditional chieftaincies of the so-called "Grassfields", whose mission was not only to conserve heritage assets, but also to serve as a gathering place for the people.

From this reflection came the idea of creating museums in Africa designed by Africans and for Africans. With this in mind, the *Pays de la Loire Cameroon Association*, under the aegis of the *Route des Chefferies* programme, has created a network of museums in the traditional chieftaincies of the West and North-West regions, fulfilling the ancient functions of the great hut, museums that are close to and at the service of the people.[14] These new museums not only have the role of collecting, conserving, exhibiting and educating local and international populations, but are above all intended to be living spaces for the conservation and preservation of the cultural heritage of the community they house. The objects or subjects kept in these museums are ritual objects that continue to fulfil their original functions insofar as they leave the museums to be used in the rituals or ceremonies for which they were produced. To this end, all their symbolic charge is returned to them and they return to the museum at the end of the ceremony. This allows the visitor to see not only the object displayed in the museum, but also to contemplate it in the context of its use. This brings a plus in understanding, knowledge and above all is a great asset for its conservation.

The Loss of Cultural Heritage and its Impact on the Social Lives of Indigenous People

The West's desire for conquest and subjugation led to imperialism and colonisation. Both events contributed to the plundering of the cultural, natural, zoological and human heritage of the colonised peoples. Arriving in Africa through military missions and evangelisation of the so-called "savages" with the aim of civilising them, the African and Cameroonian peoples were dispossessed of their property through looting, massacres and deception. These acts were committed without concern for the impact and loss of these heritages on the plundered populations. During these missions, the "explorers" were ordered to "collect" as much property and as many treasures as possible and bring them back to the old continent. Items that could not be transported to the military, evangelical or coastal stations were simply destroyed by the missionaries.

The outbreak of the First World War in Europe and its extension to the colonies had a deeply negative impact on the African people. In Cameroon, a large part of the national cultural heritage was taken from the local communities and transferred to Germany between 1884 and 1916, during the period of the German protectorate. This is the case for the thrones of the Sultan Njoya and the Bamoum kings in western Cameroon, which are on display today in the Humboldt Forum in Berlin ("offered" to the emperor as a birthday present) or in the Rautenstrauch Joest Museum in Cologne;[15] it is also the case for the Tangué (the prow of the royal pirogue), symbol of autonomy and power of King Lock Priso or Kum'a Mbape Bell, king of the Douala of Bonaberi, forcibly removed by Max Buchner (1846–1921) and the German colonial administration for disobedience and insubordination, today in the *Museum Fünf Kontinente*, Munich.[16]

After Germany's loss of Cameroon in 1916, there was an increase in the destruction of Cameroonian heritage stored at German bases. The objects could not be quickly transported to the shores and put on ships for Germany due to the loss of power over the local populations. The soldiers received strict orders from the metropolis to simply destroy the collections that could not be sent to Germany, thus preventing the Allied forces from benefiting from their achievements. The consequences were direct. Not only were some communities dispossessed of their property, but other communities were forced to destroy their own heritage objects for fear of violent repression from German colonial army from disobeying the order to destroy heritage.

The consequences of the loss of heritage assets and their impact on the lives of African populations were and are multiple:

- The loss of the custodians (guarantors, priests) who were for the most part massacred by the colonists. With them died the knowledge related to the use of the object
- the prohibition by the German colonial administration of certain rites (Abbia game, Nso ritual among the forest peoples)
- the “collection” of ritual objects that symbolised the power and identity of certain peoples
- the lack of knowledge of the existence of the stolen objects on the part of new generations of Africans and the lack of traces or information and of resource persons (some objects were taken more than 100 years ago, and some names of towns, villages and territories have changed with political developments)
- the outbreak of disasters (pertaining to health, food, environment, infertility) and tragedies (suspicious deaths by drowning, hanging, accident, fire, landslides, etc.) in some communities due to the loss of the object of protection.

One of the most striking examples is the case of the village of Bamendou in the West Cameroon region, which experienced all the misfortunes mentioned above as a result of the Touka (also: Tukah) mask being taken to France in 1957.[17] For more than 50 years, the people endured the consequences of this loss, the first of which was the cessation of the practice of the *Ngim nu* (ritual of purification and general blessing of the people and the land), plunging the village into misfortune and misery. To find a remedy, the king and his people had to make several sacrifices in the hope of receiving the clemency of the gods and the ancestors for the deliverance of the people. After these rites, they undertook to make a copy of the mask (slightly different so as not to confuse them), reintroducing the practice of the *Ngim nu* ritual in the village and the return of peace. On 27 June 2022, following the great exhibition “On the Route of the Chieftaincies of Cameroon, from the Visible to the Invisible” organised by the Route of the Chieftaincies programme at the Quai Branly Jacques Chirac Museum in Paris, a great ceremony of meeting and transfer of power between the two masks was performed under the supervision of the King of Bamendou, the guardians of the tradition, and the teams of the Quai Branly Museum. This ceremony ended with an official request for restitution made by the king to the museum’s management.

To conclude, there is a need for real synergy in the work between the people who produce heritage and those who possess it in order to facilitate their studies, their knowledge, their understanding and above all their conservation, and to allow its transparent transmission to future generations for the advancement of the history of humanity.

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III.

Managing, Using and Researching Objects in Collections

Lost Objects, Missing Documentation

Provenance Research on the Ethnographic Collection of the German Institute of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture in Witzenhausen

Lost Objects, Missing Documentation

Provenance Research on the Ethnographic Collection of the German Institute of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture in Witzenhausen

Martin Nadarzinski

Abstract

Using two selected case studies, this chapter addresses the challenges of provenance research in a small, private collection that originated during and was shaped by the German colonial period. In addition to the origins of the collection, its heterogeneous composition, and its use to the present day, the challenges are discussed along with possible solutions to meet the difficulties that have historically arisen.

Objets perdus, documentation manquante : recherche de provenance sur la collection ethnographique de l'institut allemand d'agriculture tropicale et subtropicale à Witzenhausen (Résumé)

Ce chapitre aborde, à travers deux études de cas spécifiques, les défis de la recherche de provenance dans une petite collection privée qui a vu le jour pendant la période coloniale allemande et qui a été marquée par cette période. Outre les origines de la collection, sa composition hétérogène et son utilisation jusqu'à présent, ce document évoque les enjeux et les solutions possibles pour répondre aux difficultés qui ont émergé au fil de l'histoire.

Introduction

This chapter takes an in-depth look at a small collection of objects in a rural town in northern Hesse. The ethnographic collection of the German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (*Deutsches Institut für tropische und subtropische Landwirtschaft*, hereafter DITSL) in Witzenhausen has a long and eventful history, which has shaped the current form of exhibits and poses challenges for provenance and collection research. It consists of approximately 2,300 inventoried objects, most of which come from former German colonial territories, making the collection very heterogeneous.[1] Officially, the collection belongs to the DITSL and is on permanent loan to the current Museum Witzenhausen (formerly *Völkerkundliches Museum Witzenhausen*), which is organised as an independent foundation. Support of this foundation is shared equally by the DITSL and the city of Witzenhausen.

This chapter is a synthesis of seven months of field research from August 2019 to February 2020[2], and presents the history of the collection and the institutions associated with it. Further, the problems and challenges of provenance research are highlighted instructively through two case studies from the Namibian section. Tracing the overall history of the collection in order to set the general context and then examining the intricacies of the two case studies unveils the idiosyncrasies and situatedness of these two cases, linked as they are to the German colonial period. In conclusion, the special features of the collection are summarised and contextualised with the challenges of provenance research more generally.

The History of the Collection in Brief

Witzenhausen is located in the Werra valley between Kassel and Göttingen and thus in the center of Germany. In 1899, the German Colonial School (*Deutsche Kolonialschule*, hereafter DKS) bought a former Williamite monastery in which to expand its offerings.[3] The DKS had been founded a year earlier "under the protectorate and presidency of Prince Wilhelm zu Wied in his castle in Neuwied"[4] by representatives of colonially interested industry and Hanseatic

colonial firms.[5] The founding director was the Protestant military pastor Ernst Albert Fabarius (1859–1927), who directed the school until his death. His goal was to train young men at the school to become colonial farmers, knowledgeable about growing crops in the tropics, and to develop their characters. The three-year training therefore included an agricultural practical year, handicraft lessons, and lectures on botany, tropical hygiene and ethnology, among other topics.[6] The school educated 2,308 students between 1899 and 1944.[7]

The ethnographic collection was also established under Fabarius's direction, beginning with a cooperation between the DKS and Felix von Luschan (1854–1929), then directorial assistant at the Royal Ethnological Museum in Berlin. In return for a donation of 41 ethnographic objects from the then German colony Togoland (*Deutsch-Togo*), Luschan distributed his "Instructions for Collecting" (*Anleitung zum Sammeln*) among the DKS graduates.[8] For this purpose, Fabarius published an appeal for donations in the school magazine *Deutscher Kulturpionier* (German Culture Pioneer), asking former students to send objects for the DKS' ethnographic collection.[9] The tone of his appeal aligned with the so-called "rescue" or "salvage ethnology" of the time,[10] and no specific instructions were given regarding collecting priorities. The graduates of the DKS therefore sent objects to Witzenhausen "that they considered interesting or worth collecting".[11]

These objects were curated by students of the DKS, referred to as the "museum group", until World War I. Under the guidance of a lecturer at the DKS, they arranged the objects and inventoried them, whereby "the often insufficient designation of the objects made itself unpleasantly felt".[12] Between 1914 and 1918, the collection was put into storage and, after World War I, given a nostalgic significance for the German colonies on the one hand, and a scientific approach on the other. In addition to a sign reading "Don't forget our colonies" (*Vergesst unsere Kolonien nicht*), the collection was organised from 1922 onwards according to categories such as religion, weapons and objects of daily use.[13]

From 1924, the collection, which continued to grow steadily, was taken over by the newly founded Colonial Studies Institute (*Kolonialkundliches Institut*, hereafter KKI). It was affiliated to the DKS and offered in-depth courses for the latter's graduates. In addition to collection management, it therefore also took over the organisation of the library. It has not yet been possible to clarify the approach to collection management of the KKI.[14] What is certain, however, is that the collection was reorganised into different rooms. This spatial arrangement can be traced back using a contemporary inventory book begun around 1927/1928.

During World War II, the collection was again stored in the former collection building and damaged there by rainwater that entered the premises.[15] From 1949 on, the collection was again open to the public and was reorganised in 1963/64 under the direction of the ethnologist Dr Walther Nippold (1890–1970). A contemporary witness describes the collection arrangement and use in the 1960s as follows:

> *We had ethnology as a subject. And we went in* [the museum]*, were overwhelmed by what was there, but for what was waiting for us outside later* [after the training course]*, it didn't help too much.* […] *Maybe we didn't use it as much as we could have, because for us the tropical greenhouse was more important.*[16]

The collection received its last and current place of storage with the establishment of the Foundation for the Ethnological Museum Witzenhausen (*Stiftung Völkerkundliches Museum Witzenhausen*) in 1976.[17] This was founded by the DITSL and the City of Witzenhausen, and the collection was officially given to the foundation as a permanent loan by the DITSL, the foundation's only property being the museum building and not being endowed with personnel funds.

Hanns Bagdahn (1910–2007) and Walter Breipohl (1909–2002) worked in the museum from 1976 on a voluntary basis. Bagdahn was at the DKS from 1928 to 1930, when he left for Angola, where he worked as a coffee and sisal plantation manager. He returned to Germany in the wake of Angola's independence and then set up the museum with Walter Breipohl, another DKS graduate. They recorded the collection photographically, documented it in handwritten inventories, and displayed it in glass cases over three floors.[18] Bagdahn placed an emphasis on public tours, where the museum served as a stage for his life experiences since he spoke about the objects in relation to his personal narrative.[19]

Beginning in the 1990s, the exhibition was modified by young ethnologists who worked in Witzenhausen on short-term job creation schemes. During this period, the handwritten inventory lists from 1976 were digitised using the computer program Excel. From 2007 on, the museum has also actively been used as a learning site of the *Weltgarten Witzenhausen* (World Garden Witzenhausen) which includes educational workshops based on the Sustainable Development Goals, and a digitisation project was started in October 2019.[20]

Two case studies show detailed provenance history from the Namibian holdings of the DITSL's ethnographic collection – a headdress and a pair of sandals.

A Headdress

The Namibian holdings of the DITSL's ethnographic collection consist of a total of 230 inventoried objects originating from present-day Namibia, which covers a large part of the then colony of German Southwest Africa. Weapons make up the largest part of this (sub-)collection. In the existing inventory, 13 donors are named, to whom over 90 objects have been assigned. For the rest of the collection, only rudimentary information and often no provenance information is provided. An example is the object with inventory number 94:

Figure 1 | Part of an Ekori, Ethnographic Collection DITSL, Inventory Number 94
© Ethnographic Collection DITSL (Photo: Martin Nadarzinski)

It is 45 cm high and has a diameter of 12 cm. The object consists of several parts: a basic shape made of leather, with a convex and a smooth side. On the convex shaped surface, three rows of irregularly shaped metal beads are sewn, divided approximately in half into vertical and horizontal rows. Three leaf-shaped leather pieces of approximately equal size radiate from this decorated basic shape, onto which they are sewn with decorative stitching. According to the inventory list, the object is a headdress. The only information given in addition to the measurements and a description of the material is a geographic descriptor of "Namibia" and an ethnic classification as "Herero". After further research, it became apparent that the object is part of a so-called *ekori*, a pre-Christian headdress of an Ovaherero woman, which was displaced by textile headdresses with the onset of Christianisation.[21] Further information, such as who acquired the object when and under what circumstances it was sent to Witzenhausen, are not available.

This poses a few fundamental problems for provenance research, which in the particular case of the ethnographic collection of the DITSL and its history can nevertheless offer approaches to a solution. Today, the student files of the DKS graduates are still preserved, in which, in a few cases, references to object donations have survived. However, this is a rarity.[22] There continues to be little to no historical record of the collection itself beyond the regular reports of (selected) donations and remarks in the school magazine *Deutscher Kulturpionier*.[23] In turn, further conclusions can be drawn from the lack of a museum or collection archive, as neither the DKS, the DITSL nor the Museum Witzenhausen had the historical significance of their objects in mind. In the context of the DKS, a pedagogical use likely predominated as the objects were probably increasingly integrated into teaching. This makes sense according to the corresponding thinking of the times. For both the Museum Witzenhausen and the DITSL, this focus can be explained by the fact that ethnological (subject) knowledge and thus perspectives on the historical aspects of the collections were missing.[24]

This inference, based on the lack of information about the object, nevertheless provides a framework for provenance research. Another approach is to evaluate other sources that comprise the collection. Based on the donors noted in the inventory list, it can be stated that over 75 percent of the current Namibia holdings probably came to Witzenhausen before 1976.[25] Another source that supports this thesis is a photo card index made by Bagdahn and Breipohl, which has not been continued[26] but in which the object is also noted, providing a first temporal clue.

The motivation for the acquisition can also be traced back to the specifics of the ethnographic collection of the DITSL. The collection developed primarily through the networks of the DKS graduates, which also ensured collection expansions after 1945.[27] Due to the respective collection calls by Fabarius (see above/endnote 9) and later by the then DITSL director Otto Schmaltz from 1975, neither of which expressed any firm specifications regarding desired objects, the collection was shaped by idealised, stereotypical perceptions of the collectors in addition to the question of acquisition possibilities.[28] Accordingly, the collection is reminiscent of a "boys club", as an interlocutor once put it.[29]

These processes must also be considered in provenance research and can be evidenced in the object example of the headdress with inventory number 94. However, even with objects for which much more provenance information is available, unforeseen challenges can arise, as in the next case study, a pair of sandals.

A Pair of Sandals

Two leather sandals in the collection are catalogued under inventory number 132, and consist of a foot-shaped base from which leather straps are attached to the front third of the sole. These are knotted together with other straps further down the sole, presumably used for fastening. The leather of the soles differs in colour from the straps, being much darker and sometimes brittle.

Similar to the headdress (inventory number 96), the pair of sandals is given the geographic reference of present-day Namibia, but here information about the collector is also provided. According to the current inventory list the sandals were sent to Witzenhausen by a certain Rudolf Seitz.[30] Seitz attended the DKS between 1901 and 1903, and after his education went to the then colony of German East Africa (*Deutsch-Ostafrika*), where he died in 1916 during World War I.[31] The sandals are mentioned in the *Deutscher Kulturpionier* in 1906 with a larger bundle of everyday objects[32] and, at the DKS, they were presumably counted among the East Africa Collection. [33]

The attribution to Namibia only appears in the handwritten inventory list of 1976, from which it has been transferred to the current digitised

Figure 2 | A Pair of Sandals. Collected by Rudolf Seitz, Ethnographic Collection, DITSL, Inventory number 132 © Ethnographic Collection DITSL (Photo: Martin Nadarzinski)

inventory.[34] It therefore seems reasonable to assume that Bagdahn and Breipohl made at least one mistake when re-inventorying the collection, not least because there is no institutionalised archive on the collecting activities of the DKS graduates or the collection management.

For provenance research, we can conclude from this that the inventory list is not to be trusted unchecked. Due to the possibility that further incorrect allocations have also been inscribed, theoretically every entry in the inventory list of 1976/77 requires additional confirmation before attributing provenance from Namibia. This review would have to include not only the inventory list and its special features, as shown by the collection history and the first case study, but also the material typology of the objects in order to create the clearest possible sourcing.[35]

Conclusion

Quite fundamentally, provenance research requires time and personnel that neither the *Stiftung Völkerkundliches Museum Witzenhausen* nor the DITSL have at their disposal. This, in addition to the possibly erroneous information about the holdings and the unclear acquisition contexts due to missing provenance information, pose the greatest challenge for provenance research on the ethnographic collection at the DITSL.

As described above, it is a private collection, and the DITSL itself is a private limited company (DITSL GmbH). On the one hand, this special form and structure offer particular advantages: the work is flexible and. unlike in other museums, there are (currently) few bureaucratic obstacles to repatriating sensitive items such as human remains, which also enabled the return of a human skull to Namibia in 2018.[36] Conversely, this also means, however, that for provenance research funds must be raised externally. In addition, there is no staff position at the DITSL or at the museum itself to ensure constant scientific supervision of the collection. Therefore, provenance research here, like the digitisation of the collection and research in and about the ethnographic collection of the DITSL in general, resembles a piecemeal effort. This is also evident in the digitisation project that started in October 2019 and can be described as characteristic of the scholarly engagement with the DITSL collection.[37]

The case studies in this chapter exemplify the entire ethnographic collection of the DITSL in the sense that, while no provenance information is available for a large part of the collection, there are other ways to locate the objects geographically and temporally. Possibilities include the DITSL archives with surviving student files, a materiality-based approach, and written records at other institutions and archives. This process takes time and resources not currently available at the DITSL. Nevertheless, this effort would be worthwhile, as provenance research in the DITSL ethnographic collection would shed light not only on how the collection came to be but also on the activities of the graduates and the DKS as a colonial educational institution. In addition, further insights can be gained on other individuals and institutions in the German colonial movement as well as on colonial revisionist actors.

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III.

Managing, Using and Researching Objects in Collections

Becoming Ethnographic Objects

Three Rattles from East Africa in the Ethnographic Collection at Göttingen University and their (Missing) Stories

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Hannah Stieglitz

Abstract

There is more to say about a rattle than that it is a rattle. In her article Hannah Stieglitz traces the documentation on three East African rattles in the Ethnographic Collection of the Georg-August-University Göttingen and the stories revealed. By questioning how the rattles of the Wagogo, the Wanyakyusa and the Wafipa became objects of the collection, it becomes clear that the knowledge preserved is fragmented and tells us more about the collectors than the collectables. It is shown that three seemingly similar objects have been classified in differing ways in relation to these collectors. The gaps in the documentation refer to the absence of stories which enable the questioning of the processes of (colonial) knowledge production.

Devenir des objets ethnographiques. Trois hochets d'Afrique de l'Est dans la collection ethnographique de l'université de Göttingen et leurs histoires (manquantes) (Résumé)

Un hochet n'est pas seulement un simple hochet. Dans son article, Hannah Stieglitz présente trois hochets d'Afrique de l'Est dans la collection ethnographique de l'université Georg-August de Göttingen, ainsi que les histoires qu'ils révèlent. En se demandant comment les hochets des Wagogo, des Wanyakyusa et des Wafipa sont devenus des objets de collection, il apparaît clairement que les informations recueillies sont fragmentées et nous renseignent davantage sur les collectionneurs que sur les objets de collection. Nous constatons que trois objets apparemment similaires ont été classés de manière différente en fonction de ces collectionneurs. Les lacunes dans la documentation renvoient à l'absence de récits qui permettent de remettre en question le processus de production de connaissances (coloniales).

Introduction

> *Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize.*[1]
>
> Chimanda Ngozi Adichie

In her well-known Ted talk on "the danger of a single story" Adichie found an inspiring way of elucidating how speaking and hearing about *others* establishes realities which are bound to power relations. What we know and what we think there is to know about *others* is dependent on the narratives constructed about them. Adapting her thoughts to cultural artefacts in collections, I suggest that ethnographic objects from colonial contexts become representations of the colonised *other* that are constituted in discursive practices in which some stories are established at the cost of others.

The Namibian designer and researcher Cynthia Schimming gave impressive insights in these processes when she shook a whole room of conference participants with her narratives on objects from Namibia in the Ethnographic Museum Berlin in July 2019.[2] Taking them on an "emotional journey"[3] she showed that the ethnographic objects in the collection had once been

personal things involving individual persons, who had made them, appreciated them, lived with them, and were attached to them. In the cases shown in her presentation people had things taken from them in situations of colonial structural and direct violence. After the Panel she was giving her talk in, she elaborated in an interview: “I think I actually spoke about how these objects are haunting you: How bad it was of people to take objects, giving them the wrong names or even no names at all, giving them numbers, not telling us where they come from, who brought them and how they got them”.[4]

When things become part of a collection as objects, something happens. As objects they “do not have essential and stable meaning(s)”.[5] In processes of cultural construction and knowledge production, they are negotiated as representations of what is to know about the world depending on perspective and time. They are removed from one place and brought to another, they become (re)interpreted, conceptualised, categorised, inventoried, labelled, ordered, stored and/ or exhibited. Their manifold meanings are created by the stories told and those untold or missing and strongly depend on who is narrating and on who is listening.

In this article I focus on three East African rattles with colonial provenances in the Ethnographic Collection of the Georg-August-University Göttingen. First, I will explicate why of all things I am writing about the Wagogo, the Wanyakyusa and the Wafipa rattle as they became objects of interest in the context of a research exchange initiated by the PAESE Project in 2019. After then giving some information on the historical context of the collection itself and the corpus of available sources I will discuss the material on the three rattles one after another. I will show that in the collections` documentation on these objects diverse stories can be explored and many are missing. While interpretations from the societies of origin linked to the objects and their history are absent in the sources of the collection, we can trace ways of how they became ethnographic objects. There are stories about the people and practices related to the collectors, donators and institutions linked to this process. The practices of creating knowledge on these rattles can be seen as part of a discourse which is also crucial for understanding colonialism and colonial contexts as past politics and as a living past. Thinking about the processes, practices and people who produced the archived documents in and on the collection rather than looking at them as objective things, enables us to question the making of colonial knowledge[6] and the gaps we experience in provenance research.

Why Rattles? Becoming Objects of Interest

In 2019 I was part of the PAESE research exchange and got to work, amongst other inspiring people, with Flower Manase, curator for the history department at the National Museum of Tanzania in Dar es Salaam.[7] She visited the Ethnographic Collection in Göttingen and together we unpacked and looked at objects from colonial contexts – among them the three rattles – which originated in East Africa, specifically in today's Tanzania. We exchanged perspectives on the objects themselves and looked at the knowledge kept and produced in the collection's documentation.

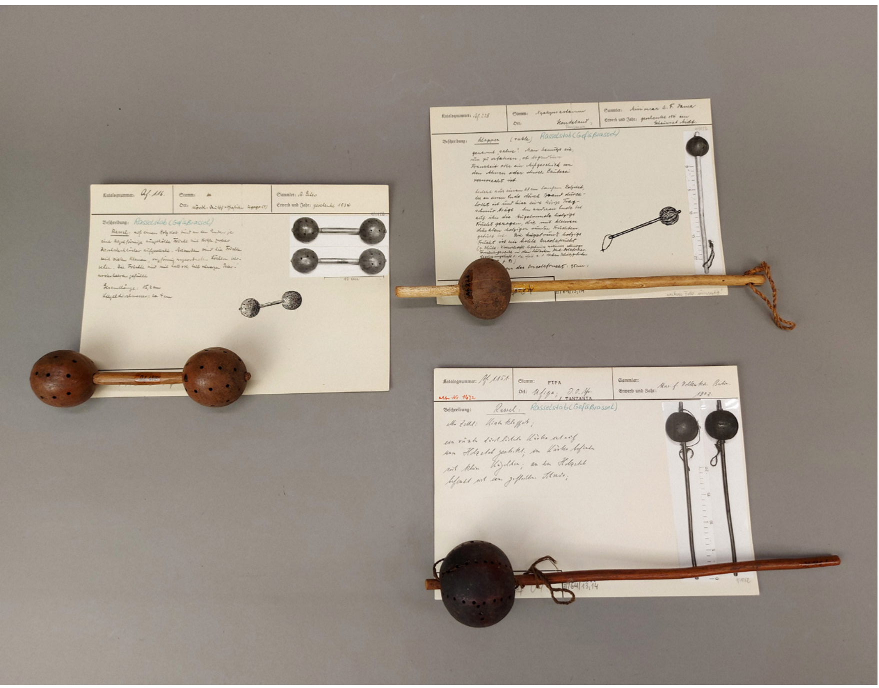

Figure 1 | The three East African rattles © Ethnographic Collection of the Georg August University Göttingen, Inventory Numbers Af 116, Af 1151 and Af 228 © Ethnographic Collection, Georg August University Göttingen (Photo: Hannah Stieglitz)

When the three rattles lay on the table, they seemed comparable. Because they were all rattles, they all came from today's Tanzania and their shapes and materials are similar. But they did not just happen to be there. I had selected them among 45 other objects from today`s Tanzania in preparation for the research exchange to provide a list of objects to work with. In this process I wanted to choose a range of objects that could represent the Tanzania holdings of the Ethnographic Collection. The goals were to give insights in the collection's holdings and documentation, to yield differentiated perspectives on colonial contexts and provenance research in the collection and give as many inducements for discussion as possible. Therefore, my selection criteria were diversity oriented: I wanted to portray the variety of object categories and materials, the heterogeneity of contexts in which objects were made and appropriated and in which they became objects of the collection in Göttingen as well as the variability of documentation status and extent. In order to do so I tried to include objects from different categories, collectors/ donators, different materials, things that I thought might be comparable somehow (like the rattles), things I knew had a conflictive background (such as a bow which was taken as war booty in the *maji maji* war or a *kiboko* whip) or such things I didn`t really know anything about but I was sure were embedded in colonial contexts.[8]

When Flower Manase came to Göttingen she chose from this list and, among other objects, the three East African rattles became objects of interest as part of present research and collaboration practices at the Ethnographic Collection Göttingen. Their stories are yet to be retold. But before presenting the findings from the rattles' documentation, I think it is crucial to contextualise them in the historical embeddedness of the collection they are part of today and the available sources related to their stories.

Researching Stories in the Ethnographic Collection of the Georg-August-University Göttingen, Germany

The Ethnographic Collection is part of a whole landscape of academic collections at Göttingen University.[9] Today approximately 18 000 objects define the collections inventory. They were made, used, collected or donated, sold, or gifted by a vast variety of people and institutions with diverse agendas and interests. Its long history goes back to the 18th century when the Royal Aca-

demic Museum was founded as a University Museum in 1773. In this institution collections from various departments, which have developed into distinct disciplines today, were gathered as materials for academic teaching and research. As the university disciplines had not yet been separated as clearly as they seem to be today and Social and Cultural Anthropology had not yet been institutionalised as an independent subject at all, the Ethnographic Collection was cared for among other collections by physicians, geographers, and zoologists. Until today it is mainly known for convolutes from the times of enlightenment deriving from the South Seas ("Cook/Forster Collection") and the Arctic polar region ("Baron von Asch Collection") obtained by the director of the Royal Academic Museum Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840).[10] Since then, items from all over the world have become objects of this collection via manifold ways. Different collecting practices were pursued, and possible, different bureaucracies were in place shaping discourses on (ethnographic) knowledge, but it was until 1928, when "Völkerkunde" was first taught as a distinct university subject by Professor Hans Plischke (1890–1972). During his tenure colonial revisionism was especially articulate in the "Institut für Völkerkunde" at Göttingen University as its members then actively debated connecting ethnographic research with (regaining) German colonial ambitions.[11] Plischke was drawn to Göttingen from the Grassi Museum in Leipzig not at last because here was the opportunity to perpetuate the Ethnographic Collection and shape it as the first ethnographic expert in charge. Due to his influence the collection was moved into a new building in December 1936 which was inaugurated as a museum and meant as a place for academic research and studies as well as a place for public education on "Bildungswerte der Völkerkunde".[12] The rattles and the sources related to their entrance in the collection are mainly related to these early eras as their dates of entrance go back to 1902, 1931 and 1934.

In order to work with its holdings today there is a variety of tools and sources that enable insights on individual items, convolutes and related persona in the Ethnographic Collection Göttingen. For my selection of items in 2019 I used the inventory catalogue listing the Africa holdings of the collection, the inventory cards of the individual objects, archival materials and documents as well as the collections' databases to select objects for the research exchange. While the preprinted inventory cards were introduced during the process of rearranging the collection in the course of its move to a new building in 1935/36,[13] the inventory catalogues were published in the 1980s and early 1990s[14] and each of them lists the objects deriving from one continent in a table.

The inventory catalogue listing the collections holdings from Africa and basic information on these objects is structured by cardinal regions (North Africa, Northwest Africa, Northeast Africa, etc.), then nation states and "undefined" (e.g., "East Africa undefined"). The objects assigned to a state are then categorised in so called "functiongroups". It is highly probable that the information in the catalogue was transferred from the inventory cards but for both documentations it is very rarely possible to tell who exactly worked on what kind of information and when. Prior to both systems the old index system withheld the information deemed important and has been preserved. The latest date for an object entry in this system refers to a purchase in 1936. The archival materials used for this research could mainly be found in two of nine folders containing a conglomerate of historical documents from object lists to correspondences or historical labels. One of them is dedicated to purchases 1927–1935, as the other holds a chronicle of the collection 1868–1935.[15]

Tracing the leads of the collection's documentation on the three East African rattles we can question the revealed information as institutionalised knowledge. Despite the gaps and insecurities in the sources there are stories that can be told, enabling us to learn about ways in which knowledge has been created.

Finding Stories – Documentation Status of the Wagogo, the Wanyakyusa and the Wafipa Rattle[16]

The Wagogo Rattle

The rattle with the Inventory Number Af 116 is listed in the inventory catalogue as a musical instrument deriving from Tanzania and related to the Gogo People. The table shows that the rattle became part of the collection in 1934 and names the collector as "Peter". The short description depicts the item as a "wooden bar/ on each side a globular fruit, filled with berries/ Length: 15,2 cm / calibre: 4 cm".[17] None of these descriptions gives a colonial context straight away and "Peter" is a very common German first and surname and therefore not especially informative. The inventory card for Af 116 substantiates the rattle as "gifted 1934"[18] but there is no further correspondence on this process preserved. The collector is here indicated as "A. Peter" who can be identified as Gustav Albert Peter (1853–1937), a professor for botany

and director of the botanical garden in Göttingen. His full title is given in the archival material, namely a convolute of handwritten historical object labels and a typed object list "Verzeichnis afrikanischer Sammlungsgegenstände von Herrn Geh. Rat. Prof. Dr. A. Peter". The indication on the inventory card for the rattles' place of origin "Northern German East Africa Ugogo (?)"[19] matches the descriptions on the object list from Peter. The language here clarifies the colonial context of the item, but says little on the function, use or other culturally relevant contexts of the object itself. The historical label only says "Rassel für Tanzzwecke aus Ugogo" ("Rattle for danceuses from Ugogo") but this information was not transferred to the inventory card. Here the description of the object is mainly focusing the outer characteristics:

> Rattle: *on a wooden bar, two ball-shaped scalloped fruit attached via two plug-wholes. Besides the fruit are provided with many little circularly ordered wholes. The fruit are filled with half red, half black chinaberries.*

Peter's allowance[20] shows, that he had given lectures on colonial crops and products on different occasions[21] and had been planning research and collecting expeditions in order to gain "eigene Anschauung überseeischer Länder, insbesondere auch der Deutschen Schutzgebiete"[22] which he describes as necessary in the course of maintaining authenticity as an academic teacher. In 1913 he set off for his first expedition to what was then German East Africa where he collected and travelled until 1919. As he returned to Germany in the aftermath of World War I, there were some incongruities with the transport of his collections and many of the boxes containing collected items and equipment never reached Göttingen. Albert Peter could not overcome the loss of his collections and spend the following years preparing a second expedition. In 1925/26 he travelled to what was then the East Africa Protectorate under British colonial rule in order to regain the materials that had been lost. The reports on both of his quests, published in the magazine *Koloniale Rundschau*, show that Peter moved through different colonial contexts managing to use the German as well as the British infrastructures and local skills and knowledges for his own agenda.[23]

Unfortunately, his descriptions don't reveal much on individual collected items. He does mention that besides his botanical collections there was a range of "Museumsgegenstände" (*museum things*) among the lost goods.[24] But as today it is unclear, why there are more than 200 objects in the Ethnographic Collection in Göttingen attributed to Peter, how and when they were

collected and how exactly they became part of the collection. 218 objects from the African continent, 182 from what is today Tanzania, are ascribed to Albert Peter making this the largest Tanzania convolute from one collector.

Af 116 is objectified mainly by mentioning the plant-based materials it is made of – this might be a reference to the collector being a botanist and therefore representing a botanical collection focus. This seemingly neutral way of describing a thing as an object can also be seen as a representation technique in a scientific discourse. As only the outer characteristics are described, only "objective" knowledge is preserved. As an effect the Wagogo rattle becomes classified as an object and, although it is retained in an ethnographic collection, the indigenous cultural knowledge and interpretations are not part of the index system. It is unclear when, by whom and for what reasons the knowledge on the rattle became this fragmented. But the gap is there. The stories missing are not only provenance-stories concerning the rattles origin, ownership and its way to Göttingen. There is also a lack of stories on Wagogo interpretations, on music and dance, on social gathering, cultural meaning and connections to the people who made it.

The Wanyakyusa Rattle

The rattle with the Inventory Number Af 228 is listed in the inventory catalogue as a rattle related to the Nyakyusa People in "Konde-Land", Tanzania. It is subordinated under the category "body hygiene and medicine" and the short description concretises the item as "'salwe'/ For finding the source of an illness (ancestors/ witchcraft)/ a filled fruit on a long wooden stick".

Further the table shows that it was collected by "Jansa" and became part of the Collection in Göttingen in 1931.[25] The information given on the inventory card, however, gives some more details on the persons related to the rattle naming the collector as "missionary A. F. Jansa" and stating that the Wanyakyusa rattle entered the collection and became object Af 228 in the year 1931 in which it was "gifted by privy council Mirbt".[26]

Among the archived materials of the Ethnographic Collection Göttingen is a folder which contains some correspondence between Jansa and Plischke as well as two lists of objects referring to two boxes in which the items were sent to the collection. The heading on the list of the first box shows the sender as "Moravian Mission" and "Kyimbila n. Tukuyu. Tanganyika Territory". The document is signed by "A F Jansa". Although Alexander Ferdinand Jansa's

(1869–1957) vita has not been researched comprehensively yet, it is safe to say that he had been serving the Moravian mission in different stations in East Africa since 1899.[27] Carl Mirbt (1860–1929) was a professor for church history at Göttingen University and was connected to protestant mission agencies around the globe.[28] In one of the archived letters Jansa states that the collection of ethnographic objects had been initialised by Mirbt but that he had died before witnessing it happen. He also closes the letter mentioning that it would be in the interest of the belated Mirbt that the collection would serve the aims of "heathenmission"[29] therefore reminding of the educational function he intended for the objects he had gathered and sent. At the same time there is no further contextualisation of this notion and he left it to Plischkes imagination in what ways the objects would be of service for Christian mission. Most definitely this task was not connected to the persons and the people who had made and used the things from Jansa's list.

The list for the first box has five categories for the items on it: hammered works, plaited works, things for heathen [or domestic; handwritten addition] use, wood works, diverse items. The second box contains a conglomerate of objects that didn't fit into the first one or had special customs regulation for transport. The category "things for heathen [or domestic] use" has the most positions representing individual objects or small convolutes and in this part the descriptions are the longest. the Wanyakyusa rattle has position 29 and is recognisable by the handwritten inventory number it has in the collection today. Its description says: "1 clatter (rattle [in engl.]) called 'salwe', to learn if an illness or any other mishap was caused by the ancestors or by witchcraft".[30] There is no information on the language the word "salwe" originates from. Flower Manase suggested that it might be Kinyakyusa but the meaning could not yet be translated. The rattle is one of the objects related to witchcraft and healing belonging to the equipment of a healer or some healers. It is yet unknown who this person was, if it was one or more persons from whom these tools were acquired and how this happened. We do not learn in which context and how the rattle would be used. Only the aim to explore the cause of an illness or a mishap is stated, but it is not explained by whom the rattle would be played, if there would be other instruments or equipment or people involved or if it would need a whole ceremony or ritual, a special place to happen or any other cultural contexts in which it is believed that ancestors or witchcraft have the ability to cause calamities and disorder. On the inventory card this description is transferred, only slightly rephrased, without explicitly mentioning that it was given by the collector. Again, this could be explained

with work efficiency reasons as the given information was simply transferred from the list to the inventory card. The effect is that the depiction of a missionary who classified the Wanyakyusa rattle as an object for "heathen" practices is objectified in the index system as it takes some consideration to regain the context of this knowledge on Af 228. Back to the inventory card this description is followed by a specification of the outer characteristics, as the length of the wooden stick, the calibre of the round fruit, that is filled with smaller ligneous fruit and that it is an oncoba fruit. The bibliographic reference to an expedition report by Karl Weule (1864–1926) leads to some remarks on toys called "Kakale", clatters for male children that would also be part of initiation rites of Wakonde boys. Weule states that the rattling part of the item was made from an oncoba fruit which seems to be the reference to Af 228.[31]

On the backside of the inventory card is another reference for "images of the object". Following it leads us to Karl Paul Kollmann's (1865–1925) account on "The Victoria Nyanza. The land, the races and their customs" from 1899 and here to page 207, where some drawn images of musical instruments have been printed. One of the pictures shows two "gourd rattles", one of them resembling the Wanyakyusa rattle. The description of figure 369 is part of a chapter on Masai culture and places the rattles among other instruments belonging to a healer, here called "medicine man". This person would use such rattles for "exorcisms" in which they would be accompanied by iron bells producing "tremendous noise". The text goes on about charms and places these spiritual practice as "common to all [*N**][32] races".[33] The text from 1899 is embedded in the racist notions of its time and the description remains generalising as there is no specific cultural context given. It was probably chosen as a start for research and comparison to similar rattles used in similar contexts from available publications in the seminar library. Both references do not refer to Wanyakyusa practices but to Masai and Wakonde without explicitly mentioning why or how a comparison would make sense. Both texts were published when Germany claimed colonial territories.

As I have noted above the compilation of the inventory cards in Göttingen in the 1930ies was embedded in the colonial revisionist mentalities in which Plischke himself repeatedly wrote that he saw the future of *Völkerkunde* in future German colonial politics.[34] It is therefore also possible that the remark in the text homogenising a form of spiritual practice as a race specific practice was accepted and chosen as a legitimate reference for a further description of the object. However, it remains unclear who decided on the references and why as there is no information on who generated the inventory card, under what

conditions and when exactly. It seems that the information deemed important for the index system, mainly relied on finding relatively comparable objects in publications of fellow (White) scholars and in this case available in the seminar library. Preserving cultural meanings from the perspective of the communities of origin was, either due to a lack of availability or of willingness, not prioritised for this purpose as there is an absence of indigenous stories.

The example of the Wanyakyusa rattle also shows that the categorisation of an object can change and that this change also has impact on the notion of an object. Categorising an object as "for heathen use" and determined to serve Christian mission is a huge difference to "body hygiene and medicine". The conclusions considering notions of healing practices and spirituality draw from very different assumptions and questions. The categories are not there *qua natura*. They have been decided on, transferred, and reproduced in a process that was influenced by *Zeitgeist* and individual mindsets as well as disciplinary developments.

The Wafipa Rattle

The rattle with the Inventory Number Af 1151 is listed in the inventory catalogue as a rattle, a musical instrument, related to the Fipa People and deriving from today's Tanzania. It is described as a "perforated calabash/ connected with a wooden stick/ little pellets inside/ length 30,5 cm". The table shows the "Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin" in the "collector/year" column and the date of entrance into the collection as 1902.[35] On the inventory card the object is described as a "round, perforated pumpkin". Presumably the dissonance was caused by the aim to be more precise in the description in the catalogue. The description of the outer characteristics on the inventory card is vague but there are some hints to the objects colonial background besides the date. The place of origin is given as "Ufipa, D.O.Af", the latter is short for German East Africa. "Tanzania" as well as the information "Fipa" for the column on the card designated to "tribe" has been supplemented with a typewriter more recently. No other references to Wafipa or cultural contexts of usage for this rattle are given. There is a reference to the old inventory system regarding the denomination of Af 1151 not only as a rattle but as a children's clapper. This old system is referred to as "alter Zettel"[36] on the inventory card. Now, when I selected the Wafipa rattle from the inventory catalogue for the research exchange in 2019, I had not come across that old system yet. In fact,

I had not yet learned about its existence. I mainly considered the object as another rattle for comparison, the items entrance date and the institution of the Museum in Berlin involved in the process.

In 1902 Germany claimed vast colonial territories on the globe, the discipline of *Völkerkunde* was in the making and due to the rapid growth of their collections "Germany's leading ethnographic museums had descended into chaos".[37]At the same time the academic discipline of *Völkerkunde* had not yet been established at Göttingen university and the ethnographic collection was still in the hands of the zoologist Ernst Ehlers (1835–1925). Still, he did acquire objects. The collection in Göttingen did not "swell like pregnant Hippos"[38] as was stated for the bigger museums but, as Plischke stated later, since Germany had become one of the European colonial powers the additions that were made to the collection during this time mainly derived from the German colonies.[39] The Royal Ethnographic Museum (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) in Berlin had a special part in the enmeshment of political colonialism and colonial production of knowledge in Ethnographic museums as it was appointed with a monopoly for ethnographic objects collected in governmentally funded expeditions into the German "*Schutzgebiete"* by law in 1889.[40]

At first glance the documentation seemed to create the Wafipa rattle as a specimen of a rattle from German East Africa or rather of a colonial doublet in the collection in Göttingen. That seemed to be the most important information here. As the archived document titled "chronicle for the years 1868–1930" shows, the Ethnographic Collection received 27 Numbers "Von der Direction des kgl Museum für Völkerkunde aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten" in March 1902.[41] Among these is no rattle listed. Following the hint on the inventory card leads us to the old index card where not only is the rattle specified as a toy. It is also explicitly described as a doublet from the *Schutzgebiete* and as part of the collection "Lt. Bischoff"[42]. Looking back at the archival material Af 1151 can now be identified as the children's clapper with the old number 1632. Its signature in the museum in Berlin was V II A 1115. In 1901 the fifth catalogue of colonial doublets *"aus den Deutschen Schutzgebieten eingegangenen wissenschaftlichen Sendungen"* was published listing items from various collectors and territories from which other German museums could choose. The Wafipa rattle is listed on page 8 as part of the collection from a "Lieutenant Bischoff".[43]

Presumably this person was Josef Bischoff (1872–1948), on whom, there is no extensive research yet. However, there are indications that he was part of military colonial violence on a regular basis in what was then German East Africa as well as during the genocide in today's Namibia. [44] The connection to

Josef Bischoff arouses special curiosity to the provenance stories of the Wafipa rattle as it remains to be traced in what relation to colonial military practice and colonialism not only as structural but as direct violence the Wafipa rattle was acquired. It does seem logical at this point to assume a connection and I am sure there are more stories to be revealed.

Again, it is unknown how the inventory card was worked on, when and by whom. It is unclear why the information from the old inventory system was not transferred or why the children's clapper became a rattle. Maybe the reasons were very profane work efficiency reasons not to repeat information already given elsewhere, maybe "rattle" was simply seen as the better classification. Maybe giving the reference to the museum in Berlin was viewed as enough information from which the collector and other information could easily be identified if needed. In its in-house documentation, as it was the case for the Wagogo and the Wanyakyusa rattle, indigenous stories and knowledges on cultural contexts as well as references to individuals related to the object's origin are absent.

Conclusion: Objects and their Stories

I have shown that the rattle's stories have become fragmented along the way, the documentation is incomplete, and even looking at seemingly similar items, the ways in which they are represented in the Ethnographic collection are not unified. Therefore, the process of becoming an object is not necessarily possible to resolve. And still, the question of how the Wagogo, the Wanyakyusa and the Wafipa rattle, became represented as objects of the collection has shown that they have been classified and depicted in various ways which reshaped their reality in relation to the people and institutions who brought them to Göttingen. Although all of them are described as rattles at some point, in this process of being collected and documented they became an object mainly characterised by its outer appearance and the materials it is made from (the Wagogo rattle), an instrument for "heathen" practices of a "witchdoctor" later contextualised in the realm of medicine and body hygiene (the Wanyakyusa rattle), and an object characterised mainly by its origin from a German colony (the Wafipa rattle). These notions are deeply rooted in the perspectives, interests, and agendas of the collecting persons. While

it is plausible to assume that the Wagogo and the Wanyakyusa rattle were incorporated in the collection due to the connections Albert Peter and Carl Mirbt had to the University of Göttingen the acquisition of the Wafipa rattle is to be seen in the dynamics of a market of its own – the trade with colonial doublets. The relationship between Josef Bischoff and the Royal Ethnographic Museum in Berlin as well as his collecting practices and their relation to his military position are yet to be investigated.

Following the leads in the documentation of the three rattles shows us more about the collecting than about the objects themselves, the people who made them or the exact circumstances in which they became objects in the Ethnographic collection in Göttingen. But the leads do help us to ask about these gaps and question them in the process of knowledge production.

The amount of information preserved and given on the rattles in the collection is embedded in documenting practices which are difficult, even impossible, to reconstruct. For the in-house materials, besides correspondences that have an addressee and a sender, it is simply not known who exactly created what kind of data when. Therefore, it is speculative why which information was deemed important, and another was not. Nevertheless, as the practices involved in their collection are intertwined with diverse colonial contexts, the stories in the rattles' documentation can also be seen as part of a discourse of colonial knowledge production. Therefore, the missing of indigenous stories on cultural contexts that I have constated for the documentation of all three rattles can be seen in a context of power relations, in which collecting practices have contributed to the construction of distance and difference to the colonised *other*.[45] In the process of becoming objects the knowledge preserved on the rattles has been objectified following the rules of a scientific discourse. As an effect the connection to their previous existence in their communities of origin becomes ever more difficult to trace and the gaps mute stories that have been assessed irrelevant to being part of the collection as an object.

When the Wagogo, the Wanyakyusa and the Wafipa rattle became part of the research exchange Flower Manase and I found more questions than answers, questions about the categories they are described in today and what could be other categories for them. We constated that in order to gain more balanced stories it would be a start to identify the gaps in the documentation and that it would be necessary to get in contact with the communities that could enrich the rattle's stories with their interpretations and knowledge on past and present cultural contexts as a next step. In the end knowledge needs

people. Being haunted, as Schimming put it in the quotation at the beginning of this paper, is referring to these gaps and the practices of their production. Being haunted by the object's stories also means that they can have impact and meaning in the present. Their plurality can help us to narratives that might "empower and humanize"[46] and challenge established (colonial) knowledges.

1 Adichie, Chimanda Ngozi: "The danger of a single story", July 2009, on: TED Ideas worth spreading, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story, accessed 10 January 2023.
2 The conference "Museum Collections in Motion. Colonial and postcolonial encounters" took place at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne from July 15–17 2019. Cynthia Schimming presented in the Panel *Open Forum: On the Ethics and Politics of Return and New Forms of Cooperation* on July 16. The Conference Flyer and program can be found online on the website of the University of Cologne, https://gssc.uni-koeln.de/veranstaltungen/konferenzen/19-7-museum-collections-in-motion, accessed 10 January 2023.
3 Röhrig, Clara and Dominika Vetter: "VOICES FROM THE CONFERENCE 2 – Getting to the core Interviews with Cynthia Schimming and Amber Aranui", 18.8.2019, on: *boasblog DCNtR*, https://boasblogs.org/de/dcntr/voices-from-the-conference-day-two/, accessed 10 January 2023.
4 Röhrig and Vetter, 2019, *VOICES*.
5 Lunden, Staffan (2016): *Displaying Loot. The Benin Objects and the British Museum*, Göteborg, p. 139.
6 Stoler, Ann Laura (2002), "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance. On the content in the Form", in: *Archival Science*, Vol. 2, no. 1–2, pp. 87–109.
7 During this exchange people from various countries and professions came together in order to share perspectives on colonial provenances in collections and museums. The PAESE-Subprojects in Lower Saxony worked together with experts from Namibia, Tanzania, Cameroon and Papua New Guinea. The experiences were also shared in a workshop at the end of this research exchange. For further information see the projects homepage: https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/gastbesuche-2019/?lang=en/, accessed 12 January 2023. In Göttingen we were happy to welcome Tommy Buga from the National Gallery in Port Morsby, PNG, and Flower Manase from the National Museum in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, for joint work on objects and their colonial histories.
8 On objects from the „Maji Maji war", 1905–07, see Reyels, Lili; Ivanov, Paola; Weber-Sinn, Kristin (2018) (Eds): *Humboldt Lab Tanzania. Objekte aus den Kolonialkriegen im Ethnologischen Museum, Berlin – Ein tansanisch-deutscher Dialog*, Berlin.
9 On the Collections of the Georgia Augusta see: Hoffmann, Dietrich von and Kathrin Maack-Rheinländer (2001) (Eds): *Ganz für das Studium angelegt. Die Museen, Sammlungen und Gärten der Universität Göttingen*: Göttingen or the website of the Centre for Collection Development of Göttingen University, https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/440706.html, accessed 12 January 2023.
10 On the history of the Ethnographic Collection Göttingen see for example: Krüger, Gundolf (2012): "Die Ethnologische Sammlung der Universität Göttingen. Eine Forschungs- und Lehrstätte mit langer Tradition, in: Krüger, Gundolf, Ulrich Menter und Steffen Schrade (Eds): *TABU?! Verborgene Kräfte – Geheimes Wissen,* Hannover, pp. 100–104.
11 Braukämper and Kulick-Aldag (2000) and Geisenhainer (2020) have shown this engagement and their works give valuable insights to archival leads and debates on colonial revisionist debates during National Socialism in Germany, especially in Göttingen: Braukämper, Ulrich (2000): "Kolonialethnologie in Göttingen und Witzenhausen", in: Bernhard Streck (Ed.): *Ethnologie und Nationalsozialismus*, Gehren, p. 193–214; Kulick-Aldag, Renate (2000): *Die Göttinger Völkerkunde und der Nationalsozialismus*, Hamburg; Geisenhainer, Katja (2020): „aus innerer Zustimmung zu den Programmpunkten der NSDAP" – Der Völkerkundler Hans Plischke (1890–1972) und sein Wirken in Göttingen", in: Schumann, Dirk; Schauz, Désirée (Eds): *Forschen im „Zeitalter der Extreme": Akademien und andere Forschungseinrichtungen im Nationalsozialismus und nach 1945*, Göttingen, pp. 263–296.
12 Nippold, Walter (1937): "Die Ethnographische Sammlung der Universität Göttingen", in: *Museumskunde*, Berlin, Vol. 9, S. 118.
13 Nippold, Walter (1957): "Entwicklung der Sammlung seit 1928", in: Plischke, Hans (Ed.): *Göttinger Völkerkundliche Studien*, Düsseldorf, pp. 10–14.

14 Scans of the inventory catalogues are also available online on the Homepage of the Ethnographic Collection Göttingen under "Open Access", see https://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/617641.html, accessed 12 January 2023.

15 Ethnographic Collection oft he Georg August University Göttingen (ECG) Folder 15 "Sammlungsankäufe 1927 bis 1935"; Folder 8 "Ethnographische Sammlung 1868–1930".

16 As I have stated in the introduction there is an absence of indigenous stories to be recognised in the documentation of the ethnographic collection. In an attempt to visualise their link to their societies of origin in this text I will refer to the rattles as "the Wagogo rattle", "the Wanyakyusa rattle" and "the Wafipa rattle".

17 Fuchs, Peter und Gundolf Krüger (1993) (Eds): *Verzeichnis der Völkerkundlichen Sammlung des Instituts für Völkerkunde der Georg-August-Universität zu Göttingen. Teil IV. Afrika*. Von Wolfram Heise, Antje Spliethoff-Laiser und Sybille Wolkenhauer. Göttingen, p. 223 [translation of the author].

18 ECG, Inventory card Af 116.

19 The reason for the questionmark is as unclear as the identity of the person who wrote it. Peter's list clearly states the related place for the Wagogo rattle as Ugogo which probably induced the deduction to the Wagogo in the category "tribe" on the inventory card.

20 This partial estate of Albert Peter is kept in the department of manuscripts, scholarly and literary papers at Göttingen State and University Library. A directory can be found on the website of the department: Teilnachlass Peter, Albert, Professor für Botanik, 1853–1937, Cod. Ms. A. Peter 1–23, http://hans.sub.uni-goettingen.de/nachlaesse/Peter.pdf, accessed 12 January 2023. When referring to documents of the allowance I will use the signatures provided in this document.

21 See partial estate A. Peter, COD. MS. A. PETER 41, COD. MS. A. PETER 52, COD. MS. A. PETER 97, Cod. Ms. A. Peter 94.

22 See Cod.Ms.A. Peter 89: 1, a Memorandum for a botanic voyage around the world dating 1907.

23 Peter, Albert (1927): "Zwei Expeditionen nach Deutsch-Ostafrika 1913/19 und 1925/26. Die I. Expedition, in: *Koloniale Rundschau. Zeitschrift für koloniale Wirtschaft, Völker- und Länderkunde,* Vol. 2, p. 33–42. and Peter, Albert (1927): "Zwei Expeditionen nach Deutsch-Ostafrika 1913/19 und 1925/26. Die II. Expedition", in: *Koloniale Rundschau. Zeitschrift für koloniale Wirtschaft, Völker- und Länderkunde,* Vol. 2, pp. 65–75.

24 Peter, 1927, *Expedition I*, p. 42

25 See Fuchs and Krüger, 1993, *Verzeichnis*, p. 256 [translation of the author].

26 ECG, Inventory card Af 228.

27 In his work on protestant missionaries in colonial Africa Thorsten Altena mentions A.F. Jansa in various references. Especially interesting is the hint to the archives of the Moravian Mission in which a Memorandum: "Erinnerungen des Missionars Alexander Ferdinand Jansa," (1868–1957) is preserved. See: Altena, Thorsten (2003): *"Ein Häuflein Christen mitten in der Heidenwelt des dunklen Erdteils". Zum Selbst- und Fremdverständnis protestantischer Missionare im kolonialen Afrika 1884–1918*, Münster, p. 254.

28 The website www.goettingenkolonial.uni-goettingen.de put together by students of Prof. Dr. Rebekka Habermas as a result of a Seminar "Universität und Kolonialismus" in summer 2019 mentions Carl Mirbt in several entries, last accessed 12 January 2023. A comprehensive study on his networks and collecting practices concerning ethnographic objects has not yet been created.

29 ECG, Folder 15 "Sammlungsankäufe 1927 bis 1935".

30 The original is in German: "No 29 1Klapper(rattle) genannt "salwe", um zu erfahren, ob irgend eine Krankheit, oder ein Miszgeschick von den Ahnen, oder von Zauberrei herrühren.", ECG, Folder 15 "Sammlungsankäufe 1927 bis 1935".

31 Weule, Karl (1908): *Wissenschaftliche Ergebnisse meiner ethnographischen Forschungsreise in den Südosten Deutsch-Ostafrikas*, Berlin, p. 93.

32 As the N-word is especially hurtful for people living in the present I decided not to reproduce its trauma by spelling it out. It is not a neutral word but a concept bearing personal and structural racist impacts. Marking it in the citation with an * is enough to show the historically used language in this context. On the problematic of the N-word in German language see e.g. Kilomba, Grada (2009): "Das N-Wort", on: bpb, Afrikanische Diaspora in Deutschland, https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/afrikanische-diaspora/59448/das-n-wort?p=0, accessed 12 January 2023.
33 Kollmann, Karl Paul (1899): *The Victoria Nyanza. The land, the races and their customs with specimens of some of the dialects*, London, p. 207
34 Here in: Plischke, Hans (1939): "Zum Geleit", in: *Göttinger Völkerkundliche Studien*, ed. by Hans Plischke, Göttingen, p. 10.
35 Fuchs and Krüger, 1993, *Verzeichnis*, p. 224.
36 ECG, Inventory card Af 1151
37 Penny, H. Glenn (2002): *Objects of Culture. Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany,* London, p. 1.
38 Transl. From: Frobenius, Leo (1925): *Vom Schreibtisch zum Äquator. Planmäßige Durchwanderung Afrikas*, Frankfurt a.M., p. 19.
39 Plischke, Hans (1931): *Die Ethnographische Sammlung der Universität Göttingen, ihre Geschichte und Bedeutung,* Göttingen, p. 42.
40 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (2021): "Die koloniale(n) Debatte(n) und das museale Selbstverständnis. Ein Positionspapier des Ethnologischen Museums. Kolonialismus und das Ethnologische Museum Berlin", on: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum, https://www.smb.museum/museen-einrichtungen/ethnologisches-museum/sammeln-forschen/kolonialismus/, accessed 20 January 2023; see also Lustig, Wolfgang (1988): „Außer ein paar zerbrochenen Pfeilen nichts zu verteilen…" – Ethnographische Sammlungen aus den deutschen Kolonien und ihre Verteilung an Museen 1889–1914, in: *Mitteilungen aus dem Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg*, Vol. 18, pp. 157–178; Schindlbeck, Markus (2012): *Gefunden und verloren: Arthur Speyer, die dreißiger Jahre und die Verluste der Sammlung Südsee des Ethnologischen Museums Berlin*, Berlin; Hoffmann, Beatrix (2012): *Das Museumsobjekt als Tausch- und Handelsgegenstand. Zum Bedeutungswandel musealer Objekte im Kontext der Veräußerungen aus dem Sammlungsbestand des Völkerkundemuseums Berlin*, Berlin; Lang, Sabine/Nicklisch, Andrea (2021): Den Sammlern auf der Spur: Provenienzforschung zu kolonialen Kontexten am Roemer- und Pelizaeus- Museum Hildesheim 2017/18, Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net, https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.742
41 "Chronicle for the years 1868–1930" in ECG, Folder 8 "Ethnographische Sammlung 1868–1930".
42 ECG Af 1151_ZR_1632.
43 Luschan, Felix (1901): *Fünftes Verzeichnis der abgebaren Doubletten der aus den Deutschen Schutzgebieten eingegangenen wissenschaftlichen Sendungen*. Berlin (SMB-PK, EM, „Acta betreffend Kolonial-Dubletten", Vol. 2, Pars I B. 47), p. 8.
44 Bührer, Tanja (2011): *Die Kaiserliche Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika. Koloniale Sicherheitspolitik und transkulturelle Kriegführung 1885 bis 1918*, München, p. 211.
45 Weber, Kristin (2006): "Objekte als Spiegel kolonialer Beziehungen. Das Sammeln von Ethnographica zur Zeit der deutschen kolonialen Expansion in Ostafrika (1884–1914)", in: *Beiträge zur 1. Kölner Afrikawissenschaftlichen Nachwuchstagung (KANT I)*, ed. by Seifert, Marc, Markus Egert, Fabian Heerbaart, Kathrin Kolossa, Mareike Limanski, Meikal Mumin, Peter André Rodekuhr, Susanne Rous, Sylvia Stankowski and Marilena Thanassoula, Köln, p. 3.
46 Adichie, 2009, *Single Story*.

IV.

Transdisciplinary Provenance Research on Objects from Colonial Contexts

Recherche de provenance transdisciplinaire sur des objets de contextes coloniaux

Introduction

Transdisciplinary Provenance Research on Objects from Colonial Contexts

Introduction

Sabine Lang

"Mehrspartenmuseen" – museums covering several disciplines – have their roots in the Chambers of Art and Wonders (*Kunst- und Wunderkammern*) that emerged with European expansion in the 16th century when explorers, naturalists, missionaries and adventurers began to bring the most varied "exotic" objects to Europe.[1] The Chambers presented ethnographic objects along with antique and contemporary art, unusual natural history specimens such as two-headed animals or narwhale tusks believed to be the horns of unicorns,[2] local archaeological objects, books, and scientific measuring instruments. Museums as an institution accessible to a general public emerged from the late 18th century onward. Today's multidisciplinary museums have their origins not only in Chambers of Arts and Wonders but also in courtly collections as well as in collections compiled by bourgeois urban elites and educational societies (*Bildungsvereine*). In Germany, they include the museums represented in the PAESE project: the Lower Saxony State Museum (*Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum*) in Hanover, the Brunswick Municipal Museum (*Städtisches Museum*), the State Museum *Natur und Mensch* in Oldenburg, and the *Roemer- und Pelizaeus Museum* in Hildesheim. In other cases, the differentiation of various scientific and scholarly disciplines in the last third of the 19th century led to a specialization of museums in single disciplines such as art, zoology, antiquities, or ethnology.

Collectors tended to be multidisciplinary as well. This is not only true for famous explorers such as James Cook (1728–1779) and Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), but also for humbler collectors in the colonies including participants in official scientific expeditions and members of colonial armies, many of whom collected both ethnographic objects and specimens from the realms of zoology, botany, and geology. This means that ethnographic objects represent only a fraction of the museums' inventories from colonial contexts.

Upon arriving from the colonies, collections consisting of ethnographic and natural history specimens were taken apart. They were either distributed among several museums according to the latter's respective specializations (as was the case in Berlin, the capital of imperial Germany) or ended up in different departments of "Mehrspartenmuseen". This is why the transdisciplinary character of colonial collecting practices becomes particularly evident in multidisciplinary museums.

So far, the focus of provenance research has been mainly on ethnographic objects, but the perspective is increasingly shifting to include approaches to natural history collections. Only a transdisciplinary approach, beyond the dividing lines of today's disciplines and museum departments, reveals the entire range of colonial collecting. This also enables researchers to identify not only collectors represented in several or many museums but also networks, dealer structures, or transport routes of objects.

The following contributions address specific issues and challenges in research using transdisciplinary approaches. What are the implications of the above observations for post- and decolonial practices in dealing with these holdings? And how can research projects on natural history specimens and ethnological objects be combined so as to achieve synergy effects?

1 See Noack, Karoline (2019): "Die Welt im Kasten. Zur Geschichte der Institution 'Völkerkundemuseum' im deutschsprachigen Raum", in: Edenheiser, Iris; Förster, Larissa (Eds): *Museumsethnologie. Eine Einführung*, Berlin, pp. 30–47; Hoffmann, Beatrix (2012): *Das Museumsobjekt als Tausch- und Handelsgegenstand,* Berlin, pp. 8–14.

2 Ibid., p. 10, Fn. 7.

IV.

Transdisciplinary Provenance Research on Objects from Colonial Contexts

The Coloniality of Natural History Collections

Transdisciplinary Provenance Research on Objects from Colonial Contexts

The Coloniality of Natural History Collections

Katja Kaiser

Abstract

Natural history collections have so far only played a marginal role in debates on collections from colonial contexts. They are either mentioned without their specificities being defined, or not discussed at all. Yet natural history museums experienced an unprecedented expansion of their collections during colonial expansion. Using the example of the Berlin Natural History Museum (*Museum für Naturkunde Berlin*), this chapter highlights the colonial entanglements of the institution and its collection. In addition, initial thoughts on specificities of natural history collections from colonial contexts are presented as first results from projects at this museum. It is argued that natural history collections must be considered in an interdisciplinary context with ethnological or anthropological collections in order to ascertain their similarities and differences and to reconstruct shared acquisition contexts and provenances.[1]

La colonialité des collections d'histoire naturelle (Résumé)

Jusqu'à présent, les collections d'histoire naturelle n'ont joué qu'un rôle marginal dans les débats sur les collections issues de contextes coloniaux. Elles sont soit mentionnées de manière très approximative, soit totalement inexistantes. Pourtant, les musées d'histoire naturelle ont connu une expansion sans précédent de leurs collections lors de l'expansion coloniale. À partir de l'exemple du muséum d'histoire naturelle de Berlin (Museum für Naturkunde Berlin), ce chapitre met en lumière l'enchevêtrement colonial de l'institution et de sa collection. En outre, les premières réflexions sur les spécificités des collections d'histoire naturelle issues de contextes coloniaux sont présentées en guise de premiers résultats des projets menés dans ce musée. Les collections d'histoire naturelle doivent être considérées dans un contexte interdisciplinaire avec les collections ethnologiques ou anthropologiques afin de déterminer leurs similitudes et leurs différences et de reconstituer les contextes d'acquisition et les provenances communes.

Introduction

Museums have been described as colonial constructs and manifestations of colonial power, their functions being collecting, ordering and governing. Already the acquisition of objects and materials was closely interwoven with colonial relations of domination, and in this framework collecting became ever more a form of imperial conquest.[2] The translocation of objects from the periphery to the metropolis symbolically established the latter as the "heart of empire",[3] a dynamic also evident in Berlin, the colonial metropolis of Germany, whose museums received the majority of all "scientific" objects from the German colonies. In the museums, the objects were arranged and displayed according to Western taxonomies, demonstrating assumed knowledge and authority over the overseas territories.

How could the accumulation of objects be better exemplified than on the Biodiversity Wall of the Natural History Museum Berlin (*Museum für Naturkunde Berlin*, Figure 1)? Masses of animals on display, even more in the depots, specimens from all over the world, ordered systematically, demonstrating appropriation of and control over the natural world. A controlled tableau of wonders that veils questions of provenance and colonial entanglements under an abundant and alleged aesthetics.

Figure 1 | Biodiversity Wall of the Natural History Museum Berlin © Natural History Museum Berlin

The natural sciences cannot be conceived of without the system of nature that is based on externally visible differences, hierarchies and a strict Latin nomenclature. This knowledge system has a universalistic claim and spread worldwide during the colonial era, suppressing other knowledge systems. Building up this system of nature has relied on colonial expansion and the extraction of resources as well as knowledge from the Global South, with their subsequent translocation to the Global North. At the same time, colonial ideologies were informed by ideas of difference, hierarchies, order and control. This applied not only to flora and fauna but also to humans.[4]

Natural history collections are a central part of the history of imperial appropriation of the world. Collecting relied largely on colonial infrastructures; it profited from the asymmetrical power structures and the exploitation of labour.[5] Through the extraction of resources and knowledge, the museums in the metropolises of Europe developed into colonial archives, providing the infrastructure for continued political and economic exploitation of colonised territories and people. Leading natural history museums functioned like other state archives. Instead of files, images and other forms of documentation, natural history specimens formed an infrastructure for governing and advancing colonial structures of power and knowledge production.[6]

Still, in current public, political and media debates about collections from colonial contexts, natural history collections have only played a marginal role so far. They are either mentioned without their specificities being defined, or they are not mentioned at all. Yet natural history museums experienced an unprecedented expansion of their collections during the colonial era. To this day, collections of colonial provenance form a nationally and internationally significant basis for research and exhibitions.

At the Berlin Natural History Museum (*Museum für Naturkunde Berlin*), we are only just beginning to understand the specificities of natural history objects from colonial contexts and to let the colonial past become part of the institutional self-understanding of natural history institutions. We are also aware of the ongoing epistemic, economic and political forms of violence and persisting colonial structures referred to as coloniality. We are discussing a profound transformation of the ways in which we work with natural history collections, how we exhibit and research them, how we enter into collaborations and how we understand digitisation processes.

Research and discussions on the coloniality of natural history collections have been an integral part of the work of the *Humanities of Nature* department for many years.[7] Since May 2020, a research project has been dedicated

to these questions in order to shed light on the special features of natural history collections, taking current discussions in science, society and politics into account to develop recommendations and standards for dealing with natural history objects from colonial contexts that supplement already existing guidelines.[8] In a broad internal discussion and in close exchange with other scientific institutions, civil society actors and researchers from various disciplines, we are dealing with the political, legal and ethical aspects of natural history collections and with the colonial history of the Natural History Museum Berlin.[9] This chapter provides insight into this work, reflecting on the specificities of natural history collections of colonial provenance and the role of transdisciplinary provenance research.

Exhibition and Taxonomy

In exhibitions or publications, transparent communication on the colonial history of natural history is still rare. Natural history stands for "nature", which is defined as space beyond history. In this respect, the object descriptions give the name of the species on display and sometimes also the location where an object was found. More precise information on the manner and time of acquisition is rarely given.[10]

However, even in the largely dehistoricised exhibition rooms, the genus and species names in the binomial nomenclature offer hints on the connection between natural history and politics. In the dinosaur hall of the Natural History Museum Berlin, for example, visitors find the skeleton of *Dysalotosaurus lettowvorbecki*. The object was excavated in Tanzania at the beginning of the 20th century, then the colony of German East Africa, and taxonomically described in Berlin in 1919. While the genus name means "lizard difficult to catch", the species-specific attribute honours General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck (1870–1964), commander of the German troops in the colony of German East Africa during the First World War. Lettow-Vorbeck's cruel and inhumane warfare led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people on the African side. After the First World War, Lettow-Vorbeck was seen as a war hero by conservatives and nationalists – not least by means of this species description. Since 2020, the exhibit description has included a critical commentary in this respect.[11]

The colonial species names are also an expression of epistemic colonisation that suppressed local knowledge systems and continues to have an effect. To this day, for example, the indispensable contribution of the local population in the colonies to the success of the collectors and the production of knowledge is hardly mentioned, and "nature" is presented as detached from economic, cultural and political connections.[12] The recontextualisation of natural history objects is all the more important because species names, unlike street names, cannot be changed, since they form the basis for the description of natural phenomena and the ordering of collections.

New panels in the dinosaur hall of the Natural History Museum Berlin pay respect to the contributions of local workers who helped to excavate the dinosaur fossils in Tendaguru, Tanzania, then the colony of German East Africa. Some names of the hundreds of indispensable workers that appear in the historical documentsare mentioned. Researchers at the museum have also started to name newly described species after local workers, such as *Australodocus bohetii* in 2007, named after the Tanzanian preparator Boheti bin Amrani, thus for the first time honouring a Tanzanian person in the naming process related to the fossils from Tendaguru.

"Nature", Objects or Belongings?

In many cases, zoological and botanical specimens or mineralogical material may not be "sensitive materials", such as human remains in particular, or even ethnological objects as such.[13] However, they are more than "scientific objects" or merely natural resources. They were and are integrated into cultural, economic and political contexts. For example, certain songs of the local population at Tendaguru originated during the excavation of dinosaur bones in the then colony of German East Africa. These songs lament the loss of the culturally and economically valuable fossils, which were used as fertiliser or for medical purposes, as Musa Sadock and Halfan Magani have demonstrated in their oral history research in this region.[14] To First Nations people from Australia, animals can be considered as family and plants as kin. In this respect, the question arises whether natural history objects should not also be understood as "belongings", a term conventionally used to refer to ethnological objects. Case studies make it clear that natural history museums

need to broaden the one-sided, Eurocentric, scientific view of "nature" to include the perspective of a multitude of actors in the regions of origin and in diasporas in Germany. Only in this way can the interpretative authority be shared and the collection be transformed into an interdisciplinary and global source of knowledge.

Closely linked to the previous point is the question of who actually owns "nature". A natural history object – on the basis of which a new species is described – is called a type specimen. Types are among the most valuable biological objects for the scientific community. They are linked to the archiving institution, formalised by international regulations to guarantee their accessibility.

Currently, international protocols regulate access and equitable benefit sharing in the field of genetic resources. These rules were introduced in 1992 under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and a legally binding framework was created with the Nagoya Protocol in 2010. Since then, the holotypes of newly described species from joint field research must be kept in the country of origin.[15] But existing guidelines circumvent the problem of ownership of historical material.[16] For example, the Code of Ethics for natural history museums, which was developed by ICOM in 2013, only refers to the problem of ownership in one place. If the material is already outside the country of origin, and there – in the understanding of ICOM – "value" was "added", for example a plant was classified and dissected, the material is then generally considered to be the property of the institution that did so.[17] If the concept of the "society of origin" is already controversial in debates about ethnological objects, the question for whom the collections are relevant beyond the scientific community is all the more urgent for natural history collections. The fact that hardly any restitution is currently demanded does not mean that no injustice was inflicted in the gathering of the collections. Rather, it sheds light on the attitude of non-transparency that has been practised for decades and prevents a productive exchange.

Digitising Collections from Colonial Contexts

The digitisation of catalogues and collections worldwide is now seen as an important means to advance access to the holdings of museums, universities and archives. Moreover, it is considered a major vehicle for negotiating the future of museums and their role in mobilising participation and social change. Digitising objects is supposed to provide all interest groups with at least digital access. Apart from the fundamental problem of whether digitisation can be equated with accessibility, other challenges arise in the context of a natural history museum. The Natural History Museum Berlin, for example, holds some 30 million objects, rendering the task of identifying and tagging those from colonial contexts a lengthy if not impossible process. How can we enable symmetrical description systems in the databases? And how should a digitisation process be designed in order to allow for different epistemologies and perspectives right from the start?[18]

These questions call for a transdisciplinary and international approach to provenance research. Starting with a short excursus on the colonial history of the Natural History Museum Berlin, this chapter will therefore discuss in the following the advantages of an approach that brings together various information stored in several collections and archives as well as different expertises and knowledges.

Transdisciplinary Collecting Practices

When the first collections of today's Natural History Museum Berlin were brought together in 1810 in the east wing of the newly founded Friedrich Wilhelm University (from 1945 onwards the Humboldt University), their holdings were manageable. However, the first guide to the collection, published by Hinrich Lichtenstein (1780–1857), the director of the collection for many years, already points to its rapid growth.[19] The collections were expanded in many cases by objects from colonised areas overseas that Europeans began to systematically explore, including Brazil, the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, the Pacific Islands and Australia. Especially in the period from 1884 to

1919, when the German Reich had colonies in Africa, the Pacific and China, the Zoological Museum of today's Natural History Museum Berlin played a prominent role in imperial politics. By a resolution of the Federal Council in 1889, it received all objects from expeditions financed by the state and, following an addendum to this resolution in 1891, also the materials collected by colonial officials.[20] The sheer number of collections arriving was overwhelming; the freight lists of the shipments indicate that literally tons of objects were extracted from the colonies year after year.[21]

The history of museum collections can only be understood as an entangled and global history. In the field, zoological, ethnological, botanical, mineralogical and anthropological objects were often collected by one and the same person, and it was only in the metropolitan centres that the shipments were divided and distributed to separate institutions. Furthermore, the Berlin museums gave duplicates of botanical, zoological and ethnological objects from the German colonies to other German museums, so we often find objects from one collector in Berlin as well as in many other museums in Germany and worldwide.

One example of this transdisciplinary collecting practice that must be understood as the norm rather than an exception is that of the botanist Georg Zenker (1855–1922). Besides his work as a colonial official and plantation owner in the then German colony of Cameroon, he collected zoological, botanical and ethnological objects. He also appropriated human remains and sent them to museums in Berlin.[22] More than a thousand objects collected by or related to Zenker can be found scattered throughout the collection of the Natural History Museum Berlin, for example in the bird and mammal collections. Extensive correspondence of Zenker's with custodians of the Zoological Museum can be found in the museum's archives. These letters provide valuable insights into Zenker's collecting practice that could be also relevant for his ethnological, anthropological and botanical collections. There are plans to digitally connect these holdings to enrich our data, add further information on acquisition contexts and historical backgrounds and also to shed light on local actors and local knowledge documented in the archival sources. Furthermore, Zenker-related objects can also be found at the Berlin Ethnological Museum and the Botanical Museum as well as in other collections worldwide. His descendants in Cameroon and Germany keep diaries and correspondence. It would be most valuable for different users to digitally connect these interdisciplinary collections and to explore a wide range of possibilities for cooperation with partners in Germany and in Cameroon.

To sum up, it is clear that natural history collections must connect their resources with different museums and disciplines in order to foster productive transdisciplinary provenance research. The exchange of information is also crucial, especially in relation to actors who collected in a transdisciplinary capacity. This has to be achieved on an international level because, especially in the natural sciences, hundreds of thousands of duplicates were given to other institutions worldwide.[23] In the natural sciences, the exchange of data between institutions and in data portals such as GBIF has been established for a long time.[24] Websites such as “Bionomia” use this infrastructure to link natural history specimens to collectors using person identifiers such as the Wikidata Q number for deceased persons.[25] In the case of Georg Zenker it lists more than 20,000 specimens in 69 institutions worldwide.[26] At the Natural History Museum Berlin we are working on recording and sharing information on collectors as linked open data. This process is under way within the framework of collection development as part of the “Future Plan”.[27] By opening the data, we hope to create new opportunities for cooperation with museums, collections and interested publics worldwide.

1 The thoughts presented here rely deeply on discussions with many colleagues of the Humanities of Nature department at the Natural History Museum (*Museum für Naturkunde*) Berlin and are published also as Kaiser, Katja; Heumann, Ina (2023): "Zugänge", in: Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung (Ed.): *ENTZUG, TRANSFER, TRANSIT – Menschen, Objekte, Orte und Ereignisse,* (in press).

2 Classen, Constance; Howes, David (2006): "The Museum as Sensescape: Western Sensibilities and Indigenous Artefacts", in: Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, Ruth B. Phillips (Eds): *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture,* Oxford/New York, pp. 199–222, here p. 209. Studies dedicated to the influence of colonial power relations on collecting practices and the presentation of collected objects in the museums of European colonial metropolises often refer to ethnological collections and museums, e. g. Penny, H. Glenn (2002): *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany,* Chapel Hill. The *Tropenmuseum* in Amsterdam, founded in 1910 as the *Koloniaal Museum*, has addressed its colonial and postcolonial entanglements in an institutional self-reflection: Dijk, Janneke van; Legêne, Susan (2011) (Eds): *The Netherlands East Indies at the Tropenmuseum: A Colonial History,* Vol. 1, Amsterdam. For a prominent example of a natural history collection see Cornish, Caroline (2013): *Curating Science in an Age of Empire: Kew's Museum of Economic Botany*, PhD. Royal Holloway, University of London.

3 Barringer, Tim (1998): "The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project", in: Tim Barringer, Tom Flynn (Eds): *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, London, pp. 11–27, here p. 11. On two of the leading museums in Berlin and their colonial entanglements cf. Heumann, Ina; Stoecker, Holger et al. (2018) (Eds): *Dinosaurierfragmente. Zur Geschichte der Tendaguru-Expedition und ihrer Objekte, 1906–2018*, Göttingen; Kaiser, Katja (2021): *Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Weltgeltung. Die Botanische Zentralstelle für die deutschen Kolonien am Berliner Botanischen Garten und Museum Berlin (1891–1920)*, Berlin.

4 Cf. Müller-Wille, Staffan (1999): *Botanik und weltweiter Handel. Zur Begründung eines natürlichen Systems der Pflanzen durch Carl von Linné (1707–78)*, Berlin; Endersby, Jim (2008): *Imperial Nature: Joseph Hooker and the Practices of Victorian Science*, Chicago; On "linguistic imperialism" as a "politic of naming that accompanied and promoted European global expansion and colonisation" cf. Schiebinger, Londa L. (2004): *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World*, Cambridge, Mass., p. 195; on Linnaeus and race see https://www.linnean.org/learning/who-was-linnaeus/linnaeus-and-race, accessed 10 March 2023.

5 An introduction with a transdisciplinary approach is provided by Förster, Larissa (2016): "Problematische Provenienzen. Museale und universitäre Sammlungen aus postkolonialer Perspektive", in: Deutsches Historisches Museum (Ed.): *Deutscher Kolonialismus. Fragmente seiner Geschichte und Gegenwart, Ausst.-Kat. Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin*, Darmstadt, pp. 154–161; with a focus on zoological/ palaeontological collections see Heumann and Stoecker, 2018, *Dinosaurierfragmente*; on the entanglement of collecting and slavery cf. Delbourgo, James (2017): *Collecting the World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane*, Cambridge Mass.; Ashby, Jack; Machin, Rebecca (2021): "Legacies of Colonial Violence in Natural History Collections", in: *Journal of Natural Science Collections,* Vol. 8, pp. 44–55; for botanical collections recently Kaiser, 2021, *Wirtschaft*; Keogh, Luke (2020): *The Wardian Case: How a Simple Box Moved Plants and Changed the World*, Kew.

6 Masemann, Bronwen (2009): "Power, Possession and Post-modernism: Contemporary Readings of the Colonial Archive", in: *Faculty of Information Quarterly*, Vol. 1, no. 1, on https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/78433/2/15464-37625-1-PB.pdf, accessed 10 March 2023; Stoler, Ann Laura (2002): "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance", in: *Archival Science*, Vol. 2, no. 1–2, pp. 87–109. Lynn Nyhart points out that natural history collections, especially in the "central museums", are comparable to other state archives, see Nyhart, Lynn K. (2009): *Modern Nature: The Rise of the Biological Perspective in Germany*, Chicago, pp. 241f.

7 https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/en/about/the-museum/colonial-contexts, accessed 10 March 2023.

8 German Museums Association (2021) (Ed.): *Guidelines for German Museums: Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts*, Berlin.

9 https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/en/science/guidelines-dealing-natural-history-collections-colonial-contexts, accessed 10 March 2023.

10 On dehistoricisation through the ordering of the collection cf. Stewart, Susan (1993): *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham/London; Heumann, Ina (2013): "Zeiträume. Typologie naturwissenschaftlicher Sammlungen", in: *Trajekte. Archive der Natur*, Vol. 27, no. 14, pp. 19–23.

11 Ohl, Michael; Stoecker, Holger (2018): "Taxonomien am Tendaguru. Wie die Berliner Saurier ihre Namen bekamen", in: Heumann and Stoecker, 2018, *Dinosaurierfragmente*, pp. 232–253; Ohl, Michael (2015): *Die Kunst der Benennung*, Berlin. On Lettow-Vorbeck cf. Bley, Helmut (2008): "Gutachten über Paul Von Lettow-Vorbeck", in: *Hannoversche Geschichtsblätter*, Vol. 62, pp. 169–188; Schulte-Varendorff, Uwe (2006): *Kolonialheld für Kaiser und Führer. General Lettow-Vorbeck – Mythos und Wirklichkeit.* Berlin.

12 Jennifer R. Morris (2021): "Non-Western Collectors and their Contributions to Natural History, c. 1750–1940", in: Goss, Andrew (Ed.): *The Routledge Handbook of Science and Empire*, pp. 87–96; Das, Subhadra; Lowe, Miranda (2018): "Nature Read in Black and White: Decolonial Approaches to Interpreting Natural History Collections", in: *Journal of Natural Science Collections*, Vol. 6, pp. 4–14.

13 Cf. Berner, Margit; Hoffmann, Anette; Lange, Britta (2011) (Eds): *Sensible Sammlungen. Aus dem anthropologischen Depot*, Hamburg.

14 This is documented by ongoing oral history studies conducted with the local population in the excavation region by Musa Sadock and Halfan Magani, cf. Magani, Halfan H.; Sadock, Musa (2021): "Siasa na Uchumi Kuhusu Dinosaria mwa Tanzania. Utafiti kwa Nija ya Masimulizi Katika Eneo la Tendaguru", in: Heumann, Ina; Stoecker, Holger et.al. (Eds): *Vipande vya Dinosaria. Historia ya msafara wa kipaleontolojia kwenda Tendaguru Tanzania 1906–2018*, Dar es Salaam.

15 https://www.cbd.int/, accessed 10 March 2023.

16 Schönberger, Sophie (2019): "Die Säule von Cape Cross und das Völkerrecht", in: *Historische Urteilskraft*, Vol. 1, pp. 28–31; also Thielecke, Carola; Geißdorf, Michael (2021): "Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten. Rechtliche Aspekte", in: German Museums Association, 2021, *Guidelines,* pp. 159–170.

17 *ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums*, 2013, p. 6; https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/nathcode_ethics_en.pdf, accessed 10 March 2023.

18 Kaiser, Katja et.al.(2023): "Promises of mass digitisation and the colonial realities of natural history collections", in: *Journal of Natural Science Collections,* Vol. 11, pp. 13–25.

19 Lichtenstein, Hinrich (1816): *Das Zoologische Museum der Universität zu Berlin*, Berlin, p. 9.

20 Cf. Kaiser, 2021, *Wirtschaft*, pp. 314–319; Lustig, Wolfgang (1988): "'Außer ein paar zerbrochenen Pfeilen nichts zu verteilen…' – Ethnographische Sammlungen aus den deutschen Kolonien und ihre Verteilung an Museen 1889–1914", in: *Mitteilungen aus dem Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg*, Vol. 18, pp. 157–178; Schindlbeck, Markus (2012): *Gefunden und verloren: Arthur Speyer, die dreißiger Jahre und die Verluste der Sammlung Südsee des Ethnologischen Museums Berlin*, Berlin; Hoffmann, Beatrix (2012): *Das Museumsobjekt als Tausch- und Handelsgegenstand. Zum Bedeutungswandel musealer Objekte im Kontext der Veräußerungen aus dem Sammlungsbestand des Völkerkundemuseums Berlin*, Berlin; Lang, Sabine; Nicklisch, Andrea (2021): *Den Sammlern auf der Spur: Provenienzforschung zu kolonialen Kontexten am Roemer- und Pelizaeus- Museum Hildesheim 2017/18*, Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net.

21 Historische Bild- und Schriftgutsammlung des Museums für Naturkunde Berlin, https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/de/wissenschaft/archiv, Bestand HBSB ZMS_II_"Deutsche Schutzgebiete".
22 On Zenker cf. Kaiser, Katja (2018): "Sammelpraxis und Sammlungspolitik. Das Beispiel Georg Zenker", in: Patricia Rahemipour (Ed.): *Bipindi – Berlin. Ein wissenschaftshistorischer und künstlerischer Beitrag zur Kolonialgeschichte des Sammelns*, Berlin, pp. 7–46.
23 Cf. Buschmann, Rainer; Heumann, Ina; McKinney, Anne (Eds): "The Issue of Duplicates", in: *British Journal of the History of Science*, Vol. 55, no. 3.
24 See https://www.gbif.org/, accessed 10 March 2023.
25 See https://de.bionomia.net/, accessed 10 March 2023.
26 See https://de.bionomia.net/Q103473/deposited-at, accessed 10 March 2023.
27 See https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/en/future/future-plan and https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/en/science/collector-edit-a-thons-museum-fur-naturkunde-developing-innovative-formats-participatory, accessed 10 March 2023.

IV.

Transdisciplinary Provenance Research on Objects from Colonial Contexts

Same Provenances in Different Disciplines

A Transdisciplinary Approach

Same Provenances in Different Disciplines

A Transdisciplinary Approach

Jennifer Tadge

Abstract

It is precisely in multidisciplinary museums such as the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg* that provenance research between shells, shields, spears and bird taxidermy renders the scope of collecting in colonial contexts particularly visible. When examining the acquisition and inventory records of such institutions, it is evident that the same collectors gave both ethnological objects and natural history material to the museum at the same time. Information on these shared provenances may, however, be lost due to historical or specific institutional circumstances. This chapter introduces a transdisciplinary approach to research on shared provenances which is, particularly in multidisciplinary museums, both an opportunity and an imperative.

Mêmes provenances dans différentes disciplines : une approche transdisciplinaire (Résumé)

C'est précisément dans les musées multidisciplinaires tels que le Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg que la recherche de provenances entre les coquilles, les boucliers, les lances et la taxidermie d'oiseaux révèle l'étendue de la collecte dans les contextes coloniaux. En analysant les registres d'acquisition et d'inventaire de ces institutions, il apparaît clairement que les mêmes collectionneurs ont donné en même temps au musée des objets ethnologiques et du matériel d'histoire naturelle. Les informations concernant ces mêmes provenances pourraient toutefois avoir disparu en raison de circonstances historiques ou institutionnelles spécifiques. Ce chapitre présente une approche transdisciplinaire de la recherche sur les mêmes provenances qui est, en particulier dans les musées multidisciplinaires, à la fois une opportunité et une nécessité.

Introduction

Collecting in colonial contexts is by no means a phenomenon that only relates to ethnological objects. Many of the collecting individuals and institutions had a much broader range of interests, as can be seen in various European museums today. This is particularly evident in multidisciplinary institutions such as the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*. Its holdings currently contain up to 7,000 ethnological objects,[1] a significant share of which stems from colonial contexts, mostly from former German colonies.[2] There are also natural history and archaeological collections of non-European origin (of a hitherto unknown magnitude), which can also be traced back in part to colonial contexts. Despite these inventories of non-European origin, the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg* is by no means an ethnological museum. It was founded by the Grand Duke Paul Friedrich August of Oldenburg (1783–1853) in 1836, and from the very beginning has included several areas of collection and different departments.[3] Today it is a multidisciplinary museum with a focus on the natural history and archaeology of northwestern Germany.

From 2018 to 2021, a subproject of the joint research project "Provenance Research in Non-European Collections and Ethnography in Lower Saxony" (PAESE), was established at the museum. Its focus was primarily on the

examination of acquisition and collection practices of the so-called “Langheld Collection”, a compilation of objects assembled by the brothers Wilhelm, Johannes and Friedrich Langheld between 1889 and 1900.[4] The museum holds some 1,000 objects that can be connected to the Langheld brothers. The Oldenburg part of the collection consists mainly of everyday and utility objects as well as weapons, most of which come from the territory of present-day Tanzania.

When examining the acquisition and inventory records (Figure 1) for provenance research on the Langheld Collection, it became evident that the same collectors gave both ethnological objects and natural history material to the museum at the same time.[5] This is primarily because the old inventories are mixed in nature, meaning that entries pertaining to natural history, archeology and ethnology were not recorded separately. As a result, searches for information about the origin of certain ethnological objects inevitably bring natural history (or archaeological) “by-catch” to the researcher’s attention.

Due to such circumstances as mixed records, common provenances seem to be easier to trace in multidisciplinary museums such as the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*, unlike in settings where collections were divided among specialised museums. However, even in multidisciplinary institutions, the various classes of objects were quickly separated from each other after their arrival, with the result that objects of possibly shared provenance are kept in different storerooms today, recorded in different databases, and looked after and researched by academics from different fields. The handling of the various types of objects and the documentation of their provenance may therefore differ significantly. Today, knowledge of these connections and the same provenances are mostly lost due to this separation in the past. This means that the common provenances and the collection background cannot be found in the museum database (or between the different parts of the collection in it). Using examples from the work at the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*, the following contribution aims to highlight a short selection of possible hurdles, problems, opportunities and challenges in provenance research on non-homogeneous colonial-era holdings and to suggest the use of a different – transdisciplinary – research approach.

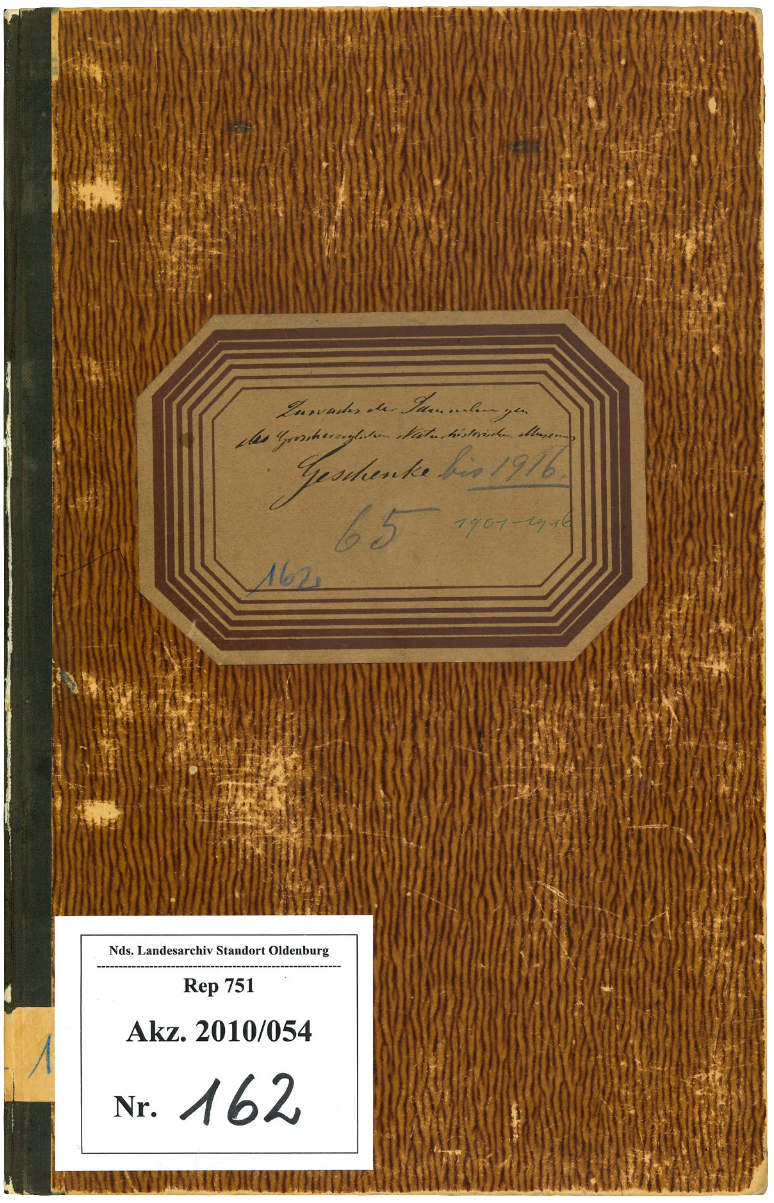

Figure 1 | Front cover of an entrance record of the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg* “Increase in the Collections of the Grand Ducal Natural History Museum, Gifts up to 1916”. © Lower Saxony State Archive, Dep. Oldenburg, NLA OL, Rep. 751, File No. 2010/054 No. 162.

Common Sources – Lost Connections

One example of lost connections comes from the record book titled *Increase in the Collections of the Grand Ducal Natural History Museum, Gifts up to 1916* ("Zuwachs der Sammlungen des Großherzoglichen Naturhistorischen Museums, Geschenke bis 1916", Fig. 1). It is a mixed register listing every object or collection entering the museum in chronological order, regardless of its classification. In October 1901 the arrival of objects from Richard Deeken was recorded. Richard Deeken (1874–1914) may be familiar as a colonial official with a somewhat ruthless reputation in Samoa. He collected objects on his first trip to the region and gave some of them to the Oldenburg museum as he had family connections in the area.[6] The entry of an "ethnographic collection" was recorded,[7] as well as "shells, a tropicbird and a sandpiper from the South Sea Islands".[8] Today, however, only one object entry can be traced in the natural history database – the white-tailed tropicbird *(Phaethon lepturus dorotheae),* Inventory Number AVE749 – and 172 entries in the ethnology database.[9] It was not known at the time that Richard Deeken was present in Oldenburg as a collector of ethnological as well as natural history objects, and the entries in the different databases differ from each other concerning information on the entry date.

A second example comes from the inventories of the so-called "Langheld-Collection". The main collector, Wilhelm Langheld (1867–1917), is perhaps better known from his time in Cameroon after 1901. Before that, however, he was deployed in German East Africa in various military contexts including the "Wissmann Troop" ("*Wissmann-Truppe*"), the "German Anti-Slavery Committee" ("*Deutsches Antisklaverei-Komitee"*), and the so-called German "Protection" Forces ("*Schutztruppe*"), while gathering ethnological objects and natural history material. The holdings of the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg* that can be connected to the Langheld brothers (except for two objects from Wilhelm Langheld's time in Cameroon, which were received later) all came from former German East Africa and adjoining territories (see an object example in Figure 2.).

But as can be seen from the various indexes to the collection, Wilhelm Langheld contributed not only ethnological objects but also natural history items to the holdings.[10] These cross-connections between the disciplines are

Figure 2 | Masai shield from the Langheld Collection, which came to Oldenburg "as a donation" among other items including natural history material in April 1897, *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*, Inv. No. 1186. © *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg* (Photo: Martin Henze)

completely lost today since not a single dataset in natural history is associated with the name Langheld, although – according to the directories – hundreds of horns, shells and skins were apparently received.[11] Even if the objects were inventoried today, it is unlikely that a connection to the name Langheld could be established only in the context of a natural history inventarisation without insight from provenance research. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that some objects from the Langheld Collection were destroyed during a fire at the museum in 1901,[12] among them an unknown number of natural history material as well as the flag from the "Emin Pascha Expedition".[13]

A Transdisciplinary Approach

These findings from provenance research practice at the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*, consisting of "bycatch" and common (but lost) collection origins, suggests that a divergent and more transdisciplinary provenance research approach might be instructive. Only transdisciplinary provenance research (detached from a specific subject area) makes it possible to understand collection contexts and acquisition circumstances across disciplines without having to repeat work in each department. Connections become visible, and departments can benefit from this information across disciplines.[14] Provenance research that is limited to one museum department or one discipline in the case of such a diversity of holdings and sources will inevitably not obtain the complete picture of the misappropriation of objects and materials by colonial actors. Moreover, research results then remain isolated and cannot find or form overarching points of connection.

Major obstacles in transdisciplinary provenance research, however, include increasing demands and requirements. This applies both to the person conducting the provenance research and to the institution in which such research is carried out. Shared (or at least synchronised) databases or recording systems for provenance-specific information would be necessary in order to conduct successful transdisciplinary research and to store the results sustainably at the end of the project.

Implications for Research Practice

A transdisciplinary provenance research approach must first overcome the various organisational, disciplinary and institutional hurdles of research practice. As could be seen from the example of Richard Deeken's collection entries from 1901, the holdings are now located in different databases and storerooms. In multidisciplinary museums, the division of collections into different departments and museum areas often results in specific organisational and administrative barriers. To work beyond one specific area, it is vital that new responsibilities need to be clarified, such as access to different databases, access to different storage spaces, and generally approvals and support from different staff members from the respective areas. Ideally, these aspects of access should be clarified at the beginning of a transdisciplinary provenance research project. In general, the whole institution has to be supportive of this approach in order for it to be successful. For instance, there might be certain limitations as to who (even within the institution) might access certain areas or databases, based on their education or position in the institution.

Further knowledge is also necessary for such transdisciplinary provenance research projects. For someone with a background in ethnology, this means acquiring knowledge of taxonomy and natural science classification systems and basic knowledge of scientific recording of natural science material. In addition to this, it must be possible to work on database systems that differ greatly from one another. The co-existence of multiple databases is not a phenomenon specific to the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg* but occurs quite often multidisciplinary museums.[15] The reasons for this lie in the very different interests and questions regarding the respective material, which result in varying database structures and database fields.

Hidden Information

These hurdles are particularly inhibiting to short-term research projects, the "bigger picture" concerning the collection circumstances possibly remaining hidden as a result. Especially concerning the different databases, a new approach to managing general information on provenances or collectors is necessary in order to render visible interconnections between the collections, databases and storerooms so that research beginning on either side will find the same vital information.[16]

The museum in Oldenburg also received ethnological and natural history objects classified as "doublets" from the Royal Ethnographic Museum (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) Berlin, the Natural History Museum

(*Museum für Naturkunde*) Berlin and the Berlin Botanical Gardens and Botanical Museum (*Botanischer Garten und Botanisches Museum*) around 1900.[17] These objects are interesting for the research community because their exchanges illustrate the connections between the museums and resulted in collections being divided and distributed around Germany. The *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg* has shared every traceable ethnological object from this provenance in the database of the PAESE project in order to support research projects on the topic. One object classified as "naturalia" is also online (LMNM_2517),[18] as it was inventoried in the ethnological database and placed in the respective storeroom (Figure 3). It is interesting to observe what was classified as "ethnological" or as "natural history" at the time, since the reasons for these categories are not always clear. From records we know that the Oldenburg museum also received natural history material, especially birds, from the Natural History Museum (*Museum für Naturkunde*) in Berlin.

Figure 3 | A "small elephant tooth", formerly from the Royal Ethnographic Museum (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) Berlin, which was classified as "naturalia" but nevertheless included in the ethnological database, *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*, Inv. No. 2517. © *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg* (Photo: Martin Henze)

One of the few examples where a shared provenance remained visible beyond disciplinary borders is the collection of Ivan Antonovich Kuprejanov (1795–1857).[19] Kuprejanov collected various objects and materials during his time as Governor of the Russian colonial possessions in North America (Russian America) between 1835 and 1840. During research on the ornithological collection of the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*, most likely due to old records of the collection referencing both ethnological objects and natural history material,[20] the range of collected material became clear. This is particularly interesting as parts such as beaks of the species collected by Kuprejanov might very likely have been used in/for ethnological objects he collected at the same time and are both now present at the different storerooms in the Oldenburg Museum.

Conclusion

Only transdisciplinary provenance research broadens our view of the extent and diversity of objects from colonial contexts that are in museum collections today. Research results on the provenance of a specific object genre can thus, depending on the situation, also be transferred to other collection holdings, which creates valuable synergy effects. Access to collector information across disciplines and museums is also desirable in order to find evidence of networks beyond the disciplinary focus of the respective museum.

New approaches and ways of thinking can be another synergy effect of joint research and transdisciplinary work. For example, how can Indigenous, local knowledge also find its way into natural history datasets? How can ethnological datasets be refined by adding concrete species names of used materials? In cooperation with societies of origin, it is also important to make natural history collections transparent, as these can also be relevant (keywords: access- and benefit-sharing, research projects, restitution). In addition, natural history collections can also provide the impetus for future joint research projects or other collaborations.

1 Kloos, Evelyn (2004): "Die Sammlungsgeschichte der Völkerkunde", in: Fansa, Mamoun (Ed.): *Kostbarkeiten oder Krempel. Museumsobjekte zwischen Wirtschaftskrise und Museumsethik*, Oldenburg, pp. 18–24, p. 18.

2 As pointed out by Schienerl, Jutta (2001): "Speere, Trommeln, Melkgefäße. Die Ostafrika-Sammlung des Landesmuseums für Natur und Mensch Oldenburg", in: Waskönig, Doris (Ed.): *Tansania und die Massai*, Oldenburg, pp. 52–57, p. 52. In subsequent years, this connection was emphasised by Kloos (2004), *Sammlungsgeschichte*, and Becker, Peter-René/Ricci, Glenn Arthur (Ed.) (2015): *Böser Wilder, Friedlicher Wilder. Wie Museen das Bild anderer Kulturen prägen. Katalog zur Sonderausstellung vom 13. Juni bis 13. September 2015*, Oldenburg.

3 An overview of the history of the museum from its foundation to the recent past is best offered by Bengen, Etta (2001): "Vom Großherzoglichen Naturhistorischen Museum zum Landesmuseum für Natur und Mensch" in: *Oldenburger Jahrbuch*, Vol. 101, pp. 207–234.

4 The focus of the subproject is the author's doctoral project with the working title "Colonial Collecting Practices in Military Contexts – The Ethnological Collections of the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*", under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Dagmar Freist at the Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg, Institute of History. Information about research on the Langheld Collection and publications from the Oldenburg subproject can be found on the PAESE project website, see https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/paese/teilprojekte/sammelpraktiken-in-militaerischen-kontexten/?lang=en, accessed 5 January 2023.

5 Most of the acquisition and inventory records concerning objects from colonial contexts are no longer in the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*, but in the Lower Saxony State Archive (*Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv*), department Oldenburg (NLA OL), on: https://www.arcinsys.niedersachsen.de/arcinsys/start.action, accessed 5 January 2022.

6 Jagfeld, Glorianna (2016): *Die unbekannte Ferne, das unbekannte Leben. Die Deekens in Samoa. Aufzeichnungen von Elisabeth Deeken*, Book on Demand, p. 7.

7 NLA OL, Rep. 751, File No. 2010/054 No. 162, p. 2.

8 Ibid.

9 See also Müller, Sophie (2021): "Vom Strand in den Depotschrank. Auf den Spuren eines Weißschwanz-Tropikvogels am Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg", in: *Oldenburger Jahrbuch*, Vol. 121, pp. 255–270.

10 His extensive hunting and travelling activities can be read about in his "travel memoirs" published in 1909. See Langheld, Wilhelm (1909): *Zwanzig Jahre in Deutschen Kolonien*, Berlin.

11 Natural history objects were also explicitly referenced in corresponding letters, for example: "Because of the antlers, I notice that there are magnificent specimens among them [...]." NLA OL, Rep. 751, file no. 2010/054, No. 160, translated by the author.

12 "Only it is much to be lamented that the flag of the Emin Pascha Expedition has also been lost", see NLA OL, Rep. 751, File No. 2010/054, No. 15, translated by the author.

13 This refers to the so-called "Lakes Expedition" of Eduard Schnitzer (1840–1892), known as Emin Pascha, from 1890 to 1892. See: Kirchen, Christian (2014): *Emin Pascha. Arzt – Abenteurer – Afrikaforscher.* Paderborn, pp. 151–176.

14 See also Schilling, Christiane and others in: von Poser, Alexis; Baumann, Bianca (2016) (Eds): *Heikles Erbe. Koloniale Spuren bis in die Gegenwart*, Dresden 2016; Andratschke, Claudia; Müller, Lars (2021): "'Menschen, Thiere und leblose Gegenstände'. Die Alfelder Tierhändler Reiche und Ruhe als Ausstatter von Völkerschauen", in: Lars Frühsorge, Sonja Riehn, Michael Schütte (Eds): *Völkerschau-Objekte*, Luebeck 2021, pp. 131–143; Will, Maria: "Blümchen von Blume aus Übersee. Zur Bedeutung von Pflanzen in kolonialen Inszenierungen und Sammlungen", in: ibid., pp. 155–163.

15 The databases have since been merged into one system.

16 The *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg* is currently in the process of unifying its databases and using a common system.

17 See also Hoffmann, Beatrix (2012): *Das Museumsobjekt als Tausch- und Handelsgegenstand,* Berlin; Lang, Sabine; Nicklisch, Andrea (2021): *Den Sammlern auf der Spur. Provenienzforschung zu kolonialen Kontexten am Roemer- und Pelizaeus- Museum Hildesheim 2017/18*, Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net.

18 See https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/exposition/lmnm_2517/, accessed 20 March 2023.

19 Fuhrmann, Kay; Ritzau, Carsten (2001): *Vögel – Die ornithologische Sammlung des Landesmuseums Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*, Oldenburg, p. 34.

20 Ibid.

V.

Cases of Restitution

Cas de restitution

Introduction

Cases of Restitution

Introduction

Larissa Förster

Postcolonial provenance research is not only a matter of 'knowing better' and 'knowing more'. Provenance research as an intellectual and political project has a number of larger aims with long-term theoretical, practical and political implications that need to be kept in mind when diving into the specificities of object histories. Firstly, it is a project of institutional (self-)critique, of institutional repositioning and reform of institutional practices. Secondly it aims to open up European institutions to transnational dialogue and foster long-term 'fair and just' relationships (to borrow a phrase from the field of provenance research on Nazi-looted Cultural Property) with stakeholders from formerly colonised countries. And thirdly, as part of the broader project of redressing colonial injustices, it is geared towards renegotiating the future of museum collections, in particular towards enabling restitution and repatriation. The last aspect is often the most difficult, but also the most transformative one – for both European institutions as well as stakeholders in the countries of origin.

The PAESE project was able to advance conversations on restitution in a number of cases. The Municipal Museum of Brunswick (*Städtisches Museum Braunschweig*) was at the centre of these conversations. In 2021 the museum received an OvaMbanderu delegation from Namibia that came to verify the provenance of a cartridge belt attributed to OvaMbanderu Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva who had revolted against German colonial occupation in 1896.

Less than a year later a delegation from the Bangwa Kingdom in Cameroon was invited to come and see, amongst other objects, the regalia of Fontem Asunganyi, which had been looted in the course of German military campaigns around 1900. Moreover, the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover (*Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover*) had already engaged in provenance research on the mortal remains of three Namibian individuals before 2018. This section brings together experiences from the two restitution cases concerning Namibia.

Namibia has played an important role in postcolonial debates in Germany – Namibian activists have been campaigning in Germany for the acknowledgement of the colonial genocide for more than 20 years. When it comes to restitution issues, Namibia is, together with Nigeria, at the forefront of debates and processes. The very first restitution of Namibian cultural heritage from a German institution took place in 1996 and still counts amongst the earliest restitution cases in Germany; interestingly, it concerned written documents, namely the letter copy books of Nama Chief Hendrik Witbooi (around 1830–1905), one of the most prominent figures of Namibian history. In 2011, 2014 and 2018 broad public attention was drawn to the debate through the repatriation of the mortal remains of 82 Namibian individuals from a number of German museum and universities. The latter also paved the way for a series of repatriations to Australia, New Zealand and Hawai'i in the subsequent years.[1] In 2019, 23 objects from the Ethnological Museum (*Ethnologisches Museum*) in Berlin, carefully selected in a multi-tiered process in Namibia, were returned.[2]

Interestingly, the cultural artefacts returned to Namibia so far do not as obviously fall into the category of 'African art' as in the case of other restitutions, e. g. the artworks from the Kingdom of Benin. Many of the Namibian collections in German institutions rather comprise(d) what historian Goodman Gwasira has suggested to call 'belongings': personal effects like jewellery, clothing, everyday and household objects – even of such prominent figures of Namibian history as Chief Hendrik Witbooi, Queen Olugondo of Ndonga, or, as detailed in the contributions below, Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva. Some of the items returned testify to the Christianisation of Southwest African societies in the 19th century, e. g. Hendrik Witbooi's bible or the *padrão* of Cape Cross.[3]

The National Museum of Namibia in Windhoek has come to be the custodian of the majority of the returned subjects and objects, as Chief Curator

Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi details below. In the meantime the museum has set up a network of community researchers who conduct research on the history of objects and object types in local languages with local methodologies, e. g. oral history research. In the face of more ongoing restitution conversations between German and Swiss institutions and Namibian stakeholders, it seems likely that the National Museum of Namibia will continue to receive items of Namibian cultural heritage from 'source museums', as they have been called by historians Jeremy Silvester and Napandulwe Shiweda.[4] Silvester and Shiweda have set the term 'source museum' against the somewhat overused term 'source community' so as to point to the necessity to reverse our gaze and put countries of origin centre stage.

The contributions of this section bring up a series of key questions in the current German-Namibian as well as the international restitution debate. One inquires as to the kind of provenance research needed to 'individualise' human remains and objects and to be able to attribute and return them to communities and families in Namibia. Claudia Andratschke details how historiographic and scientific methods can be combined in order to deconstruct legends and myths of provenance transmitted in institutions since the colonial era.[5] While her example makes an argument for interdisciplinary provenance research, the second case shows how provenance research also needs to become 'un-disciplined'. Curator Rainer Hatoum, member of the Nguvauva family Freddy Nguvauva and historian Werner Hillebrecht (interviewed by historian Lars Müller) detail a remarkable example of transnational collaboration in which academically trained and 'traditionally trained' historians and heritage professionals of different fields – plus a journalist – cooperated in order to reconstruct the identity and history of the cartridge belt of 19th-century chief Kahimemua Nguvauva. Early attempts by scholars to locate the belt in the 1990s had failed, and even OvaHerero Chief Alfons Maharero's mention of it in a speech in 2011 in Berlin had not been followed-up on. The example shows how searching for an object and provenancing it can be a matter of decades of futile attempts before concerted efforts to revise the various hints and fragments of evidence eventually lead to an identification.

The case of Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva's belt also reminds us of the politically but also ethically most sensitive question of whom to approach for, involve in, inform about, and trust in during restitution conversations. Freddy Nguvauva points to the dilemma that, on the one hand, the postcolonial

nation-state can be a legitimate counterpart for German institutions and in particular for German ministerial actors, but on the other hand, it may be perceived as not really an appropriate representative in negotiations from the point of view of dispossessed communities and families. In his discussion of the restitution of the bible and whip of Chief Hendrik Witbooi in 2019, sociologist Reinhart Kößler reminds us that for dispossessed communities, the imposition of modern statehood is at the core of the colonial experience with its alienating effects – which is why a leading role of governments in restitution processes may be viewed critically by sub-national groups.[6] In fact, a rather unique element in the restitution conversations on Kahimemua Nguvauva's belt is the involvement of descendants on the side of the settler society that participated in and benefitted from the colonial dispossession of African societies.

In most restitution cases the idea of future collaboration between museum and recipient community is brought up at some point, as also described here by Rainer Hatoum. In this context, the fundamental question is whose desire this collaboration is, on whose terms it can be maintained and how still inherent power asymmetries are dealt with during it. In order to avoid that the concept of collaboration produces neocolonial relations – an effect that museum director Robin Boast diagnosed for the related concept of the 'contact zone'[7] – institutions will have to continue engaging in radical (self-)critique and self-interrogation while indulging in the new possibilities and perspectives of collaboration. At a conference of the German Lost Art Foundation (*Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste*),[8] museum director Wayne Modest made a poignant remark: He argued that it is actually not only, as one may think, the mortal remains from the countries of origin that need to be re-humanised in the process of a repatriation, but it is also us as European societies with our institutions and collections built on the violence of colonial expansion that need to be re-humanised.

1 For an overview of repatriations and restitutions from Germany to Namibia see Graam, Rikke; Schoofs, Zoe (2021): "Germany's History of Returning Human Remains and Objects from Colonial Contexts: An Overview of Successful Cases and Unsettled Claims Between 1970 and 2021". *Working Paper* Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste 3, pp. 25–27, 40–41; Kößler, Reinhart (2021): *The Restitution of Human Remains and Artefacts: Reflecting on Namibian-German Experiences,* on: https://www.kulturgutverluste.de/Content/01_Stiftung/DE/Veranstaltungsnachlese/2021/2021-12-20_Konferenz.html, accessed 28 June 2023.

2 See Ethnologisches Museum: *23 Objekte des Ethnologischen Museums reisen nach Namibia: Partnerschaft geht in nächste Phase,* 24 May 2022, on: https://www.smb.museum/nachrichten/detail/23-objekte-des-ethnologischen-museums-reisen-nach-namibia-partnerschaft-geht-in-naechste-phase/, accessed 28 June 2023.

3 For a detailed discussion of these objects and in part also their restitution see Kößler, Reinhart (2019): "The Bible and the Whip – Entanglements Around the Restitution of Robbed Heirlooms", *ABI Working Paper*, on: https://www.arnold-bergstraesser.de/the-bible-and-the-whip-entanglements-surrounding-the-restitution-of-looted-heirlooms, accessed 28 June 2023; and on the stone cross from Cape Cross a special issue of the German Historical Museum's magazine *Historische Urteilskraft* (no. 1/2019).

4 Silvester, Jeremy; Shiweda, Napandulwe (2020): "The Return of the Sacred Stones of the Ovambo Kingdoms: Restitution and the Revision of the Past", in: *Museum & Society,* Vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 30–39, here p. 31.

5 For a discussion of how to combine historiographic and scientific methods in the provenance research on human remains from colonial contexts see: Winkelmann, Andreas; Stoecker, Holger; Fründt, Sarah; Förster, Larissa (2022): *Interdisziplinäre Provenienzforschung zu menschlichen Überresten aus kolonialen Kontexten. Eine methodische Arbeitshilfe des Deutschen Zentrums Kulturgutverluste, des Berliner Medizinhistorischen Museums der Charité und von ICOM Deutschland*, on: https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.893, accecssed 28 June 2023.

6 Kößler, 2019, The Bible and the Whip, p. 8.

7 Boast, Robin (2011): "Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited", in: *Museum Anthropology*, Vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 56–70.

8 Conference "The Long History of Claims for the Return of Cultural Heritage from Colonial Contexts", November 17–19, 2021, see documentation on: https://www.kulturgutverluste.de/Content/01_Stiftung/EN/Event-review/2021/2021-12-20_conference.html, accessed 28 June 2023.

V.

Cases of Restitution

Recent Cases of Repatriation and Restitution from Germany to Namibia

From Two Perspectives

Cases of Restitution

Recent Cases of Repatriation and Restitution from Germany to Namibia

From Two Perspectives

Claudia Andratschke and Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi

Abstract

This chapter was written by Claudia Andratschke and Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi. In the first part, Andratschke uses the example of three individuals whose remains were returned from the State Museum Hanover, Germany, to the Republic of Namibia in 2018 to illuminate the discussions around anthropological investigation prior to a repatriation that were taking place in Germany at the time. This section also shows that, when dealing with human remains, the moral-ethical responsibility does not end with their return. On the one hand, the role of German institutions and disciplines in the unethical and illegal transfer of human remains as well as in the formation and distribution of racist stereotypes in the colonial era and afterwards must be examined and made transparent. On the other hand, it is important to start a dialogue with the now preserving institutions and curators in Namibia.

The second part, by Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi, shows that the collection of human remains preserved in the National Museum of Namibia has more than doubled in the last ten years between independence and the present day, following the return of ancestral remains and cultural objects from the Charité University Hospital and other collections in Germany in 2011, 2014 and 2018. As a result, a growing number of human remains and objects of cultural and historical

significance are now accumulating in various storage facilities at various Namibian institutions, including the National Museum of Namibia, the National Archives of Namibia, and others. These returns have raised awareness in the Namibian culture and heritage sector regarding the challenges of managing human remains and heritage objects. Restitution debates can therefore assist in developing comprehensive guidelines on how human remains and other cultural objects can best be handled. This chapter urges that countries should be obligated to ensure the proper restitution and repatriation of looted and illegally acquired human remains, objects and related material culture currently held in foreign museums, institutions, and other places, that originated in nowadays Namibia.

Cas récents de rapatriement et de restitution d'Allemagne vers la Namibie – de deux points de vue (Résumé)

Ce chapitre a été rédigé par Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi et Claudia Andratschke qui, dans la première partie, utilise l'exemple de trois individus qui ont été renvoyés du musée de Hanovre (Allemagne) à la République de Namibie en 2018 afin d'illustrer les discussions qui ont eu lieu à l'époque en Allemagne sur les enquêtes anthropologiques préalables à un rapatriement. Cette partie indique également que la responsabilité morale et éthique dans la gestion des restes humains ne s'arrête pas à leur restitution : d'une part, le rôle des institutions et des disciplines allemandes dans le transfert contraire à l'éthique et illégal de restes humains ainsi que dans la formulation et la diffusion de stéréotypes racistes à l'époque coloniale et ensuite doivent être analysés et portés à la connaissance de tous jusqu'à aujourd'hui. D'autre part, il est important d'entamer un dialogue avec les institutions de conservation et les conservateurs de Namibie.

La deuxième partie, rédigée par Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi, montre que la collection de restes humains conservée dans le Musée national de Namibie a plus que doublée au cours des dix dernières années, depuis l'indépendance jusqu'à aujourd'hui, à la suite du retour des restes ancestraux et des objets culturels de l'Hôpital universitaire Charité et d'autres collections en Allemagne en 2011, 2014 et 2018. En conséquence, un nombre croissant de restes humains et d'objets d'importance culturelle et historique s'accumulent aujourd'hui dans des entrepôts de différentes institutions namibiennes, notamment le Musée national de Namibie, les Archives nationales de Namibie et d'autres institutions. Ces restitutions ont sensibilisé le secteur de la culture et du patrimoine namibien aux défis que représente la gestion des restes humains et des objets du patrimoine culturel. Les débats sur

la restitution peuvent donc contribuer à la mise en place de lignes directrices sur la manière dont les restes humains et autre objets culturels peuvent être gérés le plus efficacement possible. L'article insiste sur le fait que les pays devraient être obligés de garantir la bonne restitution et le rapatriement des restes humains, des objets et de la culture matérielle qui ont été pillés et obtenus illégalement dans la Namibie d'aujourd'hui, conservés dans des musées étrangers, des institutions et d'autres lieux.

The Repatriation of Three Individuals from the State Museum Hanover, Germany, to the Republic of Namibia in 2018

Human remains in public collections require an even higher level of careful handling as sensitive objects,[1] being the mortal remains of ancestors or individuals whose origins often date back to contexts of colonial injustice or violence, such as assassinations, martial conflicts or the desecration of graves. Moreover, after their entry into the collections in Europe where many still continue to be preserved, human remains frequently became "objects" or the subject of racial anthropological research and were thus additionally dishonored and misused for colonial or colonial-revisionist racist purposes.[2] In Germany, there have been various recommendations or other publications on the handling and the repatriation of human remains since 2013.[3] In contrast to the still very different and controversial handling of claims for the restitution of objects, there is political and public consent on the repatriation of mortal remains to their countries of origin, and indeed such remains have been returned – mainly to Australia, New Zealand and Namibia – over the past decade.[4]

First of all it is important to note that human remains are not at the focus of the various PAESE subprojects in collections in Lower Saxony, but have been or are being studied in separate projects.[5] For the Lower Saxon State Museum of Hanover (*Landesmuseum Hannover*), where a position for provenance research was established in 2008, this has been the case since 2011. The department of Ethnology, for example, decided not to exhibit human remains at the permanent exhibition which opened in 2015, and returned the remains of a young woman to Australia in 2017. Subsequently, the department of Natural History repatriated the remains of three individuals to Namibia in 2018.[6]

Unlike university, medical or anthropological collections the State Museum of Hanover has never actively collected or conducted research on human remains. In fact, for a long time there was not even a systematic collecting strategy concerning the ethnographic collection, other than the general effort in the colonial period to preserve objects from the colonies.[7] Only a few human remains therefore entered the museum in the colonial period as incidental "additions" from collectors who were mainly offering animal preparations (taxidermy) and ethnographic objects, or through exchanges with other museums. In the case of Namibia, these were three skulls donated to the then Provincial, later State Museum of Hanover by a merchant named August Rautenberg (1872–1932) in 1909 and 1913.[8]

Traces of August Rautenberg, who was an authorised signatory for the Lüderitzbucht Company L. Scholz & Co (Ltd.) from Berlin in a branch office in Keetmanshop,[9] can be found in the museum and the municipal archives of Hanover as well as in several sources of the colonial records.[10] The museum received the first gifts from him in 1905 and then from 1909 onwards, and thus always in periods when Rautenberg spent some time in his hometown before going back to Keetmanshoop. [11]

The presence of these skulls and the general willingness to return them have been repeatedly reported by the museum to the relevant authorities, such as the Foreign Office or the Namibian embassy, since 2011.[12] But it was only when the third of the three repatriations mentioned above were being discussed in 2018 that the skulls were finally taken under consideration, and then repatriated following a ceremony in the French Cathedral at *Gendarmenmarkt* in Berlin on 29 August 2018. Before the repatriation, research was carried out in collaboration with the Namibian embassy, accompanied by a controversial discussion about anthropological investigations that, while they used non-invasive methods, drew on literature and methods that reproduced colonial and racist stereotypes.[13] But for the historical research it was important to at least be able to name the gender of the person in the report, with the aim of rehumanising the skulls after they had been turned into "objects" in the museum with inventory numbers and labels. The museum therefore decided to have an anthropologist look at the skulls.[14] The anthropological report revealed a number of contradictions with the museum records. According to the information provided by Rautenberg and documented on the index card, the skull was supposed to have belonged to a "warrior" who had "attacked" a "farmer during a riot" and then had been "shot by him". It turned out, however, to be the upper skull of a young woman that had been assembled with the lower jaw of a young man.[15]

From 1909 until 2018, the remains had been regarded as one individual but then proved to be those of two individuals with traces of earth and sand. The latter indicated that both had lain in the earth and therefore must have been illegally exhumed or graves had been desecrated.[16] According to the current state of research, however, it remains unclear whether August Rautenberg appropriated the individuals in the colony of German Southwest Africa from an unknown person or mediator with a false indication of origin, or whether it was Rautenberg himself who gathered them from a burial site, put the remains of two individuals together and handed them over to the museum with an invented "bloody" story.

At the beginning of July 1913 Rautenberg handed over another human skull which, according to the files of the Natural History department, came from a burial ground at "Anichab bei Lüderitzbucht, Deutsch-S. W. Afrika", was inventoried as male and "cleaned". This skull turned out to be the remains of a female individual.[17]

So it did prove important to have an anthropologist briefly examine the skulls before repatriation. The anthropological examinations provided the decisive clues with which to ascertain for the first time that the remains were of two unrelated individuals, to address the bones as male or female persons, and thus to "rehumanise" them at least in basic terms, and finally to be able to expose the story of a shot warrior that had been handed down for decades in the archives of the museum as false. Similarly, the skull from Lüderitzbucht, supposedly belonging to an Indigenous man, was attributed to a female person. Without this brief anthropological research, the State Museum of Hanover would have returned only two skulls, with incorrect information, instead of the remains of three individuals, and would have repeated the false story that Rautenberg told in 1909.

The act of the illegal desecration of graves and transfer of remains to Germany is of course no "better" than the false story of a shot warrior, but it is just another story. At the time of the handover, it presumably gave the skull the additional meaning, questionable from today's perspective, of a "trophy" from the colony, which says a lot about the actors on the side of the colonisers and the institutions and people who profited from them, including museums. While their names and activities can be reconstructed at least to some extent, the fates of the three ancestors whose remains were unlawfully taken to the then German Empire by a merchant and subsequently preserved in Hanover for over a hundred years until their repatriation to Namibia remain completely unknown to us.

This inequality is ultimately one of the many consequences of the colonial asymmetries and the "colonial archive". These continue to have an effect in European collections to this day and their reappraisal constitutes a task to which the State Museum of Hanover has actively dedicated itself within the framework of its own provenance research as well as in special exhibitions and projects like PAESE. In this regard, the moral-ethical responsibility when dealing with human remains does not end with their return or repatriation. On the one hand, it is the duty of each institution to research and render transparent the involvement of local actors in the illegal transfer of human remains from the countries of origin as well as its own role in the subsequent formation and distribution of racist stereotypes in the colonial era and afterwards. It is their task to help make the public aware of these inglorious episodes and to distance themselves from it.[18] In the State Museum of Hanover, for example, a "colonial exhibition" and a "Provincial Office for Demographic and Racial Studies" (*Provinzialstelle* für *Bevölkerungskunde und Rassenpflege*) were affiliated to the department of Archaeology in the 1930s, at the time of colonial revisionism. Both propagated racist terminology and evolutionary models, and are now being investigated by the department of Provenance Research.[19]

In the case of the skulls from Namibia, the results of both the anthropological and historical research were recorded in a report and handed over together with the remains to the Namibian embassy and representatives of the National Museum of Namibia on 29 August 2018.[20] All human remains returned from Germany since 2011 have been preserved there until today.

Recent Cases of Repatriation and Restitution from the Perspective of a Namibian Curator

The National Museum of Namibia is the repository institution of cultural and natural heritage resources. The collection of human remains preserved there has more than doubled in the last ten years between independence and today. The first return of the remains of 20 individuals in 2011 received international publicity due to the direct and well-documented link between these and the 1904/08 Herero and Nama genocide in Namibia.[21] Photographs of some seventeen decapitated heads that had been used for research and published in a German scientific journal in 1913 were republished in the media.

The heads had been taken from prisoners held in the notorious concentration camp on Shark Island at Lüderitz for racial studies.[22]

In 2014 the human remains of a further 35 individuals were returned. These had been collected between 1898 and 1913; here not only the human remains of Herero and Nama but also of San, Ovambo, and Damara individuals were repatriated. In 2018 the remains of a further 27 persons were returned. Therefore, a total of 82 individuals has, to date, been returned to Namibia, which means that there is now a total of 137 individuals in the collection of the National Museum of Namibia.

The Witbooi Bible and Whip

In February 2019, two sacred heritage objects – a Bible and a whip that had belonged to the famous anti-colonial resistance leader, Captain Hendrik Witbooi (c. 1830–1905) – were returned by the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, Germany, to Namibia.[23] The official handover, in a State Ceremony, took place on 1 March 2019, in Gibeon, Hardap Region, at the former residence of Captain Hendrik Witbooi and during the coronation of the Nama Chief in Gibeon.[24] After the handover to the Nama Traditional Chief, the Bible was deposited at the National Archives in view of its national significance and value.[25] The whip was deposited at the National Museum of Namibia for safekeeping.

The Hendrick Witbooi Bible and whip were exhibited to the public under unsuitable conditions – harsh weather and sun – during the handover ceremony. Here, a compromise was made in favour of public exposure. Afterwards and now in the National Museum the sacred objects are treated following scientific principles of conservation to stabilise and prolong their lifespan. Managing knowledge about the whip created opportunities for the production of knowledge, access to historical objects and engagement with the communities.

The Stone Cross from Cape Cross

Additionally, a more than 500-year-old Portuguese stone cross from Cape Cross, erected in 1486 and removed by the German colonial powers in 1893, was returned to Namibia in August 2019 from the German Historical Museum in Berlin, Germany. This restitution was a result of years of discussion and a symposium which took place in Berlin in 2018 and sought to determin where the cross belonged and whether Namibia's claim for restitution was justified.[26] The stone cross arrived in Namibia on 6 August 2019. Bilateral consultation was held between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Namibia regarding an official handover, which did not take place, however, with the result that the cross remains in a storage – in its box.[27]

Conclusion

One consequence of the various returns and repatriations to date has been that a growing number of human remains and objects of cultural and historical significance are now accumulating in various storage facilities at Namibian institutions, including the National Museum of Namibia, the National Archives of Namibia, and others across the country. These returns have therefore raised awareness in the Namibian culture and heritage sector regarding the challenges of managing human remains and heritage objects. The inventorying, verification and authentication through curation of human remains, associated objects and significant heritage objects in regional and foreign institutions should therefore be a collaborative work – and considered before or during repatriation and restitution processes. Debates around the latter can therefore assist in developing comprehensive guidelines on how human remains and other cultural objects are best handled.

Accordingly, provenance research should be a cooperative task of the countries involved and those countries should be obligated to ensure proper repatriation and restitution of looted and illegally acquired objects from nowadays Namibia and related cultural material. As the Namibian nation and or communities can demonstrate a genuine link to the human remains and to heritage objects which have over time become of demonstrable value to the nation and or the communities in question, there is, finally, no need to call them "so-called" societies of origin.[28]

1 On sensitive objects see Lange, Britta (2011): "Sensible Sammlungen", in: Margit Berner, Annette Hoffmann, Britta Lange (Eds): *Sensible Sammlungen. Aus dem anthropologischen Depot*, Hamburg, pp. 15–40; Fründt, Sarah (2015): Was sind eigentlich sensible Sammlungen? Und warum sind sie sensibel?, 9 December 2015, on: *Museum und Verantwortung*, https://sensmus.hypotheses.org/117, accessed 31 March 2023; Brandstetter, Anna-Maria; Hierholzer, Vera (2018): "Sensible Dinge. Eine Einführung in Debatten und Herausforderungen", in: Anna-Maria Brandstetter, Vera Hierholzer (Eds): *Nicht nur Raubkunst! Sensible Dinge in Museen und universitären Sammlungen*, Mainz, pp. 11–28.

2 Stoecker, Holger (2016): "Human Remains als historische Quellen zur namibisch-deutschen Geschichte: Ergebnisse und Erfahrungen aus einem interdisziplinären Forschungsprojekt", in: Geert Castryck, Silke Strickrodt, Katja Werthmann (Eds): *Sources and Methods for African History and Culture. Essays in Honour of Adam Jones,* Leipzig, pp. 469–492; Förster, Larissa; Henrichsen, Dag; Stoecker, Holger; Axas, Hans (2018): "Re-individualising Human Remains from Namibia: Colonialism, Grave Robbery and Intellectual History", in: *Human Remains and Violence*, Vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 45–66; and the contributions in Fjorde, Cressida; McKeown, C. Timothy; Keeler, Honor (2020) (Eds): *The Routledge Companion to Indigenous Repatriation: Return, Reconcile, Renew*, London.

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6 See Winkelmann, 2020, *Repatriations*, p. 40ff.; Gram and Schoofs, 2022, *Germany's History*, p. 20 and 26f.; Andratschke, Claudia (2023): "Geschenkte Schädel. Menschliche Überreste aus Namibia im Provinzialmuseum Hannover", in: Katja Lembke (Ed.): *Die Haifischinsel. Das erste deutsche Konzentrationslager*, Oppenheim, pp. 85–91.

7 The ethnographic collection was initially administered by the prehistoric department and it was not until 1954 that a separate department was established. See Schmid, Anna (2006) (Ed.): *Mit Begeisterung und langem Atem. Ethnologie am Landesmuseum Hannover*; Steffen-Schrade, Jutta (2012): "Die Geschichte der Ethnographischen Sammlung im Landesmuseum Hannover", in: Jutta Steffen-Schrade, Gundolf Krüger, Ulrich Menter (Eds): *TABU?! Verborgene Kräfte – Geheimes Wissen*, Hannover, pp. 114–121; Andratschke, Claudia (2016): "Provenienzforschung in ethnologischen Sammlungen", in: Alexis von Poser, Bianca Baumann (Eds): *Heikles Erbe. Koloniale Spuren bis in die Gegenwart*, Dresden, pp. 304–309.

8 Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover, Department of Natural History, inventory book, File II.3.1 (Acquisitions, Gifts, 1909) and index cards.

9 The *Lüderitzbucht-Gesellschaft L. Scholz & Co. mbh* in Lüderitzbucht was founded in 1902 as the successor of the *Lüderitz'sche Faktorei*, which had acquired the first land from Captain Joseph Fredericks on 1 May 1883 on behalf of Adolf Lüderitz. The company had branches and estates in Lüderitzbucht, Seeheim, Keetmanshoop and other places, and operated an import and export business. See *Deutsches Koloniallexikon* (1920), Vol. 2, p. 465, http://www.ub.bildarchiv-dkg.uni-frankfurt.de/Bildprojekt/Lexikon/php/suche_db.php?suchname=L%FCderitzbucht-Gesellschaft; *von der Heydts Kolonialhandbuch* (1912), p. 226, https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/dsdk/periodical/pageview/2093850, all accessed 31 March 2023.

10 The "*Kaufmann* [Merchant] *A. Rautenberg*" mentioned in the files could be identified as August Karl Wilhelm Heinrich Rautenberg, born 12 October 1872 in Hanover as the son of Karl G. F. Rautenberg and Friederike J. D. M. Rautenberg, née Schwabe. See Municipal Archives of Hanover, resident registration files; births and baptisms in the register of the *Gartenkirche* Hanover, 1873, p. 254, No. 331; Hamburg, deaths register, 1874–1950, Hamburg No. 22b, No. 323. In 1910, various colonial organs reported that the merchants John Payne and August Rautenberg had been granted joint procuration to represent and sign for the company in Lüderitzbucht and Keetmanshoop; this expired in July/August 1913. See Federal Archives (BArch) Berlin, File R 8024/206, https://invenio.bundesarchiv.de/invenio/direktlink/022bb7e4-7b2d-40b9-a9de-b9f49a29a3a1/; German Colonial Handbook (*Deutsches Kolonial-Handbuch*) (1908), p. 126; ibid. (1909), p. 157; ibid. (1910), p. 99, Online University of Bremen, Digitale Sammlung Deutscher Kolonialismus, https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/dsdk/periodical/search/2012295?query=Rautenberg; accessed 31 March 2023.

11 Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover, Department of Ethnology, Inventory Numbers 4624 und 4625, registered on 12 October 1905; ibid, Department of Natural History, File II.3.1 ("Acquisitions 1905 to 1907"). August Rautenberg can be found on two passenger lists of the Hamburg Woermann Line, first on the list of *Eduard Woermann*, which shipped from Cuxhaven to West Africa on 16 November 1905, then on the steamship *Ernst Woermann*, which left for Africa on 30 March 1906. On both lists, the then 33-year-old Rautenberg had indicated "*Kaufmann* [Merchant]" as his profession and "*Lüderitzbucht*" as his destination. See State Archives of Hamburg, 373-7 I (Office for Emigration), VIII A 1, Vols 172 and 176.

12 The official requests from Australia and Namibia were sent via the Foreign Office and the Lower Saxon Ministry for Science and Culture to all State Museums in Lower Saxony. See the Coordination Office of Decolonize Berlin e.V. (Ed.): *We Want Them Back: Scientific Report on the Presence of Human Remains from Colonial Contexts in Berlin*, https://decolonize-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/We-Want-Them-Back_english-web.pdf, p. 13, accessed 31 March 2023, criticising that the returns of the Charité Berlin from 2011 onwards were only made in reaction to this, rather than proactively.

13 See Stoecker, 2016, *Human Remains*, p. 469ff.; Stocker, Holger; Förster, Larissa; Fründt, Sarah et al. (2017): "A Good Starting Point? Critical Perspectives from Various Disciplines", in: *Forum: Human Remains in Museums and Collections. A Critical Engagement with the 'Recommendations' of the German Museums Association*, H-Soz-Kult, 3 February 2017, https://www.hsozkult.de/debate/id/diskussionen-3955, accessed 31 March 2023.
14 The non-invasive anthropological examinations were carried out in June 2018 by Dr Barbara Teßmann, Berlin. All information provided here on the results of these examinations refer to her reports submitted in July 2018.
15 Ibid.; State Museum of Hanover, Department of Natural History, former index cards of "Homo sapiens, male, Namibia".
16 For the early history of grave robbery in Namibia see Henrichsen, Dag (2020): "Demands for Restitution – A Recent Phenomenon? Early Histories for Human Remains Violation in Namibia", in: *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*,Vol. 7, No 1, pp. 38–46; for very early examples of restitution claims Müller, Lars (2021): *Returns of Cultural Artefacts and Human Remains in a (Post)colonial Context. Mapping Claims between the Mid-19th Century and the 1970s* (Working Paper German Lost Art Foundation, Vol. 1), Magdeburg, accessed 31 March 2023.
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21 For the following see also Gram and Schoofs, 2022, *Germany's History*, pp. 25ff.
22 See also Förster, Larissa (2013): "You are giving us the skulls – where is the flesh?" Die Rückkehr der namibischen Human Remains", in: Holger Stoecker, Thomas Schnalke, Andreas Winkelmann (Eds): *Sammeln, Erforschen, Zurückgeben? Menschliche Gebeine aus der Kolonialzeit in akademischen und musealen Sammlungen*, Berlin, pp. 416–446; Winkelmann, Andreas; Stoecker, Holger (2014): "Rückgabe von Schädeln und Skeletten aus Namibia. Überreste einer fragwürdigen 'Rasseforschung'", in: *Ärzteblatt*, Vol. 111, no. 18, pp. 792–793, https://www.aerzteblatt.de/archiv/159510/Rueckgabe-von-Schaedelnund-Skeletten-an-Namibia-Ueberreste-einer-fragwuerdigen-Rasseforschung, accessed 31 March 2023.
23 See Kößler, Reinhart (2019): *The Bible and the Whip – Entanglements around the Restitution of Robbed Heirlooms*, Freiburg (in German: "Die Bibel und die Peitsche: Verwicklungen um die Rückgabe geraubter Güter", in: *PERIPHERIE – Politik, Ökonomie, Kultur*, Vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 78–87); von Bernstorff, Jochen; Schuler, Jakob: "Restitution und Kolonialismus. Wem gehört die Witbooi-Bibel?", on: *Verfassungsblog. On Matters Constitutional*, 4 March 2019, https://verfassungsblog.de/restitution-und-kolonialismus-wem-gehoert-die-witbooi-bibel/, accessed 31 March 2023.
24 See *The Official Return of Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi's Bible and Whip from Germany, Gibeon, 2019*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Td4-v-3RQXw, accessed 31 March 2023.
25 In 1996 two copy letter books, called Hendrik Witbooi Journals II and III were returned to the National Archive of Namibia from the *Übersee-Museum* in Bremen, Germany. See Gram and Schoofs, 2022, *Germany's History*, p. 40.
26 German Historical Museum (*Deutsches Historisches Museum*) (2019) (Ed.): *Die Säule von Cape Cross. Koloniale Objekte und historische Gerechtigkeit* (Historische Urteilskraft. Magazin des Deutschen Historischen Museums, Vol. 1), Berlin; Silvester, Jeremy (2019): "Museumsobjekte, Erinnerung und Identität in Namibia", in: ibid., pp. 43–47; Sandkühler, Thomas (2019): "Restitution and Historical

Judgment", on: *Public History Weekly*, 14 March 2019, https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/7-2019-9/colonial-restitution/, accessed 31 March 2023.

27 In 2021 the government of the Federal Republic of Germany declared that the ceremony could not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic; see https://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/845318-845318, accessed 31 March 2023.

28 On strengthening the African perspective in the restitution and repatriation debates see also Moiloa, Molemo (2022): *Reclaiming Restitution: Centering and contextualizing the African Narrative.* Report commissioned by Africa No Filter, https://openrestitution.africa/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ANF-Report-Main-Report.pdf, accessed 31 March 2023.

V.

Cases of Restitution

Towards Restitution and Beyond

Reflections on a Multi-layered Dialogue Regarding the Cartridge Belt of Kahimemua at the Brunswick Municipal Museum

Cases of Restitution

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Reflections on a Multi-layered Dialogue Regarding the Cartridge Belt of Kahimemua at the Brunswick Municipal Museum

Rainer Hatoum

Abstract

What started in 1993 with a first inquiry into the whereabouts of the cartridge belt of late 19th-century OvaMbanderu Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva at the Brunswick Municipal Museum eventually became an issue of paramount importance in recent years. Since then, the belt has become the center of a multi-layered dialogue. It culminated in a visit by a delegation of the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority to Brunswick in November 2021. The group was to analyze and decide on the belt's authenticity. In the end, the group handed over a repatriation request for the belt. It is currently pending a decision by the city of Brunswick. This document also included a recommendation for sustained collaboration. It is a point of crucial importance to the museum, especially as it is redesigning its permanent exhibition.

Vers la restitution et au-delà – Réflexions sur un dialogue à plusieurs niveaux concernant la cartouchière de Kahimemua au musée municipal de Brunswick (Résumé)

Ce qui a commencé en 1993 par une première enquête sur l'emplacement de la cartouchière de Kahimemua Nguvauva, chef de la communauté OvaMbanderu, datant de la fin du XIXème siècle, au musée municipal de Brunswick, est finalement devenu une problématique essentielle ces dernières années. Depuis lors, la ceinture est au cœur d'un dialogue à plusieurs niveaux. Cela a donné lieu à la visite d'une délégation de l'autorité traditionnelle OvaMbanderu à Brunswick en novembre 2021. Les membres du groupe devaient analyser et décider de l'authenticité de la ceinture. Finalement, le groupe a remis une demande de rapatriement pour la ceinture. Cette demande est actuellement en attente d'une décision de la ville de Brunswick. Ce document contient également une recommandation en faveur d'une collaboration soutenue. Il s'agit d'un point d'une grande importance pour le musée, d'autant plus qu'il est en train de réorganiser son exposition permanente.

Present-day Namibia, first reached by Portuguese sailors at the end of the 15th century, had escaped colonial meddling by imperial powers until the end of the 19th century. While German missionaries from the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft had been active in this region since the 1840s, it was not until Bremer merchant Adolf Lüderitz's 1882 requested protection by the German government that turned its attention there. This request set the stage for the German flag-raising on August 7, 1884, marking the birth of German South West Africa (1884–1915/1919). Establishing itself in a bitterly embattled, multi-ethnic region where British colonial influences from the Cape Colony increasingly grew stronger in the 19th century, Imperial Germany tried to establish its rule through numerous agreements and treaties. One of these, signed in 1895, drew not only new boundaries affecting cattle ranging and access to water resources but also exerted German influence in issues of chiefly successions. This resulted in 1896 in what Namibia's founding President, Sam Nujoma, termed "the first anti-colonial struggle waged by our people." In this connection, he singled out Ovambanderu Late Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva, whom Nujoma highlighted as "the first person to pay the highest sacrifice by the brutal forces of imperial German."[1]

At the center of this contribution stands the cartridge belt of Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva. Upon his surrender and subsequent execution in 1896, it had become a trophy of war for Gustav Voigts (1866–1934), who had been charged with disarming him. In 1898, when Voigts visited his hometown, he presented this belt along with a number of other items he had „collected" under mostly unknown circumstances from among the Herero to the Brunswick Municipal Museum (*Städtisches Museum Braunschweig*). A newspaper article hailed his donation – and here Chief Kahimemua's cartridge belt in particular – as a symbol of heroism displayed by a native son of the city in a far-off country on behalf of the German Empire. Here one reads the following about the artifacts donated by Gustav Voigts:

> *Among them* [the artifacts Voigts donated] *is also the cartridge belt of Kahimemua, the chief of the Ovambandaru, who rebelled against the German rule in 1896, but was defeated after a hard fight. Mr. Voigts, who participated in those battles with distinction – he was decorated for it by the (German) empire – succeeded in capturing the aforementioned chief, and that cartridge belt is therefore a beautiful souvenir for us of the brave deeds of a Braunschweiger in the distant regions of the black continent.*[2]

That instant of high visibility at the beginning of the belt's biographic chapter as a museum artifact was followed by a century of next to complete disregard and invisibility. Among the factors that contributed to this was that the belt was an item of apparent European influence, which put it outside the scope of anthropological interest for a very long time. Beyond that, Gustav Voigts had given it to the museum under the provision of his continued ownership, which is a point of relevance to this day.

This was the situation when a first inquiry by Namibian historian Dag Henrichsen reached the museum in 1993, in which he asked for the whereabouts of the belt. But, unfortunately, given the poor order of the ethnographic collections at that time, he received a negative answer.[3] This was a result of the little general interest taken in the ethnographic collection at the museum. It showed by the fact that no one, in particular, had been in charge of it between 1917 and 1989 and that then curator Evelin Haase had only been hired part-time that latter year.

By 2003, when Henrichsen contacted the museum yet again, Haase had surveyed the entire collection.[4] Yet, she had not found a cartridge belt bearing

the object number assigned in the files. That was the answer Werner Hillebrecht received, too, when he approached the museum regarding this subject in 2007.[5]

Another decade passed until Hillebrecht, now being a guest of the PAESE Project, had a chance to visit the Brunswick Museum personally in September of 2019. It turned out to be a visit that opened a new chapter in the belt's biography, as he actually did come to identify an unnumbered cartridge belt as the most likely candidate, which had been assumed to be from South America before (Figure 1). Thereby, a rare historic photograph, provided by Hillebrecht, played a key role as it featured some Hereros wearing quite similar belts.[6]

Figure 1 | The Cartridge Belt of Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva
© Brunswick Municipal Museum (Photo: Dirk Scherer)

By then, news had reached the Brunswick Museum that Chief Kahimemua's direct descendants searched for a sacred belt stolen from him upon surrender, which reportedly had been taken to a German museum. In May 2018, journalist Christiane Habermalz had approached the museum in her search for that particular „sacred belt“.[7] In Brunswick, she was informed that while the museum never had such a piece associated with chief Kahimemua, it did once have his „cartridge belt,“ which was then thought to have been likely taken back at some undocumented point by members of the Voigts family. This information must have filtered back to Namibia, as aforementioned Founding President Sam Nujoma came to address this subject publicly just a month later. Speaking at the 122nd commemoration of the Ovambanderu community, he not only praised Late Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva as the leader of the first anti-colonial struggle in Namibia. He also came to address the Voigts family directly:

> *I am informed that Gustav Voigts was tasked to disarm Kahimemua and he took off a sacred traditional belt of historical significance, which he presented to one of the museums in Germany for safekeeping, but later went back to collect it. I would like to appeal to the Voigts family, who might be in possession of this belt of historical and cultural significance, to hand it over to the Chief of the OvaMbanderu people, Honourable Kilus Munjuku III Nguvauva, as a token of reconciliation and goodwill gesture.*[8]

So, in 2018/19, the search for two conceptually quite different, though historically closely connected belts converged in Brunswick. This led Werner Hillebrecht to suggest a third option: chief Kahimemua's cartridge belt itself might have had a sacred-like dimension due to his standing and the importance of firearms in Herero culture. As I am in no position to talk about these cultural matters, I will leave it to my two colleagues, Freddy Nguavua and Werner Hillebrecht, to illuminate this aspect in their contribution.[9] At this point, it is only important to realise that by 2019, when the cartridge belt was in all likelihood rediscovered, it had already become a symbol of two powerful narratives making it an object of great historical and cultural significance in both Namibia and Germany.

In the following, I would like to pursue the Brunswick side of the belt's story since its likely rediscovery in 2019, which resulted in the opening of direct relations between the OvaMbanderu and the Municipal Museum by

Mr. Freddy Nguvauva.[10] This period has been characterized by concerted efforts to clarify the belt's provenance once and for all and – with its likely positive identification in mind – to set the course for its restitution. But how to go about this task with a broken chain of documentary proof and circumstantial evidence that might not prove to be strong enough to convince the city council of Brunswick, the ultimate owner of the collections held by the museum in trust?

At first, Werner Hillebrecht proposed analyzing the red patches on the belt's inner side, as he thought these might possibly be remnants of the traditional body paint used by the Herero.[11] Yet, these turned out to be patches of disintegrating leather. Next, Dr Peter Joch, the director of the Brunswick Municipal Museum, suggested solving the issue by means of genetic and other scientific tests. That, in turn, was rated as not promising for various reasons by respective experts. Then the question was raised whether there were similar handmade cartridge belts with indisputable provenance records in other collections. Larissa Förster of the German Lost Art Foundation, Department for Cultural Goods and Collections from Colonial Contexts, was so kind to spread an accordant inquiry through her networks. It revealed that there seems to be only one other handmade cartridge belt of clear Herero provenance at the Linden Museum in Stuttgart.[12] But then, ironically, it had been an image of precisely this belt, published in 2007, that had substantially shaped former Brunswick curator Haase's views and expectations in her abortive search for the belt of Chief Kahimemua at the Municipal Museum.

Considering the differences between the belts in Stuttgart and Brunswick, the question was whether one could draw conclusions from the loops on the latter. A revealing answer came from Peter Hauschild from the Military History Museum of the German Armed Forces (*Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr*) in Dresden.[13] While he stated that no definitive answer could be given as to the exact cartridge size the belt had been made for, he was quite certain that it had been designed for „rim cartridges." These, in turn, were not the ones used for the Modell 88 infantry rifle of the German Colonial Forces that were kept in belts like the one in Stuttgart, but rather in other types of rifles like the popular Martini-Henry rifle, which was widely used in former Southwest Africa.

This point is closely tied to another aspect of belt's story, which Dag Henrichsen first raised in 1993.[14] It is connected to the question as to what happened to the rifle, which Gustav Voigts also took when he disarmed Chief

Kahimemua. This question has been fueled by a book on Voigts published in 1943 by the highly controversial author Hans Grimm, who attributes to him the statement that *„both Kahimemua's belt and rifle are „hanging" in the Brunswick Museum today."*[15] As to this question, I can only say that there is no evidence whatsoever to support this claim. No rifle has ever been mentioned in 1898 when the belt was handed to the museum with much public attention or in 1908 when Voigts supplied more information on the belt. And even repeated searches of the museum's locked gun vault and a 2018 police registration of all „modern" non-flintlock rifles have revealed any likely candidates. Still, Dag Henrichsen brought a puzzling point to my attention. His research has revealed that Grimm had actually submitted his manuscript to Voigts for review in 1928 and that the latter had not commented on this point, in contrast to others.[16]

And so, the museum's focus had shifted towards paving the way for a visit by Ovambanderu community representatives to give the details of the belt's make a thorough analysis. Against this backdrop, Dr Joch and I had been invited for talks to the Embassy of the Republic of Namibia in June 2020 and again in June 2021.

While the first attempt to have an Ovambanderu expert group visit Brunswick to that end in November 2020 failed due to a Covid 19 lockdown, the second attempt, a year later, fortunately, materialised. And so, from 1 to 5 November 2021, the Brunswick Municipal Museum was honored to host a twenty-three-member-strong delegation of the OvaMbanderu Tradition Authority consisting of 12 male and 11 female official representatives. 2 November 2021, began with a fire ceremony in front of the museum. It invited the Ovambanderu ancestors to participate in the subsequent investigation of the belt (Figure 2).

This was followed by a thorough analysis and discussion of the belt's details by all group members in the OvaMbanderu language. Subsequently, the findings were compiled on the spot in a computer-typed document in English by Mr. Frederick Nguvauva. Later, this document was publicly read piecemeal by him and translated by Ileni Henguva, the designated translator of the group, into OvaMbanderu. Some additions and corrections were worked in on the spot. After that, copies of the document were printed out and disseminated to the present delegation members for a final review. On 3 November the findings were shared with the public in a press conference. In the end, this

Figure 2 | Fire Ceremony of the OvaMbanderu Delegation in front of the Brunswick Municipal Museum, 2 November 2021 © Brunswick Municipal Museum (Photo: Dirk Scherer)

document, signed by Arnold R. Tjozongoro, Senior Traditional Councillor, and Frederick U Nguvauva, Representative of the Nguvauva Clan, was then handed over to the director of the Municipal Museum, Dr Peter Joch.

The signed document features a detailed substantiation of the claim of the belt's authenticity, including their findings as to the kind and the treatment of the leather used and the belt's comparison with other authenticated Ovambanderu cartridge belts from that time. The document also features a list of recommendations that culminated in the request for the repatriation of Late Chief Kahimemua Nguvuauva's belt, which is at one point specifically designated as a „sacred belt." Thus, the document clarifies that the belt is both historically and culturally sensitive.

A common „cartridge belt" in the past, it was born out of the chaos brought about by European and German colonial ambitions. Meanwhile, it has become a powerful symbol of many worlds of thought: In the Ovombanderu community, where the belt has left a void from the day it had been taken, it is now considered to be a sacred link to the ancestral past and a symbol of

anti-colonial resistance. But in Germany, too, it has recently come to stand for aspects beyond its material shell. Here, it came to stand for the changing attitude in the nation's dealing with its colonial past and exemplifies, among others, the paradigmatic change that is taking place in museum anthropology. And so, it is now the Brunswick Municipal Museum that has to face the question of how it will fill the "void" that the belt will leave once it is returned. Thereby it was clear, the generally expected restitution of the belt would not come with notions of threat to the collection or a feeling of relief from simply getting rid of a troubling object, but rather with hope and the conviction that this is a unique chance.[17] And so we were relieved and thrilled to learn that the document requesting the return of Chief Kahimemuas belt also included a very emphatically formulated recommendation for ongoing collaborations and joint projects between the Brunswick Municipal Museum and the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority. With regard to the upcoming new permanent exhibition, this has already led to the installment of a working group[18] that will work towards preserving and presenting the belt's story in Brunswick, ensuring a joint shaping of our future.

A first step on this new path was taken when the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority extended an official invitation to Dr Joch and me to attend the annual commemoration of Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva in June 2022 in Okanhandja. Among the many honors bestowed upon us on this trip, which included being dressed in new clothing in the green national colors of the OvaMbanderu upon arrival at the Airport in Windhoek, was the invitation to participate as honored guests in the annual OvoMbanderu pilgrimage to the usually closed-off gravesite of Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva (Figure 3).

As to the current state of the actual restitution process, it can be stated that the request by the OvoMbanderu Traditional Authority had been forwarded to the legal department of the city of Brunswick right after the visit of the delegation in 2022, along with a written endorsement from the side of the Municipal Museum. Furthermore, the restitution request was lately further reinforced and reiterated by an official letter from Minister Ester Anna Nghipondoka (MP) of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture of the Republic of Namibia, dated 5 April 2023. This has led the German Foreign Office to express its general support of this restitution case and state that it will completely hand over the decision to the city of Braunschweig. And so, the pending final decision concerning the restitution of Chief Kahimemua's

Figure 3 | Peter Joch's and Rainer Hatoum's visit of Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva's tomb by in Okanhandja, Nambia, 2022 © Brunswick Municipal Museum

cartridge belt now rests in the hands of the city council of Brunswick. Given the reactions the museum has received so far, we are very optimistic that the city council will reach a favorable decision in the near future and that the way will be finally cleared to have the cartridge belt of late Chief Kahimemua Nguvauva handed over to the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority, and at last get on its way home.

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2 Brunswick Municipal Museum, Archive: *Braunschweigische Landeszeitung*, 5 Juli 1898, additions in paranthesis, the author.
3 Ibid., Emails from Dag Henrichsen to Evelin Haase, 26 April 1993; Evelin Haase to Dag Henrichsen, 23 June 1993.
4 Ibid., Emails from Dag Henrichsen to Evelin Haase, 30 July 2003; Evelin Hase to Dag Henrichsen, 31 July 2003.
5 Ibid., Emails from Werner Hillebrecht to Evelin Haase, 28 February 2007; Evelin Haase to Werner Hillebrecht, 28 February 2007.
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8 Nujoma, 2018, *Statement*.
9 See the Interview with Lars Müller, Werner Hillebrecht and Freddy Nguavua in this Volume.
10 Brunswick Municipal Museum, Archive: Email from Freddy Nguvauva to Dr Peter Joch and Evelin Haase, 8 October 2019.
11 Ibid., Email from Werner Hillebrecht to Dr Peter Joch, 17 December 2019.
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13 Ibid., Email from Peter Hauschild to Rainer Hatoum, 21 January 2021.
14 Ibid., Email from Dag Henrichsen to Evelin Haase, 26 April 1993.
15 Grimm, Hans (1943): *Gustav Voigts – Ein Leben in Deutsch-Südwest*, Gütersloh, p. 35.
16 Brunswick Municipal Museum, Archive: Email from Dag Henrichsen to Rainer Hatoum, 5 January 2021.
17 In my case, a review of my previous work shows that the engaged, dialogical approach to museum collections and individual museum objects that I am promoting here is not a solitary act under the pressure of special circumstances, but rather the expression of a fundamental conviction that a new approach to museum collections is necessary. See Hatoum, Rainer (2010): "Musealizing Dialogue", in: Lidia Guzy, Rainer Hatoum, Susan Kamel (Eds): *From Imperial Museum to Communication Centre? – On the New Role of Museums as Mediators between Science and Non-Western Societies*, Würzburg, pp. 121–136; Hatoum, Rainer (2011): "Digitization and Partnership – The Berlin Northwest Coast Collection and the Future of the "Non-European Other" in the Humboldt-Forum", in: Andrea Blätter and Sabine Lang (Eds): *EthnoScripts – Contemporary Native American Studies*, Vol. 13, no. 2, Hamburg, pp. 155–173; Glass, Aaron; Berman, Judith; Hatoum, Rainer (2017): "Reassembling „The Social Organization", in: *Museum Worlds – Advances in Research*, Vol. 5, pp. 108–132.
18 ASMBS: Nguvauva, Freddy to Hatoum, November 18, 2021; Hatoum Rainer to Nguvauva, November 18, 2021; Henguva, Ileni to Hatoum, November 29, 2021; Hatoum, Rainer to Henguva, November 29, 2021.

V.

Cases of Restitution

Kahimemua Nguvauva, his Belt, and the Colonial War of 1896

Cases of Restitution

Kahimemua Nguvauva, his Belt, and the Colonial War of 1896

Interview with Lars Müller, Frederick Nguvauva and Werner Hillebrecht

Editorial Note

Frederick Nguvauva and Werner Hillebrecht gave a joint presentation at the PAESE conference about their involvement in the history of the belt of Kahimemua Nguvauva, reporting on the long-standing restitution claim to the object and the challenges around it, but also the recent developments concerning the return of the belt. Due to the dynamics of the situation and ongoing negotiations, we decided to include the interview here in the book.

Kahimemua Nguvauva, sa ceinture et la guerre coloniale de 1896. Interview de Lars Müller avec Frederick Nguvauva et Werner Hillebrecht (Note de la rédaction)

Frederick Nguvauva et Werner Hillebrecht ont fait une présentation commune lors de la conférence PAESE sur leur implication dans l'histoire de la ceinture de Kahimemua Nguvauva, faisant état d'une demande de restitution de longue date, des défis mais aussi de l'évolution de la restitution de la ceinture au cours des derniers mois. En raison des situations dynamiques et des négociations en cours, nous avons décidé d'inclure l'entretien dans ce livre sous la forme d'une interview (en ligne).

The Belt of Kahimemua Nguvauva

Lars Müller: Thank you, Freddy and Werner, for agreeing to provide us with some insight into your work in this interview. Whenever we talk about German-Namibian relations, there is a strong focus – in Germany at least – on the German-Herero War of 1904–1907/08. However, today we are talking about an event that dates back earlier. Perhaps we should begin with a short description of who Kahimemua Nguvauva was.

Frederick Nguvauva: It is true that the current history debates around genocide, land and livestock dispossessions and related atrocious acts of colonisation are mainly limited to 1904–1907/8, and refer only to the Herero and Nama communities without making any mention of the Mbanderu community. This is also the case in Namibia, while it is well known that the OvaMbanderu community under the leadership of King Kahimemua Nguvauva were an independent community exercising jurisdiction over the eastern region, currently referred to as the Omaheke Region.

Kahimemua Nguvauva was the son of Munjuku I Nguvauva, the elder brother of Riraera Nguvauva and Njoronjoro Nguvauva. Njoronjoro was my great grandfather, thus Kahimemua was a great grandfather of mine as well. He was born at Omusorakuumba near Okahandja in 1822, and it was a breech birth. His birth was prophesised by great traditional prophets of that time. He assumed leadership from his father, Munjuku I Nguvauva, who took off the sacred traditional cartridge belt and a thong with knots representing the children of the House of Nguvauva and the country in general, and handed these instruments to Kahimemua as a sign of succession. These events happened at Okeseta (Gunichas). His father sent him to Gobabis to introduce himself to and notify other leaders that he had now assumed the leadership position of the OvaMbanderu people.

Lars Müller: Can you give us closer insight into the historical context of German land dispossession?

Frederick Nguvauva: The German agenda of land dispossession started with the OvaMbanderu under Kahimemua when Major Theodor Leutwein, the then commander of the German Colonial Force („*Schutztruppe*“) and

Figure 1 | Nikodemus and Kahimemua © Basler Afrika Bibliographien, Archive, BAA.20 4, Copy in the National Archives, Windhoek, Namibia

administrator of the colonial German South-West Africa, visited Kahimemua in 1895 at Otjihaenena to ask for land on which to resettle German settlers. Kahimemua refused to allocate land and told Leutwein that the land belonged to the community and cannot be given to foreigners.

During that time, Kahimemua Nguvauva had defused a potential war between Samuel Maharero and Nikodemus Kavikunua (Kambahahiza) over a dispute as to who would succeed Maharero Tjamuaha, who had died in 1890. Samuel Maharero had the backing of General Leutwein to succeed Maharero Tjamuaha because he befriended the Germans and was eager to give them land, unlike his father who, like Kahimemua, refused land to German settlers.

The Germans started to unilaterally demarcate colonial boundaries without the consent of the Indigenous communities and began to confiscate cattle that crossed over into the German boundaries for grazing. This led to rising tensions.

Lars Müller: And these tensions led to violence, and ultimately the execution of Kahimemua Nguvauva?

Frederick Nguvauva: Yes – the Germans then started to organise fighters in large numbers from their troops stationed in different parts of the country, and also volunteers such as Gustav Voigts. They also called upon Hendrick Witbooi and Samuel Maharero, with whom the Germans had signed treaties to join forces to fight Kahimemua and the OvaMbanderu in the east. Some OvaHerero people and the /Khauas from the Nama community, who were against German land occupation, fought alongside Kahimemua and the OvaMbanderu. The Germans were further joined by Simon Kooper of the Nama and Hermanus van Wyk of the Basters community of Rehoboth. lt was at the Battle of Otjunda (Sturmfeld) on 6 May 1896 that fierce fighting erupted and the OvaMbanderu with their allies were defeated due to the superior conventional warfare equipment of the German troops.

Kahimemua Nguvauva escaped from the battle with a leg injury, and later handed himself to the German troops on 15 May 1896 after sending an envoy to the latter, who were looking for him having noticed that his body was not amongst those killed. Kahimemua was led more than 300 km on foot from Kalkfontein (Omukuruvaro) near Epukiro to Okahandja. It was at this place, Omukuruvaro, where Kahimemua was disarmed and detained by Gustav Voigts under the orders of Major Leutwein. Voigts removed Kahimemua's sacred cartridge belt, rifle and other artefacts. Kambahahiza was shortly arrested in Okahandja after news emerged that Kahimemua had been detained, and they were both tried in a kangaroo court without any legal representation, pronounced guilty and sentenced to death. Both were executed in public by a firing squad, but beforehand, Kahimemua requested that the firing squad shoot Kambahahiza first, knowing that if Kambahahiza were to witness his execution, it would scare him to death.

They shot Kambahahiza, who died with the first shot, and then turned to Kahimemua. Eleven shots were fired and he did not die, upon which he informed the Germans where they should shoot him, pointing to his forehead between the eyebrows after identifying a high-ranking officer to shoot him. (*This is where my family name derives from: "Ueriurika", meaning he pointed to himself where exactly he should be shot at*). On the twelfth bullet, he fell, then rose and grabbed sand with both hands and fell back again, at which point he died with the sand in his hands.

Lars Müller: What happened to Kahimemua's family and clan?

Frederick Nguvauva: These events took place on 12 June 1896 at Okahandja. The remaining children bearing the name of Nguvauva and known to be the descendants of Kahimemua were persecuted, hunted down, searched, and when found they were killed for fear of retribution. Many had to change their surnames and refrain from mentioning Kahimemua or Nguvauva or even from being a "Mbanderu". Many fled into exile in neighbouring Bechuanaland; others were deported as forced labourers to Windhoek. *Their experiences clearly fulfil the definition of genocide as per the United Nations Convention of 1948.*[1]

After the execution of Kahimemua, Leutwein ordered the confiscation of all livestock (cattle) belonging to Kahimemua and the OvaMbanderu, which was to be collected and sold to compensate for war damages. The total number of cattle collected and assembled at Orumbo near Omitara was about 13,000, of which 3,000 belonged to Kahimemua personally. Leutwein also ordered that the OvaMbanderu people no longer be allowed to have their own chief, but would be placed under Samuel Maharero. They also ceased to be recognised as an independent tribe, but were known and referred to as OvaHerero. This is how the OvaMbanderu people were driven from their ancestral land and all land in the east was confiscated by the Germans, who later sold it as private farmland.

Werner Hillebrecht: The entire war is very well documented in German sources, both in printed form and in the government archives in Berlin and Windhoek. Leutwein himself writes in his memoirs how he manipulated the agreement about the border of "Hereroland" to disadvantage the OvaMbanderu and provoke their resistance, which gave him the opportunity to mobilise for a war against them. It was his tactic to isolate and subjugate Namibian communities, one by one, according to the motto "divide and conquer".

Lars Müller: Freddy, can you tell us more about the significance of Kahimemua Nguvauva's belt?

Frederick Nguvauva: As I mentioned above, Kahimemua received the belt from his father, Munjuku I Nguvauva, at Okeseta as a sign of succession. Anything inherited or passed on to you by an extraordinary person is something one should cherish and preserve for future generations. These items normally represent the spirits of our ancestors as per our beliefs, custom

and tradition. It is our conviction that the belt was made from the skin of a sacred cow of *Katjivare*, which was the holy cow that mothered the sacred cows of the clan. To have something that belonged to Kahimemua personally, who was revered by his people as a leader and a prophet, is therefore simply a good omen for the members of the clan, the community and Namibia at large. It is our conviction and strong belief that having the belt of our ancestors back would strengthen our contact and communication channels with our ancestors.

It is also striking that Gustav Voigts never donated the sacred cartridge belt to the Brunswick Museum as he did the rifle/s and other artefacts, but only made it available on loan, retaining the option to demand it back at any time. What value he saw in the belt while he had modern conventional belts in abundance in the German arsenal is a question that we have been wondering about. He must have had an idea of its significance.

Lars Müller: Freddy, you did some research on the history of the belt after it was taken from Namibia. Can you summarise what has been known about the belt in Namiba since 1896?

Frederick Nguvauva: According to oral history that has been passed down from one generation to the next, Kahimemua was not alone when he was detained at Omukuruvaro. He was together with Nikodemus HiaTuvao Nguvauva, the son of Kavarure. Kavarure was the younger brother of Kahimemua. Nikodemus HiaTuvao Nguvauva was hidden behind a small bush when the Germans approached Kahimemua to arrest him. Nikodemus was assured by Kahimemua that the Germans would not see him from his nearby hiding place, although the Germans were aware of the fact that Kahimemua was speaking to someone nearby whom they couldn't see. HiaTuvao was ordered to relocate the OvaMbanderu people, and specifically some members of the Nguvauva clan, to Botswana from where "one day the future leader for the OvaMbanderu people would come from". Thus, Nikodemus Nguvauva witnessed everything that transpired during the arrest of his father and relayed everything when he returned to Namibia in 1931.[2]

He also recounted how the Germans had disarmed his father and taken items such as the rifle/s and belt. The other item he mentioned was the ox wagon left at the battlefield at Otjunda (Sturmfeld), which was also sacred to Kahimemua (no raw (red) meat was allowed to be transported on it). All along, it was believed that the descendants of the Voigts family were holding

these items at one of the numerous farms in their possession, and no one thought that any of these items had been exported to Germany.

But then I learned from Mr Werner Hillebrecht that he had come across a book written by a Nazi German writer by the name of Hans Grimm, who way back in 1928/9 had conducted an interview with Gustav Voigts. Voigts told Grimm that he had deposited Kahimemua's belt and rifle with a museum in Brunswick.[3] It was based on this information that I engaged a journalist with Deutschland Radio, Mrs Christiane Habermalz, to visit the Brunswick Municipal Museum and to see what she could find there. When Mrs Habermalz visited the museum initially, she found a record about the said belt and cuttings of newspaper articles on how Gustav Voigts was hailed as a *hero*, having disarmed a feared native leader in the former German South West Africa.[4] However, the director, Dr Peter Joch, could not locate the belt.

In Search of the Belt

Lars Müller: There had been an earlier demand for more information about the whereabouts of the belt – can you tell us more about this, Werner?

Werner Hillebrecht: From an old catalogue of the African collection of the municipal museum in Brunswick, I had long been aware that Gustav Voigts had donated several objects to his hometown, including a letter by Samuel Maharero. They were well catalogued. When I read in Hans Grimm's interview that Voigts had also given Kahimemua's belt and rifle to the museum, items that were not mentioned in the catalogue, I made enquiries in Brunswick. I only learnt later that the Namibian historian Dr Dag Henrichsen (Basel) had also done the same. The response from the museum was that they knew nothing about a gun. A catalogue card about the belt existed, but the problem was that the object could not be found. Interestingly, the catalogue card mentioned that for this specific object, Gustav Voigts had wished to retain ownership and had given it to the museum only on loan. But no record about a possible return could be found.

Lars Müller: We invited you, Werner, as well as Nzila Mubusisi, to come to Germany from Namibia to work in a museum in Lower Saxony in 2019 – as part of the PAESE joint project. In our email conversation, you said that you wanted to visit the Brunswick Municipal Museum. After earlier responses that the belt was not there, what were your reasons for visiting the museum?

Werner Hillebrecht: I know very well that objects in museums can be misplaced; this is not at all unusual. Collections are moved, labels fall off, inscriptions become unreadable. Moreover, the former curator in the Brunswick Municipal Museum, Dr Evelin Haase, had informed me that there was an unlabelled cartridge belt. She thought it belonged to the South American collection. So I was eager to see it for myself. I informed Freddy of what I knew about the belt when I got to know him in the context of the reparations issue. When I went to Germany, he specifically asked me to look for the belt and the rifle.

When I arrived there, I closely examined all the Namibian collections, of course, but I specifically asked for the cartridge belt. The museum staff were very helpful and allowed a thorough inspection. It was immediately obvious that the belt was not a European product: it had been laboriously hand-sewn with animal sinews in a manner I knew from the heavy leather cloaks of Ovaherero women with their iron bead ornaments. And it had a reddish colour consistent with the ancient use of ochre pigment mixed with butter as used by several Namibian communities, both as body ointment and on clothing items.

The issue about the rifle remains unsolved. So far, no trace of it could be found on the German side, not even on paper, but it often happens that vital clues turn up in unexpected places.

Lars Müller: As far as I know, there were some negotiations in Namibia on how to proceed after you found a belt that might be that of Kahimemua Nguvauva. Can you describe what happened after Werner returned to Namibia?

Frederick Nguvauva: It was only after Werner Hillebrecht had visited the Brunswick Municipal Museum and informed us of the need to positively identify the belt that I informed Christiane Habermalz. I asked her to pay the museum a second visit in order to view the belt that had been found and consult the museum on further action to verify its origin. lnitially, the museum conducted investigations by involving experts working with chemical laboratories in order to determine the possible origin of the belt.

lt was at this juncture that Christiane Habermalz was invited by the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority to visit Namibia and provide a full report on her findings and possible solutions for the way forward. The conventional process proved to be futile since no sample could be obtained from the belt with which to do an analysis.

Lars Müller: Then, in 2022, an OvaMbanderu delegation visited the Brunswick Municipal Museum to examine the belt. Can you tell us more about this visit?

Frederick Nguvauva: After Werner's visit the museum decided to engage the OvaMbanderu leather experts and historians by inviting them to view the belt and provide evidence that the belt was in fact the one deposited by Gustav Voigts. It was at this juncture that a group of traditional leather experts and historians from the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority and the Nguvauva clan visited the Brunswick Museum in November 2021 to view and examine the belt and have consultations with the museum management. Having done so, a comprehensive report was submitted in writing to the museum, the city council, and members of the media.

The findings were overwhelmingly convincing and an agreement was reached to proceed with the restitution process using the relevant formal channels between Germany and Namibia. The Namibian embassy in Berlin was involved as an observer due to the involvement of the citizens of Namibia in an item that is said to have belonged to a national hero of Namibia. Kahimemua Nguvauva had been recognised as such after independence and his grave was proclaimed a national monument. The embassy was involved and appraised from the beginning, and made all necessary arrangements towards restitution.

Lars Müller: It is interesting for us to hear how the delegation concluded that it was actually the missing belt. Can you tell us more about how the delegation worked in the museum and the results of the visit?

Frederick Nguvauva: When the belt was displayed in the open and the delegates were given the opportunity to view and touch the belt, it was a very emotional event at which most people, especially the women, cried heavily. There was a great difference between looking at the images sent to many of the delegates while in Namibia and seeing and touching the belt at close quarters. The images made the belt look more conventional, but a closer view and the opportunity to touch it showed that it was plainly traditional and original. The delegation were then left on their own for about three to four hours to critically examine and put on paper all features of the belt that resonate its originality and relation to items made by the Indigenous OvaMbanderu communities.

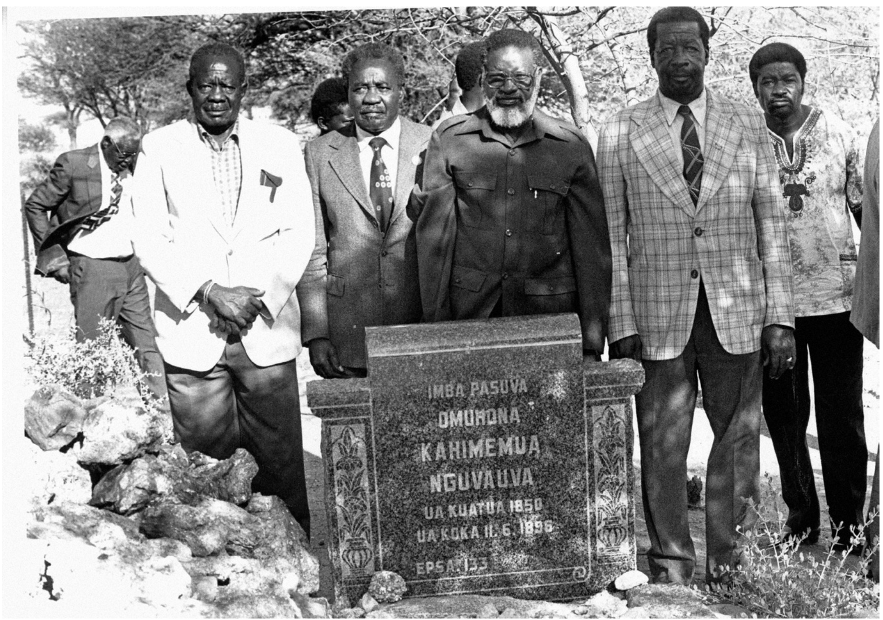

Figure 2 | President Sam Nujoma with Mbanderu Chief Munjuku II Nguvauva (left in white jacket) at the grave of Kahimemua Nguvauva at Okahandja, 17 December 1989
© National Archives, Windhoek, Namibia

The most striking features were the reddish powder our communities use that is made from certain stones found in the Kunene Region called Otjize. The belt remains red today as a result of this powder. Secondly, the stitches used from the sinews of either a calf or small game, as well as the skin from which the belt was made, which was of a similar size to a young calf, probably the lower belly. Thirdly, the softness of the belt after over 125 years as of 2021 could be attributed to the way our Indigenous communities used to soften their skin products by putting them in milk for some days and then applying raw unpasteurised cow fat. These are some of the convincing facts that supported what was stated in the report on the findings.

Interestingly, no record could be traced to suggest that Gustav Voigts came back at any point in time to claim the belt he had deposited with the museum.

Preparing for Restitution

Lars Müller: After the delegation had returned to Namibia, the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority asked for the restitution of the belt. Can you tell us more about how the OvaMbanderu community debated the case?

Frederick Nguvauva: The OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority submitted a request to Brunswick city council after discussions with the city's mayor, but after some time they were informed that the council would prefer a written request for restitution from the government of the Republic of Namibia. When the director of the National Museum in Namibia was approached, she had a different view and demanded that either the museum or the city council write to Namibia informing the latter of the finding. A number of meetings had to be initiated by the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority in order to have the request issued from Namibian side, where there were some bureaucratic bottlenecks. The OvaMbanderu Traditional Authoriy did everything to get the process moving from the Namibian side and on 5 April 2023 the Namibian government sent an official restitution request to the Municipal Museum in Brunswick.

Lars Müller: You said that the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority sent a restitution request to the city of Brunswick, the official owner of the belt, towards the end of 2022. If the belt returns, what are your plans for it in the OvaMbanderu Community?

Frederick Nguvauva: As the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority we would like to preserve the belt for future generations of the OvaMbanderu community and Namibia at large for another 130 years and beyond. We would therefore like the belt to be kept in a safe facility, as it has been kept in Brunswick by either the National Museum or Archive under internationally accepted storage conditions of such item. The only condition we placed before the Namibian government is that the belt should be readily accessible to the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority and the Nguvauva clan during specific community activities and rituals, while under the protection of the supervising institution.

Lars Müller: What are the main challenges in this process of negotiating restitution? And what have been the more positive experiences? Do you think some practices could be seen as a model for further restitution cases on how

to deal with these questions together – the museum and the community of origin working in concert?

Frederick Nguvauva: The only challenge is that government offices or institutions are manned by different individuals from different traditions, cultures, norms and political persuasions. Sometimes, support and understanding of the value of a specific item for a certain community isn't taken seriously by those in power to make things happen. Differences in perceptions and sometimes personal agendas in government offices, agencies and institutions will remain a challenge, especially in developing countries such as Namibia. There seems to be no clear-cut policies and guidelines as to how one should conduct restitution processes. In some instances, the political decision-makers are more influenced by their own political convictions and persuasions, unfortunately.

Lars Müller: You told us about the political and sacred meaning of the belt in the OvaMbanderu community. For German-Namibian relations, it is also a sign of the violent history that is not limited to the war of 1904–1907/08 – but there is also a debate suggesting that restitution can lead to a new ethical relationship. If the belt is returned to Namibia, do you think this could lead to a new relationship between OvaMbanderus, Namibians and Germans? If so, what is needed in order to achieve such a new relationship?

Frederick Nguvauva: The reality is that the restitution of the belt could lead to an improved relationship between OvaMbanderu, Namibians and Germans. In fact, the OvaMbanderu community has already started building a relationship with the Voigts family in Namibia. I have had several meetings with senior members of the family who are the descendants of Gustav Voigts in Namibia. Last year, on 12 June 2022, we invited the Voigts family to the commemoration of the death of Kahimemua at Okahandja, and Karin Voigts attended the occasion with her husband, Mr Reinhardt, and gave speeches at the event.

What is needed is for the former enemies to engage one another, understand that what happened in the past between our grandparents was cruel and inhumane and that we need to work towards reconciliation. The Germans in Namibia need to accept the fact that they benefited from colonialism to the disadvantage of the Indigenous communities; they should start acknowledging this fact and to some extent assist those who have been negatively affected by colonialism. We should all start to acknowledge that we are all Namibians, and we should make this country great, pleasant, and safe

for us all. Assistance shouldn't be viewed purely from a materialistic point of view but also as the sharing of knowledge, information and skills, and creating an enabling environment; these are areas that the more fortunate German-speaking Namibians could consider for the less advantaged.

Werner Hillebrecht: In relations between Germany and Namibia, the story of Kahimemua and his belt is an important reminder that the history of our two nations cannot be reduced to the genocide of 1904 and Von Trotha's infamous order. The violent conquest of Namibia started with the unprovoked attack on the Witbooi Nama at Hoornkrans in 1893, continued with the war against the OvaMbanderu and the /Khauan Nama in 1896, and so it went on and on. And after 1907 the genocide culminated in summary land expropriation and reducing all "natives" to a landless, leaderless, and disenfranchised mass of labourers.

1 For further information see https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide-convention.shtml, accessed 15 May 2023.
2 In European terms, his uncle. In several African kinship systems, an uncle is considered like a father, and a cousin (in European terms) is called a brother.
3 See also Grimm, Hans (1943): *Gustav Voigts – Ein Leben in Deutsch-Südwest*, Gütersloh.
4 For the early research by Habermalz, see Habermalz, Christiane (2020): "Der Gürtel des Kahimemua Nguvauva", on: *Deutschlandfunk*, 5 February 2020, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/eine-deutsch-namibische-kolonialgeschichte-der-guertel-des-100.html, accessed 15 May 2023.

VI.

Cooperation Projects on Cameroonian Collections
Experiences and Perspectives

Projets de coopération sur les collections camerounaises
Expériences et perspectives

Introduction

Cooperation Projects on Cameroonian Collections
Experiences and Perspectives

Introduction: For Collaboration in and a broad Understanding of Provanance Research

Thomas Laely

There has been a lot going on in the field of ethnological museums recently, we are in a time of upheaval and new beginnings. If you have worked in an ethnological museum for a longer period of time, the speed and radicality with which essential parameters are shifting and the breadth that these shifts are reaching in a short time is astonishing. Not only has provenance research become a *conditio sine qua non* for ethnological museums today, but also what is meant by provenance research is in the process of change as well. Provenance is a term and concept strongly determined by Western epistemologies. In terms of its content, it is strongly influenced, indeed impregnated in its everyday museological understanding by the Western art market, in which the series of previous owners, whose "genealogy", as it were, determines to a large extent the interest in and value of an object – this reflects the logic of historically and legally oriented provenance research.[1] It is clear, however, that today's understanding is increasingly moving away from a pure history of collecting, a temporal series of collectors and previous stations, and opening up to a more inclusive understanding and approach to museum work – the focus is less on the physical location and ownership of an object, but opening up in the direction of its interactions with the environment, especially the social environment. This shift, too, is not to be understood in isolation, but in the broader context of the new museum work;

thus, a corresponding "social shift" can also be observed right into the innermost realm of museum work, conservation and restoration, as exemplified by a conference organised in September 2021 by the Hamburg *MARKK Museum* (*am Rothenbaum/Kulturen und Künste der Welt*) under the meaningful title "From Conservation to Conversation".

We have seen an increasing emphasis recently on the fact that the study of provenance is not simply the uncovering of a straight line to an object's "primal" origin or creation. Relationships and bonds between people and objects – often expressed in the language of "cultural heritage" – are significantly more intricate. It would be an untenable reduction to assume that objects are always traceable to and uniquely connected with a "source community" – all too often neither a source nor a community can be identified and located. The conception of descent-essentialist relations between things and people, according to which the former are understood as "materialised", "material culture", is connected with the "dominant (and socially hermetic) Western idea of 'one object, one culture, one creator'", as Erica Lehrer, taking up a formulation already expressed by Richard Handler in 1991, put it in a nutshell.[2]

Rather, the significantly more complex and diverse meanings and relationships of objects argue for abandoning the assumption of taken-for-granted ethno-cultural boundaries and containers and for broadening the notion of ties and relationships between objects and communities, for example, toward a notion of "communities of implication" in the sense of Erica Lehrer, who draws on the Council of Europe's definition "to include people who are 'affected' by or can be said to be 'implicated' in certain tangible or intangible cultural products, in ethical terms".[3] With her understanding of "implication", she wants to highlight the need to reckon with the very particular character of one's historical and contemporary connection to a given object, which means asking questions such as "What other groups have claims to this object, and *how does my relation with it relate to theirs?*".[4]

So, what does cooperation have to do with provenance research? The examples presented in the following chapter all highlight the central role cooperation plays in this endeavour. Collaboration is nothing surprising in itself, but a core element of methodology when working from an anthropological approach – and ethnographic museums and collections will also be committed to such an approach to a large extent. (Social and cultural) anthropologists generally have and seek a counterpart whose cooperation they require – collaboration is inscribed in the DNA of ethnological methods, as it were.

This is all the more true in the narrower field we are concerned with here: Reappraising colonial collections in the sense of decolonisation cannot be done by museums, collection curators or other museum experts alone if it is to be pursued seriously. After all, the central postulates are the breaking up of a monopoly on interpretation and the admission of a multicentric perspective and polyphony, all under the sign of the opening and transparency of the collections and museum institutions.

There is no way without cooperation. However, there are different forms of collaboration and several contents. It can be joint work on collections by museum people with representatives of communities of 'implication' or with museums from the societies from which the objects come, or between researchers from both and more sides; it can be about processing and reappraising the history from all implicated sides, about questions of representation, accessibility and ownership of the objects as well as the future handling of them as the examples in this chapters illustrate.

Postcolonial provenance research requires, as Isabella Bozsa and others highlight, an expansion of both spatial and temporal dimensions – it must be done from different places, and multi-locality also entails different perspectives and lines of inquiry. Collaboration requires two things above all: a lot of time and a lot of trust on the part of all those involved – this also becomes clear, for example, in the video on the collaboration between Syowia Kyambi and Mareike Späth.[5] Furthermore, it becomes apparent in the diverse case studies presented that the questions and interests between the side of European museums and researchers and those of the South are not always the same.

Some basic considerations deserve to be noted at the beginning of this chapter. Provenance research can actually only ever be a prelude, a start, and must reach beyond the narrower issue to larger questions that lie beyond it, for example those of the power of disposal and the handling of these collections. Provenance research must not be limited to drawing and siphoning off additional knowledge from communities of provenance of whatever kind in order to complete the databases of the museums of the North although there is certainly a great need for this. Not least, collaborative provenance research must be integrated more strongly into everyday museum work – in such a way that it cannot simply be a project or a series of projects, but a constant part of museum work, in anthropological as well as in natural history or art

museums. This part of museum work must be made permanent and definitely should be integrated in the ICOM definition of museum and museum activity. The key is not only to initiate cooperation, but also to establish and maintain it in the long term in a sustainable sense and, of course, to provide the necessary human and financial resources.[6]

It is certainly wrong to reduce provenance studies to a defensive stance towards restitution demands. Provenance research must be much more than "collection history" in the narrow sense. It is not only the context of acquisition that is of interest, but also the context of "origin" – not only the presence in Western collections, but also the *absence* at the place of production and provenance. We must not forget that the objects have a life, an existence beyond the fact that they were collected.

One of the main problems in provenance research is the prevalent underestimation or overlooking of the constant change and the dynamics in space and time in the regions of provenance of the objects. These and their contexts are undergoing constant change and are all but frozen in time and space. The Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne speaks in this context of "objets mutants", mutant objects undergoing continuous metamorphosis, just like any life; all things need care and repair, all things are ephemeral like life, which speaks according to his thinking against the "monumentalisation" and permanence of things.[7] This is a challenge for each individual provenance research. It is a widespread misconception to assume that one can simply return to a presumed, supposed or sometimes actually proven place of origin and starting point of objects and obtain information about the object – as if time had stood still and the people involved in the production, use, maintenance and storage of said objects or the stories surrounding them had not moved. In individual cases, this point of departure or place of manufacture may indeed be discernible, but in many cases it is not. But it is never the case that time has stood still and the implied people on the spot have not moved. This is precisely why translocal, multi-sited and multi-perspective research is needed that is not solely focused on a narrowly defined "provenance". Finally, we should not ignore but acknowledge all the work and efforts in provenance research, in the narrower and wider sense, that have been undertaken not only in the West and (mostly Northern) Europe, but in the rest of the world.

1 Beltz, Johannes (2021): “Provenienzforschung reicht nicht! Museale Praxis im Zeitalter von Dekolonisierung und Globalisierung”, in: Schölnberger, Pia (Ed.): *Das Museum im kolonialen Kontext*, Wien, pp. 380–400, p. 395.

2 Handler, Richard (1991): “Who Owns the Past? History, Cultural Property, and the Logic of Possessive Individualism”, in: Brett Williams (Ed.): *The Politics of Culture*, Washington, DC, pp. 63–74; Lehrer, Erica (2020): “Material Kin: ‘Communities of Implication’ in Post-Colonial, Post-Holocaust Polish Ethnographic Collections,” in: Margareta von Oswald, Jonas Tinius (Eds): *Across Anthropology: Troubling Colonial Legacies, Museums, and the Curatorial*, Leuven, p. 292;

3 Lehrer, 2020, *Material Kin*, p. 304, Council of Europe (2005): *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society.* Council of Europe Treaty Series, 199, Article 2: Definitions.

4 Ibid., emphasis in original.

5 See the contribution of Syowia Kyambi in this Volume.

6 Beltz, 2021, *Provenienzforschung reicht nicht*, p. 394.

7 Diagne, Souleymane Bachir (2020): “Musée des Mutants”, on: *Esprit*, July/August 2020, https://esprit.presse.fr/article/souleymane-bachir-diagne/musee-des-mutants-42835; accessed 10 April 2023.

VI.

Cooperation Projects on Cameroonian Collections

Experiences and Perspectives

Entangled Objects, Entangled Histories

A Collaborative Provenance Research
on a Heterogeneous Colonial-Era Collection

Entangled Objects, Entangled Histories

A Collaborative Provenance Research on a Heterogeneous Colonial-Era Collection

Karin Guggeis, Ngome Elvis Nkome and Joseph B. Ebune

Abstract

In recent years, provenance research on collections from colonial contexts in European museums has gained much attention from academia, the media and in the public sphere. This kind of provenance research refers to entangled objects, but also entangled histories. Multiperspectivity is therefore a precondition, as this paper will demonstrate with the case of a project on the collection of a colonial officer in Cameroon that is now housed at *Museum Fünf Kontinente* in Munich. The core of the project is an intense collaboration, focused around oral history traditions, with scholars in Cameroon as well as with the assumed descendants from local source communities of the cultural assets to explore their counterbalanced colonial histories as a pre-condition to gaining the required multiple perspectives.

Objets enchevêtrés, histoires enchevêtrées – Une recherche de provenance collaborative sur une collection hétérogène de l'époque coloniale (Résumé)

Ces dernières années, la recherche de provenance sur les collections issues de contextes coloniaux dans les musées européens a suscité beaucoup d'intérêt dans le milieu scientifique, les médias et la sphère publique. Ce type de recherche de provenance fait référence à des objets enchevêtrés, mais aussi à des histoires enchevêtrées. C'est pourquoi la multiperspectivité est une condition préalable, comme le démontrera le document à l'aide d'un projet portant sur la collection d'un officier colonial au Cameroun, aujourd'hui conservée au Museum Fünf Kontinente de Munich. Le cœur du projet est l'intense collaboration avec des spécialistes au Cameroun ainsi qu'avec les descendants supposés des communautés locales à l'origine des biens culturels et de leurs histoires coloniales contrastées comme condition préalable pour obtenir la perspective multiple requise.

The Need for Multiperspectivity[1]

> *Until the lion tells the story, the hunter will always be the hero.*

This popular West African proverb has been the guideline for our provenance research project on a collection from the colonial era housed at the *Museum Fünf Kontinente* in Munich, Germany.

If a story is told by the hunter only, the lion will always be the hunted, the victim. For the story of the lion, often missing, might be quite a different one. Moreover, the story told only by the hunter has not only an immense impact on external perception but above all on the self-esteem of both hunter and lion. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, an internationally acclaimed Nigerian writer, highlighted these issues in her famous speech, "The Danger of a Single Story":

> *The single story creates stereotypes.* […] *They make one story become the only story.* […] *Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories could also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.*[2]

Polyphony and, above all, multiperspectivity are therefore at the core of provenance research on collections from colonial contexts aiming at unraveling the untold side of the entanglement of objects and the entanglement of histories. The perspective of the colonising powers has to be counterbalanced by the then-colonised.

The provenance research project on a collection originating from the early German colonial expansion in Cameroon, titled *The 'Blue Rider Post' and the Max von Stetten Collection (1893–1896) from Cameroon in the Museum Fünf Kontinente Munich*, will highlight some crucial aspects of research on entangled objects and histories. The aim is to reconstruct specific situations and locations in which the assets were acquired as well as the entangled history of Germany and Cameroon in this early phase of German colonial expansion, using Max von Stetten as an illustrative example. The core of this proactively designed project is an intensive collaboration with academic partners in Cameroon, alongside members of the communities of origin of the more than 200 cultural assets, as a pre-condition for multiperspectivity.[3] The oral traditions of these communities were regarded as an important means to counterbalance the written sources.

To stress Cameroonians' perspectives on the entangled objects as well as the specific entangled colonial histories at that specific time, the project team included five project-funded researchers in Cameroon in addition to the German overall project manager, Karin Guggeis. The project manager for Cameroon, Albert Gouaffo, appointed Yrène Matchinda and Lucie Mbogni Nankeng for research concerning the relevant Francophone regions, and they were joined by two Anglophone historians, Joseph B. Ebune and Ngome Elvis Nkome, for field research in the specific Anglophone regions. As a consequence of its colonial history, Cameroon consists of Francophone and Anglophone regions. Since 2016, separatist groups in the Anglophone regions have been calling for an independent state and fighting government security forces. Hence, two research teams, one for the French-speaking zones of Cameroon and one for the English-speaking areas, were conceptualised as crucial.

Multiperspectival research indeed goes far beyond a single-stranded bilateral entanglement. Von Stetten's collection shows a great heterogeneity of (documented or presumed) communities of origin of the cultural assets, and hence a great variety and heterogeneity of local traditions and languages in these specific colonial histories. Therefore, beside the post at the focus of the project (see below), cultural assets with a high probability of violent acquisition context were prioritised.

In a nutshell, the most important preliminary work from the German side for collaborative research on entangled objects and histories encompassed the following tasks: Matching, supplementing and correcting information from different archival sources at the museum with the object database. This also involved replacing colonial terms and designations with current, post-colonial language. Professional photographs of the collection's items were made as a visual medium for the Cameroonian partners. Historical contextualisation using relevant written sources on Max von Stetten's colonial activities enabled probable contexts of origin and acquisition to be circled as likely. The information was shared with the Cameroonian scholars. Two examples are presented below, first with the most important aspects from the German perspective and then from the perspective of the Anglophone partners.

The most prominent item in the collection is a large post – a wooden block – with sculpted motifs on both sides. It is also called the "Blue Rider Post" because of its depiction in the *Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider)* almanac (1912) by the artists Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc. Previous research from German scholars on its concrete origin and use only yielded conjectures, namely the Mbo or Lundu region in what was then called the "*Waldland*" ("woodlands"; today the South and Littoral regions), and its function as a ritual post. As only very few publications in the Global North focus on the so-called "*Waldland*", this collaboration with partners in Cameroon offers a unique opportunity for concrete results.

But new research using the German sources also yielded new insights. The post was inventoried in the museum in January 1893.[4] The historical contextualisation revealed that Max von Stetten had passed through numerous abandoned villages in the area of the "Waldland" and the Banyang region on an expedition to the Baliburg station in autumn 1892.[5] In view of the presumed cultural significance of the wooden block, its probable context of acquisition is that it was taken from one of the abandoned villages and thus without the consent of the inhabitants.

The abandonment of villages had different reasons but indicates the migration of peoples and is further proof that the concept of "tribes" in a given area was a colonial fiction that had little in common with the actual realities of indigenous people's lives.

In the case of the five objects from the village of Buea,[6] merging information in the museum archives and colonial written sources on Max von Stetten's military activities revealed a high probability of a violent acquisition context. Von Stetten was part of two military "punitive expeditions" in 1891

and 1894 against Buea and its population, and each time in a leading position. In 1895, von Stetten sent two possibly ritual figures (Inventory Numbers 95-78 and 95-79) and three horns or flutes (Inventory Numbers 95-491 to 95-493) from Buea to the Munich museum.[7]

It is also important for the provenance of the blowhorns that horns were blown in Buea shortly before the attack of the German "Schutztruppe" in 1894.[8] Objects of this kind were used by the local Bakweri (also referred to as *Backwiris* in German colonial sources) in warlike contexts. It is therefore most likely that Max von Stetten took them as booty during the destruction of Buea in December 1894 or shortly afterwards. However, the example of the military actions against the Bakweri makes it clear that the German colonial power was by no means as powerful as often described and proclaimed. The deputy governor, von Schuckmann, described the battle of 1891 as a great success in his final assessment:

> *As regards the result of the Buea punitive expedition, it is certain that it has instilled in the Backwiris respect for the power of the government. No punishment has ever been so thorough in the protectorate.* […] *It will certainly be of good effect that this most powerful people are punished, their strongholds taken and their royal places incinerated.*[9]

By re-reading this source from a postcolonial perspective, other aspects can be emphasised, rendering the battle a disaster for the German colonial government. The Maxim rifle had failed, Commander Freiherr von Gravenreuth and three African soldiers of the troop were killed, and Max von Stetten was seriously wounded.[10] Moreover, the renewed fight in 1894 shows clearly the continuation of the Bakweri resistance to the German colonial powers; their power was thus by no means broken.

Despite the prioritisation of research on unlawful acquisition, other probable types of acquisition should not be neglected. For example, the lack of obvious traces of use of several items in the collection suggests that they had been newly made, even for the already existing European demand.[11] The generalised, premature judgement in the public sphere that colonial collections are automatically "looted art" and therefore immediately need to be returned most probably does not prove true in this case, where probable acquisition contexts range from booty to newly made assets for an early European market.

Figure 1 | Blowhorn from Buea, as documented in the archival sources of the museum. Max von Stetten Collection, Inv. No. 95-493 © *Museum Fünf Kontinente*, Munich (Photo: Marietta Weidner)

Figure 2 | Interview with Mr Miller Kingue, Bakweri notable, showing a similar blowhorn, Buea, 14 May 2020 © The Author (Photo: Ngome Elvis Nkome)

Cameroonian Voices in Provenance Research on the Max von Stetten Collection

In this collaborative research project, the task of the academic team in Cameroon was to collect data in the archives as well as conduct intensive interviews with source communities in Anglophone Cameroon. Knowledgeable members in the relevant communities were singled out and interviewed without bias in terms of age, sex, religious or tribal background. In addition to interviews, we also visited the archives to obtain relevant data on the German military action and its implications for the victims in the colonial era. Available studies reveal that early German pacification in the interior of Cameroon was not void of resistance, which had an impact on the people.[12] The violence that characterised many communities as a result of the wars has given rise to varied interpretations as to whether or not the objects in von Stetten's collection were exclusively looted or perhaps donated. The veracity of the issue is so serious because the interpretations of our informants were as varied as the people themselves; finding reliable answers to such questions requires detailed research. However, some of the objects in von Stetten's collection may have been acquired in the abandoned or burnt villages.[13]

In this and subsequent military actions, von Stetten participated actively in the military violence. The Germans imposed punitive measures on the "conquered" people by demanding cattle, eggs, tusks and other items. This view is also upheld by some interviewees from the grassland communities of West Cameroon;[14] some of the objects in von Stetten's collection might have been war booties or looted artefacts of either Mankon or Nso Fondoms from the present-day Northwest Region of Cameroon.

The well-thought assertion that, until the lion tells his side of the story, the hunter will always be a winner, is in tandem with our claim in this paper that other perspectives are necessary. It is the right time to reconstruct the entangled histories and entangled objects using African voices of the source communities. The best way to do this is to explore the life histories and oral accounts of communities in Anglophone Cameroon where some of the priority objects are likely to have come from.

A. Nformi[15] provided lucid facts about some objects, including the post at the focus of the project (inventory number 93-13). He claimed that it was a royal doorpost, but it could also be found at the entrances of the sacred society called *ngiri*. From Nformi´s analysis, it appears unclear how and by what means the object was carried away. However, the fact that such a

decorated post shows ritual, religious and zoomorphic motifs suggests that the object could not have been donated to the Germans as a gift; rather, that it was acquired in one of the burnt palaces or ritual sites in the Bamenda region during the period of colonial hostilities in Cameroon.

The same perspective is shared by E. Ndyudze,[16] who alluded to the fact that the object shows close resemblance with the wooden posts which can still be seen today on the door-frames of royal palaces in the grassland region of West Cameroon. It also seems that many of the informants from the Bamenda area made meaning out of the photograph of the "Blue Rider Post" that we showed them, but that their interpretation was limited because of the absence of the object in its physical state.

The plurality of interpretations on the part of the informants therefore makes it hard to draw early conclusions about the supposed owners of the object. All we can say for now is that the culture of arts and crafts is more significant in the Bamenda area of Cameroon than in other regions of the country; this is not to claim, however, that the object necessarily originated from there, as other arts and craft manufacturers and owners existed and still exist in other parts of Cameroon.

When investigating the blowing horns and small human-like figures from among possible source communities like the Bakweri, Ejagham, and Bafaw, we came across a very knowledgeable elderly respondent in Buea called Kingue Miller[17] who identified the horns and fortunately owns one of the sacred horns called *nzeva-nju* in his house. Other Bakweri interviewees identified these horns and explained their various uses or functions and that the Bakweri made use of the horns during the German–Bakweri wars between 1891 and 1894.[18] From the long list of our informants, we were satisfied with the rich responses of the people about their histories, which inform us that the people had a long history of using horns as communication tools especially by secret societies like the *male* and *nganye*.[19] However, the diversity of persons interviewed rendered interpretation complicated as many other forest groups claimed to have used similar horns.

Bakweri informants in Buea also recognised two figures (inventory numbers 95-78 and 95-79) which they called *ekumu'yawuka*.[20] According to them, the latter was a god of the village which watched over domestic animals and crops.[21] They also maintained that the object had other functions beyond protecting the community from evil spirits and wild animals.[22] Here again, we were confronted with contradictory opinions from our inteerviewees, who held different interpretations concerning the origins, uses and spirituality of the objects. The controversies are of course indispensable and unevitable within this type of research

because of the lack of palpable evidence to substantiate our finding. One important limitation is caused by the complete absence of the physical objects for our informants to make their on-the-spot critical visual evaluation. In spite of the differences in interpretations due to certain limitations posed by the absence of the physical objects, the lack of archival clarification on the German colonial era, and the failing memories of our informants, we are, however, consoled by the fact that most of the consulted persons in Buea could actually identify these objects to the best of their knowledge. This research, as most of them expressed, thus opens another window for future collaborative research between the museum and the communities of origin and institutions in Cameroon.

Conclusion

The central argument in this paper was to stress the importance of multiperspectivity for provenance research on collections from colonial contexts. It requires intense bilateral scholarly collaboration. Both written and oral sources contribute to the reconstruction of the entangled objects and the entangled histories between nowadays Germany and Cameroon.

Important steps for the provenance project concerning the collection of Max von Stetten at *Museum Fünf Kontinente* in Munich have been taken. Different places of origin and acquisition contexts were more specifically circumscribed by archival and other historical and ethnological sources. The search for members of communtities of origin was sometimes challenging, as instead of the colonial fiction of static and precisely definable "tribes", the migration of peoples due to different reasons often occurred and continues to occur. From a methodological point of view, the physical absence of the actual cultural goods in Cameroon was highlighted by diverse partners in the country. Photographs did not prove to be a sufficient substitute.

Diverse exchanges and conversations with scholars from countries of origin of the collection of Max von Stetten and with members of communities of origin of specific cultural assets have begun. One highlight of the research by the Anglophone scholars was the finding that not all cultural assets and not all traditions have vanished, as the case of the blowhorns demonstrates. But many questions remain open. The issue of how to deal with probably looted cultural assets now and in the future can only be negotiated jointly and thus cooperatively.

1 The first part of this contribution was written by Karin Guggeis, the second by Ngome Elvis Nkome and Joseph Ebune, and the abstract and conclusion all together.
2 Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi (2021): "The Danger of a Single Story", on: *TED*, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story, accessed 02 April 2021.
3 One crucial precondition for a collaboration on eye-level with the scholars in Cameroon is their regular payment, which would have not been possible without the support of the German Lost Art Foundation. The Bavarian Ministry of Art and Science, under whose auspices the museum stands, also supported this project financially.
4 *Museum Fünf Kontinente*, Munich, collection of manuscripts and writings, object list (*Objektliste 1. Zugang von Stetten, Akt 1893, Schriftstücke 1892–1902*).
5 von Stetten, Max (1893): "Reise nach Baliburg und zurück", in: *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 1893, pp. 33–36, here: pp. 33–34.
6 In this paper the common spelling used today, "Buea", is used, not the more common spelling "Buëa", mostly used in colonial sources.
7 *Museum Fünf Kontinente*, Munich, collection of manuscripts and writings, inventory book (Eingangsbuch) 1894–1902, 2 SMV 24: 26 and 49–50.
8 Dominik, Hans (1901): *Kamerun. Sechs Kriegs- und Friedensjahre in deutschen Tropen*. Berlin, p. 104.
9 Schuckmann, Bruno von (1892): "Bericht des stellvertretenden Kaiserlichen Gouverneurs in Kamerun vom 18. November 1891 betr. die Bestrafung von Buëa", in: *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 1892, pp. 14–16, here: pp. 15–16; own translation Guggeis.
10 Ibid., see also Stetten, Max von (1892): "Bericht des Premierlieutnants von Stetten über die Buea-Expedition vom 18. November 1891", in: *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 1892, pp. 16–17.
11 Guggeis, Karin (2020): "Alles Raubkunst? Erste Ergebnisse zum Provenienzforschungsprojekt über Max von Stettens kolonialzeitliche Sammlung aus Kamerun im Museum Fünf Kontinente", in: *Journal Museum Fünf Kontinente*, Vol. 3, München, pp. 10–29, here pp. 16–22.
12 Edwin Ardener (1996): *Kingdom on Mount Cameroon. Studies in the History of the Cameroon Coast 1500–1970*, ed. Shirley Ardener, Oxford; Ngoh, Victor Julius (1996): *History of Cameroon Since 1800*, Limbe; Ian Fowler and Verkijika G. Fanso (2009): *Encounter, Transformation and Identity: People of the Western Cameroon Borderlands, 1891–2000*, Oxford; Fanso, V. G. (1989): *Cameroon History for Schools and Colleges: The Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods Vol. 2*, London; Balz, Heinrich (1984): *Where the Faith Has to Live: Studies in Bakossi Society and Religion, Vol. 1: Living Together*, Berlin.
13 Ngoh, 1996, *Cameroon*, pp. 34–40.
14 Ngome Elvis Nkome, interview with Wirba Aboubakar, secondary school teacher, Buea-Town, 6 August 2021.
15 Ngome Elvis Nkome, interview with Mr Augustine Nformi, Great-Soppo, Buea, 15 June 2021.
16 Ngome Elvis Nkome, interview with Mr Emmanuel Nyudze, Nso from the Bamenda region, Buea, 22 April 2021.
17 Ngome Elvis Nkome, interview with Mola Kingue Miller, Buea, 87 years old, Bakweri, 14 May 2020.
18 Ngome Elvis Nkome, interview with Luka Nganje, 74 years old, Bakweri, town crier, Buea, 15 August 2021.
19 Ngome Elvis Nkome, interview with Tonga Nganda, 67 years old, Bakweri, cultural promoter, Buea, 22 April 2021.
20 Ngome Elvis Nkome, interview with Evakise Dabaju, 54 years old, Bakweri, Bokwango village, farming, 13 March 2021.
21 Ngome Elvis Nkome, interview with Prince Remigius Endeley, 55 years old, Bakweri, cultural promoter and owner of a local museum in Buea, on 12 May and 11 June 2020.
22 Ibid.

VI.

Cooperation Projects on Cameroonian Collections
Experiences and Perspectives

Re-engaging with an Ethnographic Collection from Colonial Cameroon through Collaborative Provenance Research

Re-engaging with an Ethnographic Collection from Colonial Cameroon through Collaborative Provenance Research

Isabella Bozsa and Rachel Mariembe

Abstract

In this chapter, Isabella Bozsa and Rachel Mariembe present their approach of re-engaging with the Cameroonian section of the ethnographic collection at the Municipal Museum of Brunswick, in particular with the objects that Kurt Strümpell handed over to the museum between 1902 and 1905. The aim of the collaborative provenance research they carried out at the museum was the co-production of knowledge on an equal basis. The involvement of Strümpell in colonial wars raises the question of colonial looting. Bozsa and Mariembe also address the lack of information in the museum's documentation of the objects' provenance and function as well as significance. By establishing contact with the descendants from the communities of origin, they ask whether historical relationships can be re-animated and, finally, what should happen to the collection in the future. Besides considering the challenges of the pandemic, they reflect on the potential and limits of collaborative research for decolonial approaches in museum practices and provenance research.

Renouer avec une collection ethnographique du Cameroun colonial à travers une recherche de provenance collaborative (Résumé)

Dans ce chapitre, Isabella Bozsa et Rachel Mariembe présentent leur approche du ré-engagement de la collection camerounaise issue du contexte colonial, notamment celle donné au musée par l'officier colonial Kurt Strümpell entre 1902 et 1905. L'implication de Strümpell dans les guerres coloniales soulève la question du butin colonial. Bozsa et Mariembe ont mené une recherche collaborative sur la collection ethnographique du Musée Municipal de Brunswick. L'objectif est la coproduction de savoir sur une base égalitaire. Le manque d'informations dans la documentation du musée sur la provenance, la fonction ainsi que la symbolique des objets, est questionné également. Ainsi, en établissant un contact avec les descendants des communautés d'origine, la démarche vise à réanimer les relations historiques et voir ce qui devrait arriver à la collection à l'avenir. Outre les défis de la pandémie de COVID-19, les auteures réfléchissent au potentiel et aux limites de la recherche collaborative pour les approches décoloniales dans les pratiques muséales et la recherche de provenance.

Introduction

The issue of provenance research and restitution of African art as well as of ethnographic objects held in Western museums is of general concern. It is relevant to various parts of African and European societies, including states, local communities, museum staff and researchers working in the field of human and social sciences. As a museologist and curator from Cameroon (Rachel Mariembe) and a provenance researcher in Germany (Isabella Bozsa), we propose in this chapter a participatory and collaborative research approach to Cameroonian collections in German museums that seeks to re-evaluate their inventory, documentation, and historical context of appropriation during the German colonial period. Museum inventories and related archive material on the collections kept in Western museums form an instructive starting point for provenance research. In-depth scientific research is required to determine the objects' exact origins, their local names and contextualised meanings. Moreover, oral history and questions about the value of objects in the collections for today's societies in Cameroon have to be taken into account. These require research in Cameroon itself. To this end, we argue that ethnographic collections from colonial contexts provide potential for

multiple forms of re-engagement with them through collaborative provenance research. This chapter is based on such work, carried out with a collection from Cameroon at the Municipal Museum of Brunswick (*Städtisches Museum Braunschweig*)[1] as part of the PAESE (Provenance Research in Non-European Collections and Ethnography in Lower Saxony) project. Our focus is a poorly documented collection from a region of Cameroon referred to in colonial times and sometimes still today "Grassfields", an area of today's West, a part of South-West and North-West administrative region of Cameroon. The objects were displaced from Cameroon to Germany by a German colonial officer called Kurt Strümpell (1872–1947) and handed over to the Municipal Museum of Brunswick between 1902 and 1905. No further details around the circumstances of the objects' appropriation are available; nor does the documentation of the collection provide perspectives of communities of origin and experts from Cameroon. Therefore, collaborative and comparative research is required on the provenance, local names, and the significance of the collected items. In the following we will explore this issue and describe how we came to consider this approach.

Research Aims

This chapter is dual in scope (scientific and practical), and aims to study the collection described above with the following objectives. One goal is to clarify the objects' origin more specifically. As the museum's documentation contains mostly the German colonial names of places or population groups, we try to associate them with the current names of these places. During the past 120 years, the significance and functions of objects have changed depending on different contexts. This necessitates reflecting on these changes. Beyond this, information on their use and perception might have been lost, either in the museum's documentation due to a Eurocentric or colonial bias that excludes or silences local knowledge, or on the part of communities of origin, where colonialism caused cultural ruptures. Inspired by the idea of "museums as contact zones"[2], we aim at (re)-connecting Cameroonians with their heritage through these objects. We inquire as to whether old relationships between the collections from the German colonial period and descendants of the communities of origin might be re-kindled as well as how new relations between academics, museum workers or students can be established through ethnographic

objects as mediums. These (re)-connecting processes can reveal new meanings and perceptions of the past, and may serve the development of new visions for the futures of collections. The following quote of the anthropologist Paul Basu reflects our understanding of ethnographic collections and their potentials:

> *In the case of ethnographic museums, even as objects were extracted from their local contexts and recirculated via networks of collectors and collecting institutions, the relationships between these things and the people from whom they were sourced, though transformed, were also preserved, creating the possibility, perhaps a century or more later, for these relationships to be reanimated, for objects to be repatriated and for museums to become 'contact zones' in which competing claims (and ontologies) might be negotiated.*[3]

Beside the anthropological view, the historical context of the collection is also an important angle in provenance research. By studying the museum's documentation, military reports in German archives, and publications from the German colonial era, we can learn more about this historical context. Beyond the European perspectives that are represented by the documents in the German archives, we are interested in Cameroonian positions on the colonial past and the displacement of the objects. In addition, oral history studies can give insights into memories of local communities, which are not represented in written sources in Germany.

The guiding principles of our collaboration are knowledge sharing and the respect of interests of all parties.[4] Considering postcolonial discourses, it is necessary for academics and concerned persons in Cameroon to gain access to and information about the collections from Cameroon in German museums, ideally also participating in the documentation of the collections to discuss their origins, functions, and symbolism.

Collaborative Research in Cameroon within PAESE: The Historical Context

Our collaborative research started in December 2019, when Bianca Baumann, former research fellow at the State Museum of Hanover,[5] did field research in West Cameroon as part of the PAESE project. Together with Paule-Clisthène Dassi Koudjou,[6] at that time curator of the community museum in

Batoufam, who had earlier benefited from a research stay in Germany within PAESE, she had visited the Institute of Fine Arts in Nkongsamba/University of Douala, Cameroon. In a meeting with Rachel Mariembe, the colleagues discussed how to conduct in-depth research on the provenance of Cameroonian objects in the museums in Lower Saxony that were participating in PAESE and how to involve the students of Heritage and Museum Studies. Afterwards, Bianca Baumann, Isabella Bozsa, Rachel Mariembe, and Annette Angoua Nguea, director of the institute, held several video calls to discuss concrete steps. As an outcome of our meetings, we organised an international workshop in March 2020. The topics were planned to align with the training programme in Heritage and Museum Studies as well as the objectives of the PAESE research interests, and were structured as detailed below.

In the first part of our workshop on "Provenance research and contested heritage from colonial contexts" we discussed different methodologies of provenance research around collections from colonial contexts and the documentation of the collections at the State Museum of Hanover and the Municipal Museum of Brunswick.[7] In the first part, Bianca Baumann and Isabella Bozsa presented the two German museums with their systems and practices of collection management, conservation, and documentation. They also shared knowledge about the ethnographic collections from Cameroon. All participants then discussed selected examples of archival materials relating to appropriation circumstances, such as museum records and publications, or reports from the colonial period. Our meeting ended with a lively debate on approaches to postcolonial provenance research and restitution.

In the second part, we tried a little experiment and produced video statements with the students. They described and interpreted items from the collections in Brunswick and Hanover, and shared their opinions on restitution and how to conduct provenance research. The discussion at the workshop revealed that most students favoured restitution and addressed related questions, such as where to return the objects – to a museum or a kingdom? They also suggested the construction of new museums, like community museums. Furthermore, they proposed programmes of knowledge-sharing and capacity-building. It was suggested that local conservation practices be acknowledged and equally supported in African-European projects. An example of a possible outcome towards the decolonisation of museum classification came to light through the re-interpretation of objects beyond the colonial framing. For example, one object was classified in the museum as a "bowl from Bali". In contrast, the student reflecting on it described it more thoroughly its

use by the community in rituals signifying solidarity and living together in peace. In the course of the discussion, the students voiced different opinions on how to go about provenance research, with the consultation of notables, titleholders, and artists at the places of origin being suggested as key methods. Later on, we published four video statements from the students on the PAESE website in order to transfer some of the perspectives into the public debate.[8] They will also be displayed in an upcoming exhibition at the museum in Brunswick.

Figure 1 | Workshop at the Institute of Fine Arts at the University of Douala in Nkongsamba, March 2020 © The Authors and Bianca Baumann

Collaborative Provenance Research in Lower Saxony and Virtual Knowledge Exchange

Cooperation with researchers and museum experts from the countries of origin of the selected collections was an important part of the PAESE project and is the framing of our work. And so, in September 2019, cooperation partners from different countries[9] were invited for a research stay to Lower Saxony to analyse and discuss the collections of the involved museums. As we both joined the project later, we did not take part in the entire exchange. Another joint study of the collections was planned for 2020, but the research visits of the PAESE partners from the countries of origin had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We therefore began our exchange of knowledge about the objects online. We discussed some 220 objects from West Cameroon held at the museum in Brunswick. In several Zoom meetings, we discussed how to re-evaluate the colonial collection and the provenances of its objects systematically, deciding to examine them for traces of usage during Rachel Mariembe's planned research stay. This can help us to identify culturally sensitive objects. Furthermore, we decided to raise critical questions such as: Which objects were used in rituals? Which ones were royal and prestige objects and were inalienable at the time of collecting? Which objects have or had spiritual value? Besides this object-centred provenance approach, we also consider the historical context under German colonialism in Cameroon. In this sense and as a principle of our collaboration, we practice knowledge-sharing: As a curator and museologist from Cameroon, Rachel Mariembe shares her knowledge on the cultural meaning, social function, iconography, and use of objects. Isabella Bozsa, as a historical anthropology researcher from Germany, shares and translates historical records from the colonial era in the museum and other German archives relating to the objects and the context of their appropriation. Together, we critically examine the museum's documentation and epistemology, re-reading the museums' categorisations and adding new information to establish new narratives. Moreover, we keep our exchange open in order to go beyond questions of provenance research in a classical sense like chains of ownership. We ask what potential for new interpretations and relationships the objects inherit, and discuss what should happen with the objects in the future. In the following, two examples shed light on aspects of our virtual knowledge exchange so far.

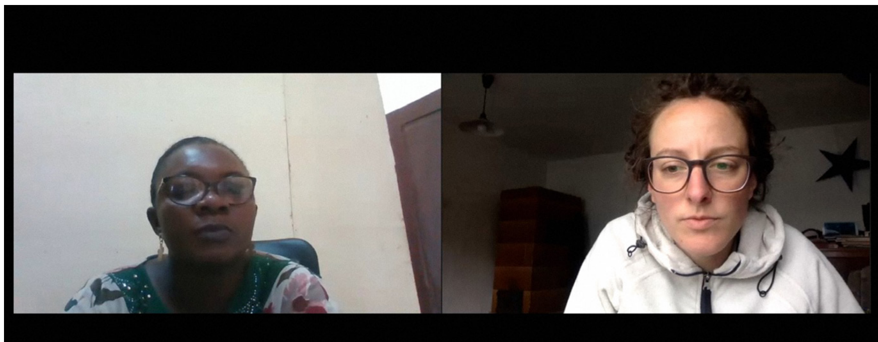

Figure 2 | Virtual collaborative provenance research on Zoom by Rachel Mariembe and Isabella Bozsa, March 2021 © The Authors

The first example is the identification and location of the place referred to by the museum's documentation as "Bamunkung", given as the name of the place of origin of five objects. The relevant note was written by Richard Andree (1835–1912), who acted as a voluntary conservator at the Municipal Museum of Brunswick from 1893 to 1903.[10] According to the records, the objects were taken from "Bamunkung" and brought to Brunswick by Kurt Strümpell in 1902. The latter was then a military officer with the rank of a first lieutenant. As a member of the German colonial forces he was involved in colonial wars in parts of today's Northwest and West Cameroon that were supposed to consolidate German colonial rule.[11] Two journals from the colonial era feature reports on a military action led by Strümpell in March 1902.[12] They mention that the town of "Bamunkung" was invaded and looted by the colonial troops after the king refused to accept the German colonial administration.[13] It is therefore likely that Strümpell took the five objects from their owners by force.

Following the aim to find the descendants of previous owners or users, it is crucial to identify today's location that corresponds with the historical name. Phonetically, it is conceivable that "Bamunkung" was a misinterpretation of the places Bamougong or Bamougoum by the colonial officer. The German Federal Archives in Berlin house a map drawn by Strümpell of the route of the military expedition to "Bamunkung" and other places.[14] The digital tool *Archivführer Kolonialzeit* (archival guide to the colonial era) allows us to layer historical colonial maps with their contemporary counterparts, and this

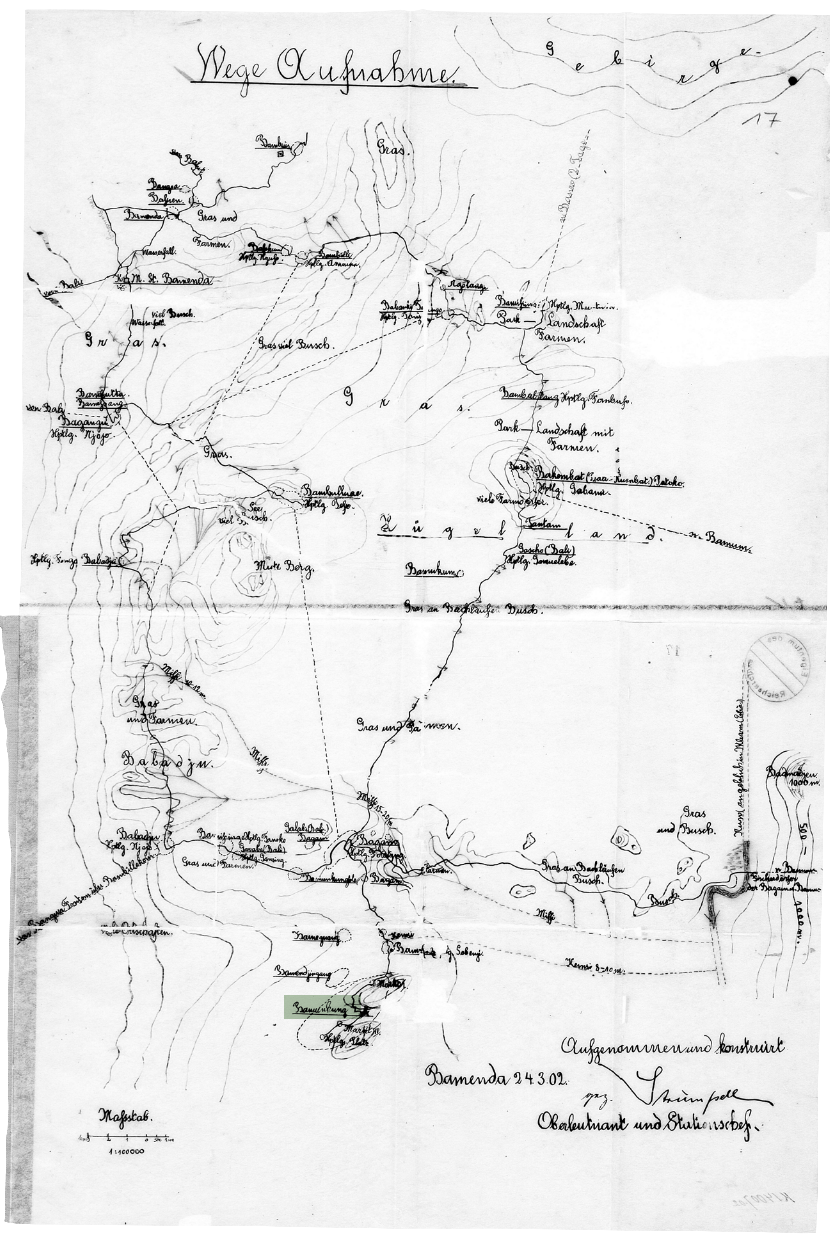

Figure 3 | Map, drawn by the colonial officer Kurt Strümpell after the attack on "Bamunkung" by the German colonial army in 1902 © Federal Archives Berlin, BArch R 1001/3351, p. 17

Figure 4 | Ceremonial pipe head from "Bamunkung", Municipal Museum Brunswick, Inv. No. 1709-0062-00 © Municipal Museum Brunswick (Photo: Monika Heidemann)

procedure shows that “Bamunkung” was located in the area east of the present village of Bamendjinda. A linguistic analysis of the term “Bamunkung”, together with the iconography of the objects, suggests that the regions of Kougham or Bamendjing could also be likely. It is close to the border of the Bamoun kingdom. A future oral history study in both places should help verify this hypothesis and produce more evidence. An audience with the “*chef supérieur*”, who is responsible for the district and knows its population, could help to find persons who know the local history and could confirm whether the colonial name of the place seems familiar to them and whether they can recognise the objects through photographs.

Our second case exemplifies our attempts to find the descendants of previous owners or descendants of the communities of origin. Under the conditions of the pandemic, we conducted an online consultation on local knowledge in Cameroon.[15] In a virtual remote interview with the king of Lenale Ndem, Fornjinju Alexandre Tatabong, we asked him what oral history had to say about the place of origin of some objects from the collection. As he was raised in Lebialem (subdivision of South-West Region), he knew about the area’s German colonial past, about the Bangwa-German wars, and the famous king Fontem Asunganyi (approx. 1870–1947). This example shows that such an approach can help add valuable information about the context of the German colonial period. In establishing contact with descendants or representatives of the communities, networks and cooperation partners from the countries of origin who act as intermediaries are crucial. This is especially the case in highly sensitive situations when conversation partners remember violent aspects of the colonial past or crimes committed by German forces. Postcolonial inequalities, such as around access to African collections in Europe and experiences of loss of cultural heritage, can also evoke suspicion towards a German researcher. In such situations, local cooperation partners can help to build trust.

Conclusion and Perspectives

Collaborative provenance research offers an opportunity towards decolonial approaches in knowledge production. Different forms of knowledge based on archival and oral sources can be combined. The exchange with researchers and museum experts from Cameroon, as well as oral history interviews with Cameroonian kings, notables and others can revive stories of the past that have not been transmitted in written colonial sources. Through knowledge-sharing between cooperation partners, mutuality can be achieved, balancing unequal access to collections and information and redefining postcolonial power relations. As further experiences of and discussions on museum cooperation have shown, research questions should not be set by one side – to date, typically by the European side – as this reduces one partner to a source, from which knowledge can be extracted. In order to avoid this pitfall of reducing cooperation to a one-sided consultancy level, it is important to keep space open for discussion, set up research questions together, and to negotiate and re-negotiate these.[16] As in our workshop at Nkongsamba involving students, experimental practices can lead to new interpretations of objects from colonial contexts. Museums can thus become sites for encounters towards a decolonial collaboration by "passing the mic", especially when it comes to the interpretation of objects.

Besides all the opportunities that collaborative provenance research and participative museum practices in "contact-zones" such as museums offer, we also need to consider its "dark underbelly".[17] To avoid reproducing unequal power relations or, at worst, legitimising them, the limits of collaborative projects have to be stated. Challenges are often pre-established in the structures of collaborative projects and follow postcolonial inequalities around aspects such as who has access to financial resources, who makes decisions, or who allocates funding based on which criteria. Funding structures have so far made the symmetrical funding of partners difficult. With new funding programmes, there is hope that structural inequalities will gradually decrease. On an individual level, structural inequalities demand emotional and intercultural skills of both parties.

Postcolonial power relations are also constituted through unequal access to research data or publication platforms. The PAESE project provides new spaces to publish research results with multiple authorships. On the PAESE

website, we published four of the video statements from the students of Nkongsamba, while the implemented database offers the opportunity to include knowledge of cooperation partners and provides access to non-European based researchers. Finally, collaborations often depend on personal relationships and are limited by external funding. We, as the authors, established our cooperation as a member of the Institute of Fine Arts in Nkongsamba and a research fellow at the Municipal Museum of Brunswick. To ensure that the cooperation does not end with the funding of PAESE, we hope to establish a long-term partnership between the museum and the institute. To this end, the transfer of our individual partnership to the institutions is desirable. Follow-up research on the Cameroonian collection in Brunswick that includes the students of Nkongsamba could be a joint endeavour.

The virtual exchange between us has shown a need for much more research in Cameroon, complementary to that under way in museums and archives in Germany. Digital interviews are, in this respect, not a substitute but merely a temporary workaround. The biggest challenge for our cooperative work was the pandemic: From 2020 until the date of the PAESE conference it was only possible to continue our collaboration on a very limited virtual level. In the meantime, however, the pandemic situation in Germany is much improved, and the research stay of Rachel in Lower Saxony finally could take place in summer 2021.[18] The outcomes of the collaborative research will be discussed and published elsewhere.

1 This text was written in 2021 and reflects the state of research at that time. Isabella Bozsa is currently working on her PhD thesis about the ethnographic collection from Cameroon at the Municipal Museum of Brunswick, where she elaborates on a cooperative approach towards postcolonial provenance research. The text includes some of the content of the presentation by Bianca Baumann and Isabella Bozsa „Cooperation as method" at the African Studies Association in June 2021. Many thanks to Bianca Baumann for her approval and cooperation.

2 Clifford, James (1997): *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, p. 188.

3 Basu, Paul (2018): *The Inbetweenness of Things*, in: Paul Basu (Ed.): *The Inbetweenness of Things: Materializing Mediation and Movement between Worlds*, London, pp. 1–20, here p. 18.

4 As stated in, for example, Weber-Sinn; Ivanov, Paola (2020): *"'Collaborative' Provenance Research – About the (Im)possibility of Smashing Colonial Frameworks"*, in: *Museum & Society*, Vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 66–81, here p. 76; Laely, Thomas; Meyer, Marc; Schwere, Raphael (2018): *Rethinking Museum Cooperation*, in: Thomas Laely, Marc Meyer und Raphael Schwere (Eds): *Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe: A New Field for Museum Studies*, Bielefeld, p. 4.

5 Today she is a researcher and lecturer at the Department for Anthropology and African Studies at the University of Mainz.

6 Currently she is leading the Conservation Department of the Museum Programme in Cameroon "Route des Chefferies".

7 For further information, see also https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/workshop-contested-heritage/?lang=en, accessed 15 March 2023.

8 https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/videostatements-contested-heritage/?lang=en, accessed 15 March 2023.

9 Tommy Yaulin Buga from Papua New Guinea, Paule-Clisthène Dassi Koudjou and Albert Gouaffo from Cameroon, Werner Hillebrecht and Nzila Marina Libanda-Mubusisi from Namibia, and Flower Manase from Tanzania.

10 Haase, Evelin (1992): *Führer durch die Abteilung Völkerkunde*, Braunschweig (Arbeitsberichte, 62), p. 10.

11 Hoffmann, Florian (2007): *Okkupation und Militärverwaltung in Kamerun. Etablierung und Institutionalisierung des kolonialen Gewaltmonopols. Teil II: Die kaiserliche Schutztruppe und ihr Offizierskorps.* Göttingen, p. 187.

12 Förster, Brix (1903): *Strümpells Wanderungen im Balilande*, in: *Globus. Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder- und Völkerkunde*, Vol. 83, p. 260; Strümpell, Kurt (1903): *Expedition des Oberleutnants Strümpell*, in: *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, Vol. 14, pp. 84–86.

13 Strümpell 1903, *Expedition*, p. 85.

14 Federal Archives Berlin, BArch R 1001/3351, *Abschrift des Berichts der Station Bamenda vom 30.03.1902*, p. 17.

15 Due to the pandemic, Isabella Bozsa conducted further virtual remote interviews on Zoom with researchers from the University of Maiduguri, an elder, and museum experts from Dikwa, Nigeria, in 2020 and 2021.

16 Laely, Thomas; Meyer, Marc; Mugume, Amon; Schwere, Raphael (2019): "*Towards Mutuality in International Museum Cooperation: Reflections on a Swiss-Ugandan Cooperative Museum Project*", in: *Stedelijk Studies*, vol. 8, pp. 1–16, here p. 12.

17 Boast, Robin (2011): "Neocolonial Collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited", in: *Museum Anthropology*, Vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 56–70, here p. 57.

18 Further research stays of Hervé Youmbi and Tevodai Mambai took place in September 2021.

VI.

Cooperation Projects on Cameroonian Collections
Experiences and Perspectives

Serendipitous Intersections and Long-Term Dialogue

Art and Research as Collaborative Exchanges

Serendipitous Intersections and Long-Term Dialogue

Art and Research as Collaborative Exchanges

Silvia Forni and Hervé Youmbi

Abstract

The relationship between research and the production of art and knowledge is an area of growing academic interest and reflection in the 21st century. This chapter contributes to recent literature that explores the complex and often not fully articulated relationship between artists and scholars, and the practical and tangible impact of research in the arts. The authors – a researcher and an artist – have collaborated for over a decade, with a mutually significant and beneficial impact on each other's work. In this chapter, they reflect on the cooperation and exchange that have thus been critical to the development of their respective works. They explore power dynamics in, and the impact of colonialism on, the art world, especially the relationship between the "traditional" and the "contemporary", the meaning of "success", and how these are articulated in the visual languages of the societies and landscapes of West Cameroon.

Intersections fortuites et dialogue à long terme : la création artistique et la recherche en tant qu'échanges collaboratifs (Résumé)

La relation entre la recherche et la production d'art et de connaissances est un domaine de réflexion universitaire qui suscite un intérêt croissant au XXIème siècle. Notre chapitre contribue à la littérature récente qui explore la relation complexe et souvent mal articulée entre les artistes et les spécialistes, ainsi que les effets pratiques et tangibles de la recherche dans le domaine artistique. Nous proposons ici une réflexion plutôt fluide et non structurée sur un peu plus d'une décennie de conversations et d'échanges qui ont été essentiels au développement de nos travaux respectifs. Cette réflexion suit vaguement une série de sujets qui nous ont été proposés par les rédacteurs de cette publication. Par souci de concision, nous avons décidé de résumer les principaux points plutôt que de fournir une traduction et une transcription complètes de notre conversation.

Introduction: Encounters and Mutual Influence

Somewhat at odds with other experiences highlighted in this volume, to this day, we have never been involved in any type of formalised project together. Nevertheless, our paths and work have intersected in many ways over the course of the years, and we acknowledge that our shared research and reflections have had a significant impact on both Silvia Forni's academic and curatorial work and on Hervé Youmbi's creative practice. There is a definite distinction in impact and scope between funded projects with specific outcomes and the open-ended long-term professional and human relationship that we are considering here. However, it is exactly this indefinite and unprescribed horizon that makes it possible for each of us to continue to learn from one another in ways that inform and transform our practices in a rather organic way.

Although we have had many encounters, and we were both part of a few formal gatherings and recipients of one large grant, this chapter is – somewhat paradoxically – the first coauthored product of our long working relationship. Over the last decade, Forni has delivered conference papers and written a few articles centering on Youmbi's work.[1] These were discussed at length with Youmbi who supported these activities by generously sharing images and frequent updates on his developing artistic practice. The

collaborative effort underpinning academic writing is something usually just acknowledged in passing, but the question posed to us by the editors of this volume made us reflect more intentionally on the importance of building mutual trust in the relationship between an artist and the scholar(s) writing about their work. We both often felt that this worked quite nicely as a mutually beneficial relationship which strengthened Forni's position as a scholar and contributed to enhancing the visibility of Youmbi's work, resulting in residency opportunities and important acquisitions. This chapter is a rather fluid reflection on just over a decade of conversation and exchange that have thus been critical to the development of our respective works.[2]

Contemporary Art, Traditions and Markets

For many years, long before our paths crossed, both of us had been reflecting on the complex relationship between African contemporary art production, academic taxonomies, market demands, and opportunities. Since the late 1990s, Silvia Forni had been exploring contemporary village-based artistic production in North West and West Cameroon, the relationship between objects and collections, and local conceptions of political authority, prestige, gender relationships, and financial success. Following the seminal work of Michael Rowlands, Jean-Pierre Warnier, Nicolas Argenti, Christraud Geary and Christopher Steiner, Silvia Forni's research sought to explore the multiple ways in which contemporary makers articulated ideas of tradition and modernity through their aesthetic choices. In addition, starting in 2010, she was interested in exploring the markets available to contemporary rural artists and how middlemen and dealers influenced both the artistic production and the way this was framed in markets. At the same time, Hervé Youmbi had started reflecting on the persistent social impact of colonisation on African societies fifty years after independence. Through his work *Totem that Haunt our Dreams*, completed in 2010, he questioned the aspirations of Africa-based artists who still saw cultural institutions in the Global North as the inescapable arbiters of success, despite the desire many had to make art from an African perspective. Building on his questioning of the identity and aspirations of individual artists, Hervé Youmbi was interested in exploring the idea of cultural identity and the factors that shape and influence cultural

values and transformations. In many ways, what troubled us both were the strict academic and commercial boundaries dividing the "traditional" and the "contemporary" and the very real challenges posed to these definitions by the complex reality of artistic production happening in cities and villages on the African continent.

Grounded in our independently developed interests and research, our thinking finally started to converge in 2010, when Silvia returned to Douala after spending several weeks in West Cameroon, often referred to as the "Grassfields", and particularly in Foumban researching the local art market. Over a few visits to Hervé's studio, we spent hours discussing the artificial separation between the traditional and the contemporary, exchanging ideas and thoughts about the changes and transformations that we were witnessing in how "tradition" was being articulated in the visual language of the palaces and masquerades of West Cameroon. What unfolded during those visits was an intense and generous exchange that in many ways reinforced our independent commitment to continuing this research through our distinct languages. Collaboration was indeed an interesting part of those conversations. Though singular authorship is the highest currency both in academia and in the art world, we were both interested in thinking through ideas of collective forms of creativity. Forni's research on the market for contemporary "traditional" art, the workshop and the collective efforts that often contribute to the creation of artworks was very much aligned with Youmbi's own interests.

After spending some time reflecting on the ways in which artists' individual trajectories are shaped by the inescapable fields of power of the international art world (institutions, biennials, fairs and galleries), Hervé Youmbi was beginning to investigate the role of art in contributing to shifting cultural identities on the local level. While contemporary studio artists presented themselves as players on an international scene in dialogue with makers from other countries, these international tensions were taking a different form at the local level, where artists and performers operating in the "traditional" sphere were developing new visual languages that reflected their contemporary understanding of community, political, and religious practices. For both of us, the creative and often collaborative creative intelligence that bestowed specific meanings to different art forms in local communities was a compelling counterpoint to the globalising and homogenising effect of the international contemporary art scene, often characterised by sweeping trends that strictly inform – to the point of limiting – the space of

individual creativity. While we pursued these avenues of research and reflection with different methodologies and from different vantage points, we strongly valued the opportunity of sharing and discussing our ideas with one another, testing their validity and heuristic potential in contexts (North West and West Cameroon and the contemporary art world) that were familiar to both of us and constituted a strong foundation for our conversations.

Long-Term Exchange as Collaboration

Not framed by specific funding, institutional networks or timelines, but fuelled exclusively by mutual interest and trust, the relationship we established afforded avenues of collaboration that were driven exclusively by our research and creative interests at any specific moment. For Hervé Youmbi the chance to discuss with academics and researchers was a welcome sounding board for ideas. Even before meeting Silvia Forni, he had developed a strong and meaningful working relationship with art historian Dominique Malaquais, who was the first art historian to publish significant scholarship about his work.[3]

Meeting Silvia Forni provided yet another avenue of collaboration: her position as a curator in a large encyclopedic museum made it possible for him to test the practical and conceptual possibilities of producing contemporary works that were meant to transition between different spheres of presentation and fruition.[4] Although it was not really planned that way, upon encountering the first material iteration of Youmbi's contemporary idiosyncratic "traditional" masks at an art fair in London, Forni proposed to acquire the work for the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto. Knowing well what the intent of the project was, she was keen to witness the completion of the multiple transitions of the first works in the *Visage des Masques* series which travelled from the contemporary art space of Bandjoun Station to the dance field, and from an art fair back to the community before being permanently accessioned by a foreign institution. Because of her deep interest in the project, Forni was invested in negotiating the institutional latitude to make sure that the work could travel from London back to Cameroon, then to the ROM, following a somewhat unconventional journey and timeline for the acquisition of a contemporary artwork. Becoming involved firsthand in this

Figure 1 | Hervé Youmbi and Silvia Forni in the atelier of Marie Kouam, one of Youmbi's collaborators, November 2021 © The Authors

project provided Forni with the opportunity not only to *think*, but also to *do* things differently when it came to building a collection of African art in a large Canadian museum. At the same time, the ROM's purchase provided Youmbi with his first important institutional endorsement, which, as often happens, was followed by other museums acquiring his works in the years following.

Unlike many scholar/curator-artist interactions, our relationship neither began nor ended with a project or a product, but it is mostly grounded in a sincere interest in exchanging ideas. Silvia Forni wrote and likely will continue to write about Hervé Youmbi's work.[5] She also acquired two important artworks for the institution she was working for. Yet there was never a sense that these were the final goals of their interactions. Rather, these events emerged as the punctuation of an ongoing relationship that continues to unfold through encounters in Cameroon and other parts of the world. The absence of a specific economic framework allowed for a high degree of flexibility but also reduced the potential power imbalance of traditional institutional collaborations, where terms tend to be determined by the side controlling the finances of a project. That said, we both know that our exchanges have had an impact on the way we do our respective jobs. It is a relationship that has provided reciprocal intellectual nourishment while also pushing us to think beyond our areas of expertise and remain open to different forms of articulation of our shared interests.

Although we are conveying a rather positive picture, we do not want to give the impression that our positionalities are not shaped by the structural imbalances which shaped many collaborations between researchers in the Global North and artists in the Global South. We are clearly aware that we are not operating outside the systems that define our roles as curator/researcher and artist/researcher. The fact that we first met in Cameroon where Forni was doing research sponsored by the museum she was employed by long before we would meet in Europe and in the US is not a factor that we ignore. This framework created a specific setting and expectations that were neither unusual nor unique. Artists usually welcome researchers and curators due to their potential to open up future opportunities. Yet we know that our relationship is not exclusively defined by the transactional opportunities that have emerged at different times, as we are both convinced that there is much more to be gained as researchers, artists, and humans by taking a long-term approach that allows for relationships and questions to evolve. As we continue to stay in touch, discuss, and exchange we look forward to discovering how our thinking will change with time and what new horizons we will contemplate together as individuals and professionals in the years to come.

1 Forni, Silvia (2015): "Objects Fit for Kings: The Antiquities and Replicas Art Market in Foumban", in: *Africa in the Market: 20th Century Art from the Amrad African Art Collection*, Toronto, pp. 94–119; Forni, Silvia (2016): "Masks on the Move: Defying Genres, Styles, and Traditions in the Cameroonian Grassfields", in: *African Arts*, Vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 38–53; Forni, Silvia (2017): "Visual Diplomacy: Art Circulation and Iconoclashes in the Kingdom of Bamum," in: Basu, Paul (Ed.): *The Inbetweenness of Things*, London, pp. 148–157.

2 This reflection follows loosely a series of prompts that were provided to us by the editors of this volume. For brevity, we have decided to summarise the main points rather than provide a full translation and transcription of our conversation.

3 See Malaquais, Dominique (2008): "Douala en habit de festival", in: *Africultures*, Vol. 73, pp. 83–92; Malaquais, Dominique (2011): *Hervé Youmbi: Plasticien,* Montreuil: Éditions de l'Œil; Malaquais, Dominique (2011): "Imagin(IN)g Racial France: Take 3 – Hervé Youmbi", in: *Public Culture*, Vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 157–166; Malaquais, Dominique (2016): "Playing (in) the Market: Hervé Youmbi and the Art World Maze", in: *Cahiers d'études africaines*, Vol. 223, pp. 559–580.

4 Interestingly, at the time of writing this chapter in 2023, Youmbi is producing a documentary that brings together the reflections of many researchers, curators and museum professionals that have impacted his work in one way or another. The documentary reverses the relationship between artist and researcher, but also acknowledges the productive importance of scholarship and the art ecosystem writ large in helping to clarify and focus an artist's creative practice.

5 Forni, Silvia; Malaquais, Dominique (2019): "Village Matters, City Works: Ideas, Technologies, and Dialogues in the Work of Hervé Youmbi", in: *Critical Interventions*, Vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 294–305.

VII.

Hidden Objects – Sensitive and Restricted Objects in Museum Collections

Issues Surrounding their Storage, Access, Consultations, and Potential Repatriation

Objets cachés – Objets sensibles et à usage restreint dans les collections de musées

Enjeux relatifs à leur stockage, à leur accès, à leur consultation et à leur rapatriement éventuel

Introduction

Hidden Objects – Sensitive and Restricted Objects in Museum Collections
Issues Surrounding their Storage, Access, Consultations, and Potential Repatriation

Introduction

Mareike Späth

Museum collections were often put together with the intention to tell stories about the places and people where they come from to the people they were brought to. They were meant to be seen, looked at. Until today, exhibiting tangible and intangible heritage for the purposes of education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing is one of the museums' key tasks according to the definition by the International Council of Museums.[1]

A small group of objects in museum collections, however, are categorised as sensitive because access to them is heavily restricted in the communities where they originate from. These objects must only be viewed, consulted, or used following a certain protocol. This may include being accessed by authorised persons only (due to their age, their gender, their profession, their status, or their being initiated into a certain group), exclusively at a certain time of the year or month or day, or only after necessary rituals have been performed that allow access to the objects. These restrictions may even extend to the knowledge about the origin, existence, or the correct way of using these objects being heavily restricted and strictly managed in the communities of origin. As a result, knowledge and documentation details associated with such objects and contained in museum records must be considered as sensitive, too.

Some of these objects have been collected precisely because of their sensitive quality. The aura of secrecy and restriction sparked special interest by collectors

and researchers who wished to venture into the realm of the secret, the sacred, the forbidden, and the rare. It is safe to say that the nature of ethnographic curiosity and collecting itself has resulted in the fact that museum collections hold objects that are categorised as sensitive or restricted. In other cases, it is only through cooperation and consultation in the context of provenance research that collection curators become aware of the secret and sacred character of objects and learn about their restrictive nature and specific needs.

From the 1980s onwards, and after an increasing number of requests for information on the whereabouts of restricted objects were formulated by communities in search for their belongings, awareness of ethical and moral considerations regarding such sensitivities in a post-colonial museum environment has increased. A growing number of museums are now willing to respect and apply the communities of origin's rules of restriction and treat these collections accordingly. This has resulted in some objects being removed from exhibitions and public access. But how will museums manage such hidden objects in the future?

In a post-colonial museum framework, dealing with such collections and knowledge poses challenges for museum staff and provenance researchers. The objects require to be handled (stored, accessed, digitised, published, exhibited, researched) with special care while in the collection, but sometimes a lack of resources render it difficult to effectively accommodate and implement instructions on the collections' needs in a museum environment. More so, the current call for transparency and publication of inventories and collection information is diametrically opposed to the demands for restriction of some objects.

Provenance researchers are committed to identifying the exact community or family to which an object rightfully belongs. But it can be tricky to identify authoritative custodians with traditional rights to the restricted objects and knowledge, particularly where knowledge restrictions involve political implications, or where different stakeholders express opposing demands. European institutions must decide whether a person making a request for access to restricted objects is entitled to do so, and to decide whose advise or demands to accept or to decline. It is likely that institutions lack the relevant information to distinguish legitimate requests from illegitimate ones. Traditional custodians, once identified, must be effectively consulted about restricted matters and meaningful dialogue between them and the museum must be established and maintained, a task that is sometimes difficult to

accomplish, despite strong intentions by individuals involved on both sides. It is yet to be seen whether museums can commit to effectively share and transfer control of such collections, and to processes related to their repatriation, restitution, or return.

This section therefore addresses the issues surrounding the management of restricted objects and knowledge in museum collections. Both chapters discuss examples of powerful objects that are, due to their secret and sacred nature, subject to restrictions in their respective cultures and access to them is meant to be strictly regulated. While answers to the above questions always depend on the specific requirements of the distinct secret or sacred context of an object or group of objects, some overarching aspects may apply to all objects classified as restricted. Michael Pickering and Victor Ngitir will discuss important issues surrounding the future management of restricted objects and knowledge in museum collections against the background of their expertise with restricted collections from Australia and Cameroon.[2]

Both authors not only have an academic background in related fields, but also actively engage in museum und heritage practices. Hence, their writings combine theoretical approaches with practice and experience.

Michael Pickering has a long experience in handling and repatriating sensitive objects from the Australian context in museum collections and he has published extensively, not only on cases of restitution, but also on how increasing knowledge about secrecy and sacredness affects practices inside the institution.[3] He knows from experience that while collection managers may have close relationships with certain communities that have been the subject of their personal research or prior collaborations, they often have little detailed knowledge of other cultures, communities, and contexts. As a result, he observes, they are often at a loss to know where to start and what to watch out for when working on a repatriation issue. In his chapter he describes the general methodologies applied in the repatriation of central Australian secret/sacred objects as applied by the National Museum of Australia, which shall serve as an introductory guide to other collecting institutions seeking to initiate repatriation.

Victor Bayena Ngitir introduces restricted objects in the Cameroon Grassfields to the discussion. As cultural entrepreneur and heritage project expert, he has carried out extensive ethnographic research on grassland's palace museums in Cameroon and their power objects.[4] Access to them is limited to

initiates, their exposure closely tied to taboos and their functions religious. He argues that their alienation by colonial agents and appropriation by Western museums have created multiple ruptures both at the place of origin and destination. What Victor Bayena Ngitir calls “the crusade for their restitution” has so far remained fruitless. He elaborates on the methodology he applies when researching the contexts of these sensitive objects, addresses the alienation of Grassfields power objects, the obstacles to their public exhibition, and finally calls for their restitution to living collections to restore the objects’ function.

The conference was also attended by Shaun Angelis. As an Arrernte man from Ayampe in the Central Desert of Australia, he is experienced in working with secret sacred objects, audio-visual material and archival records relating to numerous language groups across Central Australia, focussing on the return of cultural heritage material from international collecting institutions.[5] He shared his experiences with the repatriation of sensitive and restricted men’s objects to seven Aboriginal communities across central and northern Australia from overseas collecting institutions, and about the continuing work with some of those Senior Men who continue to request the return of their belongings from overseas collecting institutions. In his talk at the PAESE conference he argued that these objects must come back to Australia and elaborated on the impact this has on custodians when they come home.[6]

All contributors agree on the urgent need for special care and handling of restricted objects. The importance of consultation with authorised representatives of the communities of origin is crucial, as is the adequate resourcing of these often protracted and costly consultation processes. The examples raised in the following chapters show that the restrictions can differ according to whether objects are still active while in collections, or whether they need to be ceremonially reactivated or re-sacralised before their return or reuse. However, the latter case certainly does not diminish the object’s importance for the community it belongs to. The contributors agree on the need to return powerful objects. Solutions about how restricted objects return to their rightful owners and in which way they can be accommodated in the future should always be negotiated with authorised representatives of the communities that once owned, and still own, these objects currently hidden in museum collections. The determination to care for the objects’ requirements and to respect the meaning they embody today shall be the common ground for all future procedures.

1 ICOM, Museum definition, Version of 2022. See https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/, accessed 27 May 2023.

2 I am grateful to Olaf Geerken who has proposed this topic for the conference and invited the distinguished contributors. His research in the PAESE-project "Provenances of Tjurungas at the Landesmuseum Hanover and the Hermannsburg collection" (see https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/provenienzen-von-tjurunga/?lang=en, accessed 27 May 2023) initiated a decision-making process about how to handle *tjurungas* and other sensitive parts of the collection while they reside with the museum's collection and about their future whereabouts.

3 See e.g., Pickering, Michael (2020): "The Supernatural and Sensitive Indigenous Materials: A Workplace Health ans Safety Issue?", in: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 35, no. 5, pp. 532–550, on workplace health and safety related to supernatural and sensitive Indigenous materials or Pickering, Michael (2018): "Up Close and Personal: The Management of Sensitive Indigenous Objects at the National Museum of Australia", in: Anna-Maria Brandstetter; Vera Vierholzer (Eds): *Nicht nur Raubkunst! Sensible Dinge in Museen und universitären Sammlungen*, Göttingen, pp. 273–290, on the management of sensitive Indigenous objects at the National Museum of Australia.

4 See Ngitir, Victor Bayena; Rene Ngek Monteh (2021): "The Survival of Community Museums in Cameroon", in: *Himalayan Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 31–40, and Ngitir, Victor Bayena (2017): "Bamenda Grassfields Living Museums: A Colonial Heritage", in: *Cameroon Journal of Studies in the Commonwealth*, Vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 44–67.

5 See Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2020): *Return of Cultural Heritage Project 2018–20*, Canberra.

6 See https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/conference/pprc21-johnson-angelis/, accessed 29 May 2023. The contribution by Shaun Angelis was unfortunately not elaborated in writing and is therefore not available in this volume.

VII.

Hidden Objects – Sensitive and Restricted Objects in Museum Collections

Issues Surrounding their Storage, Access, Consultations, and Potential Repatriation

First Principles

First Principles

Michael Pickering

Abstract

The more spatially and/or temporally distant a collection is from its culture of origin, the harder it is to apply culturally appropriate processes for its use and management. This is of particular relevance to the repatriation of First Nations cultural materials. While collections managers may have close relationships with certain First Nations individuals and communities that have been the subject of their research and collections projects, they often lack detailed knowledge of other spatially and temporally distant cultures and communities. As a result, when working on a repatriation request, they may be at a loss to know where to start and what to watch out for.

This chapter describes the general methodologies that are applied in the repatriation of central Australian secret/sacred and significant objects by the Repatriation team at the National Museum of Australia[1]. It is intended to provide an introductory guide to non-Australian collectors and collecting institutions seeking to either initiate, or respond to, requests for repatriation of such objects to First Nations peoples in Australia.

Principes fondamentaux (Résumé)

Plus une collection est éloignée spatialement et/ou temporellement de sa culture d'origine, plus il est difficile d'appliquer des processus culturellement appropriés pour son utilisation et sa gestion. Ceci est particulièrement important pour le rapatriement du matériel culturel des Premières nations. Si les gestionnaires de collections peuvent avoir d'étroites relations avec certaines personnes et communautés des Premières nations qui ont fait l'objet de leurs recherches et de leurs projets de collecte, ils manquent souvent de connaissances détaillées sur d'autres cultures et communautés éloignées dans l'espace et dans le temps. Par conséquent, lors du traitement d'une demande de rapatriement, ils ignorent parfois par où commencer et ce à quoi il faut faire attention.

Ce chapitre décrit les méthodologies générales appliquées par l'équipe de rapatriement du musée national d'Australie pour le rapatriement d'objets secrets/sacrés et significatifs du centre de l'Australie. Il s'agit d'un guide d'introduction destiné aux collectionneurs et aux institutions de collecte non australiens qui souhaitent initier ou répondre à des demandes de rapatriement de ces objets aux peuples des Premières nations d'Australie.

Introduction

The title of this paper – First Principles – is intended to address a basic, but very important, issue in repatriation: "Where do I start?"

There is a considerable body of readily available research that addresses the cultural significance and contexts of Central Australian secret/sacred and significant objects.[2] These cultural values are the primary reasons behind of the desire for such objects to be returned to their Traditional Owners. However, there is little information available as to how museums might initiate, or respond to, a repatriation activity. Determining where to start is the focus of this paper.

Initial requests from Australian First Nations[3] communities, or their representatives, to museums, institutions, and individuals, for the repatriation of secret/sacred and significant objects, can be intimidating. The request itself may be courteous but raises an issue about which the curator has little or no previous experience or knowledge. Requests for repatriations by commu-

nities can also occasionally be phrased in forceful, direct, and often legalistic, language, which is the standard communication style for those experienced with repatriation requests, but which is, again, a totally new experience for the unaware and inexperienced curator.[4]

It is also not unusual for western collection managers of First Nations cultural materials to have a very limited knowledge of many of the cultures represented in their collections. Early collecting practices gathered objects world-wide, and many First Nations cultures are represented in any single institution. However, the collection manager, no matter how experienced in the culture of their special interest group, cannot be expected to identify and understand all the social and historical contexts of all the materials of all the cultures represented in their collections.

Australian First Nations collections held in overseas holdings are often treated by managing curators as separated in both time and space from their associated cultures. Collections from the First Nations groups often came to a halt in those institutions many decades ago. They are typically displayed as relics of a bygone age; of people, cultures and practices that no longer exist, cultures frozen in time, or of groups who no longer practice those lifestyles represented in an institution's collections. They are presented as curios from a lost past. They are also often displayed generically, with a mix of objects from culturally distinct groups presented under the umbrella term of "Australian Aboriginal Culture".[5]

Living Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not necessarily see old and remote collections in this way. There are many Australian First Nations cultural groups, and as many opinions as to the contemporary cultural status and value of collections. There are those who demand repatriation, and there are those who are happy for objects to remain where they are, such as in museums, galleries, university, or individuals' collections. However, based on my experience, all see the objects as part of their cultural heritage, whether they previously knew of the existence of the collections or not. All First Nations peoples also have something to offer in understanding the cultural and historic backgrounds of those materials, whether they have direct experience with them or not. Considerable knowledge still exists and is continuously transmitted through active cultural processes and practices. This knowledge includes the symbolic, such as the inherent meaning conveyed through artistic iconography, and the practical, such as the manufacture and use of technologies.

Museums tend to be conservative places, with a culture of their own. The mystique of the museum explorer persists in some spaces – even in Australia. The idea is that the curator must do the field research and consultation – an expensive and long-term proposition. For the purpose of repatriation discussions, such travels are not essential, although face-to-face contact between claimants and curators is always rewarding, personally and professionally, for participants of both groups. The opportunity to meet in-person, to discuss matters of interest without mediation, such as through media or bureaucratic time-managers, and to see the lands from which the people, and collections, come, is an invaluable experience.

Nonetheless, we can't all travel, and we are not all experts in the cultures represented in our collections. As an example, while I have a good generalist knowledge of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and the cultural contexts of certain material culture that originated in Australia, I have limited knowledge of African societies. What I do know is that, in the event of a request for repatriation from an African source, is that I will need expert local advice before I respond or engage at length. Therefore, what I advocate in this paper is for prospective practitioners to do some homework and seek expert 'local' advice first.

Doing homework

The starting point to engagement with Australia First Nations peoples, is to have an idea of the significance of secret/sacred objects in the cultures of origin. Doing homework is relatively simple. As noted above, there are numerous published historical and scholarly research-based descriptions of Australian secret/sacred objects and their cultural contexts. Many of these are available through institutional libraries. Caution is required in their use, especially of earlier historical reports, because they invariably reveal restricted images and information. This is information that would not, in both traditional and contemporary cultural contexts, be made available to uninitiated men, to women and children (in the case of men's objects), or men (in the case of women's objects).

But historical texts alone are not sufficient to understand the significance of such objects to today's communities. Indeed, relying on historical texts to develop a cultural template can be both misleading and inappropriate.

Today's First Nations communities may have different cultural reasons for seeking repatriation. The request may be based on historical significance rather than religious significance, or vice versa. However, the requests are genuine, and have been arrived at through legitimate processes of cultural change and community consensus as to significance. As a result, it is also necessary to understand contemporary cultural contexts and significance for material cultures collections. Strangely, the most up-to-date and readily available sources for such information is through mainstream news media. Many repatriation activities are well-covered by news media events,[6] particularly in Australia, and many First Nations speakers communicate their reasons for desiring the return of objects through such media. The next step is, ask the "experts".

Experts

Who are the experts, and what are they experts in? Of course, the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the objects under consideration must be acknowledged as the Experts in their own cultures. But identifying and engaging with the appropriate First Nations people can be a major challenge for researchers outside of Australia.

I work as a museum curator and repatriation officer. I am an "expert" in the practical processes of repatriation. I am knowledgeable about, but do not consider myself an expert in, the deeper cultural contexts of secret/sacred objects in Australian First Nations groups. As well as First Nations Elders, there are many anthropologists and heritage agencies staff and professionals who, due to their long local engagement with First Nations communities, have greater knowledge of the past and current cultural contexts and significance of the objects in question. It is part of my job to know who these agencies and individuals might be.

My approach to a repatriation event is, therefore, to firstly identify or confirm that the potential claimant has *prima facie* right to make the request and, in most cases, that they have a formal responsibility and legal accountability to represent First Nations stakeholders.

In Australia, the major museums often have close relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the management and representation of their cultures. This engagement has come about through "doorstep activism" on the part of First Nations people.

Because museums, museum staff and First Nations peoples are immediate neighbours, and because debates over First Nations and non-First Nations relationships occur daily. The decision by Australian museums to engage with Australian First Nations people is not a fearful response to intimidation. The thorough arguments and debates that have been generated through engagements has led to a greater appreciation of the continuance and vitality of Australian First Nations cultures, and recognition of their right to be involved in the management of their cultural heritage – old, current, and emerging.

Australia's publicly funded Federal, State and Territory museums have a long-standing commitment to repatriation of Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects[7]. The Australian Government has an explicit policy supporting the return of remains and secret/sacred objects,[8] and provides some support funding for repatriation activities through the Office for the Arts.[9]

Australian museums have been engaging for decades with the First Nations communities represented in their collection holdings, and in their state or territory in particular. They have built up a wealth of knowledge, experience, and relationships, and can usually advise on which First Nations groups or representative agencies to contact.

It is not hard to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, either directly, or through their authorised representatives. Advice as to who to contact over issues of First Nations heritage is readily available through numerous agencies, including:

- State and Territory Museums[10]
- Land Councils[11]
- Native Title Representative Bodies[12]
- Legal Aid Services[13]
- Community Councils[14]
- Art and Cultural Centres[15]
- State and territory government heritage offices[16]
- Universities[17]
- Researchers[18]

Any of these sources can either provide advice or refer you to who you should contact. They are discoverable through an online search, or through individual and museums' industry contacts,[19] and are contactable by phone and e-mail. Publicly funded agencies such as museums and government heritage agencies often have an obligation to provide some 'entry level' information and advice free of charge. In many cases, it is not necessary to go to Australia

to trace contacts – there are researchers across the world who work with First Nations people in Australia and can assist directly or provide advice and further contacts. The products of such engagements can be many and varied. In all scenarios, however, the result is the sharing of information.

There is no guarantee that engagements will be successful. There are some issues that require cautious management and appreciation. There is also no obligation on any First Nations person or agency to assist. In addition, there may be internal community politics that may affect or complicate an engagement. It may be difficult to identify a relevant culturally authorised spokesperson. While repatriation is an important issue for them, other social issues such as health, education, and housing, will also take priority.

Working through representative agencies provides an extra level of protection for museums. Such agencies usually have strong internal systems of governance and accountability, acknowledging their role in representing First Nations interests over the interests of their employed individuals. For example, on rare occasions, individual researchers, may ask favoured and sympathetic informants for advice or decisions about cultural materials, knowing they will get the advice the researcher personally prefers. This is convenient for the researcher, but risky for the distanced museum. Working with agencies to ensure community consensus helps avoid such problems.

Representative agencies, however, as legally established organisations, have accountability. Both to their First Nations clients and to official protocols of corporate governance. Working with such agencies, at least in the beginning, provides a degree of insurance for the participating museum and serves as a demonstration of ethical practice[20].

Secret/Sacred Objects

In its repatriation activities over its 27 years, the National Museum of Australia has relied heavily on the support of many of these representative agencies in its successful repatriation of Ancestral Remains and secret/sacred objects.

In 2004, three hundred and eight secret/sacred objects were returned to Western Australian communities through a multi-museum collaboration.[21] State museums were approached by the National Museum regarding objects in their care available for repatriation. The Western Australian Museum

agreed to contact communities in Western Australia with whom it had long standing relationships, good knowledge, and reputation. At the instruction of communities, objects were sent to the Western Australian Museum for redistribution to First Nations communities. These communities were represented in their claims by legally and culturally accountable heritage agencies such as the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre and Wangka Maya Language Centre in the Pilbara. A condition of the repatriation was that the Western Australian Museum was assisting the communities, and not being given legal possession of the objects. The objects were returned to communities over time as resources and facilities became available.

In 2006, fifty-four secret/sacred objects were returned to Central Australian communities through the National Museum engaging the Central Land Council to carry out consultations.[22] Consultations can be time consuming and cannot always happen in a compressed or consecutive time frame. If the options are to engage a private consultant for 50 consecutive days – or engaging a representative agency such as the Land Council for 50 non-consecutive days over a year, then the latter option is far more sympathetic to cultural time frames, the need for group discussions, seasonal disruptions, and travel over long distances.

At the time of writing, consultations are ongoing between the National Museum, Central Australian, and Northern Australian communities over a further 20 secret/sacred objects. Because of COVID-19 lockdowns and travel bans, face to face engagements have been restricted, but teleconferencing and e-mail has allowed continued consultation.

An important aspect of these consultations has been that they rely on consensus. Through community discussions, claims will be endorsed or challenged, knowledge will be shared, decisions will be thoughtful. Consensus is important. There are examples of repatriation related events (not necessarily secret/ sacred) where individual researchers have sought responses that reflect their own views on repatriation or, even more concerning, received "approvals" for unsanctioned research by working with individuals who are not fully informed of the possible consequences of the research.[23]

Cautionary tales

Whether or not the approached institution supports or opposes repatriation of secret/sacred objects, it still has a professional obligation to be informed about the cultural context of such objects. This will better enable them to tell the appropriate stories about those objects and, I hope, through self-education resulting in better awareness of the cultures involved, lead them to the conclusion that repatriation may be the appropriate action. To use opposition to repatriation as an excuse to avoid learning about the cultural significance of the objects in their care is basically unethical. Some examples.

Bad story 1: The National Museum of Denmark

> *In the exhibition Ethnographical Treasure Rooms at the National Museum, you can see collections from Micronesia, including a warrior from the Gilbert Islands, boats, fishing tools, ceremonial equipment, objects made from raffia and jewellery, together with others relating to hunting, war, daily life and the cults of the Aborigines of Australia.*[24]

In 2018, the author visited the National Museum of Denmark. The exhibition of Australian First Nations people included a small, mixed selection of objects from Central Australia, the Northern Territory, North Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia, with secular and secret/sacred items intermingled. Dozens of language groups were represented in the one exhibition case, without any care taken to distinguish or explain the variety of significance. A significant number of the objects were secret/sacred and sensitive religious, ceremonial, and sorcery objects that would normally be restricted from view in Australian First Nations groups.

The presentation probably reflects an old exhibition staying on display for decades, rather than a more recent exploration of Australian First Nations cultures – noting, however, that a more recent "Indigenous themed" art mural in the exhibition foyer demonstrates an acknowledgement of the need to occasionally upgrade exhibition spaces. As with many museums, some exhibitions remain up for far too long due to shifting priorities and resources. While the current interpretation of this old exhibition style is to show diversity

of Australian cultures, the exhibition does little, if anything, to educate visitors about those cultures. Again, in the light of debates about what is the appropriate way to manage such sensitive objects and the ready availability of advice through literature, web searches, professional journals, or consultation, there is no reason such exhibits should persist. That the exhibition is old and was prepared 'before we knew what we know now' is no excuse.

Bad Story 2: The Museum of Tomorrow, Brazil

In 2015, the *Museum of Tomorrow* opened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. A feature of this museum is a gallery displaying a single item: an Australian Aboriginal secret/sacred object, probably from north-western Australia. The object is one that was traditionally restricted in viewing and contact. Here it is displayed to all. It is presented without description of its original cultural context; rather it has a culturally un-informed interpretation by curators and designers. The website text states:

> *The area called Us, the last part of the Main Exhibition, features a light and sound display. The setting is based on an 'oca'. An indigenous house of knowledge, where the elders share cultural information and wisdom with younger generations. The 'tjurunga', an object used by Australian aborigines to symbolize the passing on of knowledge, is central to this area. It is among the most ancient artefacts ever created and is the only physical object in the main exhibit.*[25]

And continues:

> *General director of the Roberto Marinho Foundation, Hugo Barreto, sees the 'tjurunga' as a symbol of the museum itself. Like the museum, its shape is elongated and it transmits knowledge. Mr. Barreto explains, 'The exhibits are our 'inscriptions' in the museum, which help visitors understand the connection between the past and the future.'*

This is an exhibition of wilful ignorance, unforgivable today. The object has been appropriated, its cultural and religious context lost and desecrated, to the point where it is displayed in a gallery inspired by Amazonian First Nations longhouses, mixing at least two distinct and unrelated cultural traditions. Its meaning reinterpreted by designers and architects. The promotional image for the Museum is now the main image for the Wikipedia entry for "Tjurunga".[26] At the bottom of the page in very small print is the statement:

"Aboriginal readers from Central and Western Desert regions are respectfully advised that viewing or displaying images of sacred objects may be considered inappropriate by their communities."

Good Story: Museum Natur und Mensch, Freiburg

But now let me wrap up on a happier note. In 2020 the Freiburg *Museum Natur und Mensch* opened an exhibition of objects celebrating its 125th anniversary. The museum approached the National Museum of Australia seeking a suggestion as to what objects might be suitable for display. The listing included (but was not limited to) Central Australian secret/sacred objects. Given my specialist interests in secret/sacred objects, I suggested a display in which secret/sacred objects were a focus, but not displayed. Rather, the display includes the narrative that, due to the advocacy of Australian First Nations communities, Australian museums now consider it inappropriate to display such objects. The museum courageously accepted this suggestion, although safer object options were available. The exhibition was successful and curator Stefanie Schien subsequently advised me that this approach proved quite entertaining, stating: "It enriches the exhibition, making it all the more surprising and fascinating!"[27]

In their catalogue[28] they deliberately left a blank where the image would have appeared. Whether or not the museum chooses to pursue or respond to future repatriation requests, its educational resources and internal exhibition and research processes have hopefully improved through taking this approach.

Conclusion

It is not hard to develop a better understanding of the past and contemporary cultural place and significance of secret/sacred objects, indeed all cultural materials, that relate to Australian First Nations peoples. Simple e-mails and phone calls will do the job, and people are generally happy to chat and share their knowledge and experience in a positive and generous manner. Australian public museums, in particular, are spending on the public purse, and assisting with inquiries about such issues all the time. If we can't provide advice and assistance, we can refer you quickly to those who can.[29]

1 I'd like to thank Ann Robb, Anne Faris, Patrya Kaye, Yvette Wajon, Carly Davenport and the Editor Team for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper. For further information regarding the Repatriation Program of the National Museum of Australia see https://www.nma.gov.au/about/repatriation, accessed 14 January 2023. This site provides access to policies, activities and publications.
2 For example, see Anderson, Christopher (Ed) (1995): *Politics of the Secret*. Oceania Monographs, Vol. 45, University of Sydney; Akerman, Kim (2010): "'You Keep It – We are Christians Here': Repatriation of the Secret Sacred Where Indigenous World Views Have Changed", in: Paul Turnbull, Michael Pickering (Eds): *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, New York, pp. 175–182; Gibson, Jason M. (2020): *Ceremony Men: Making Ethnography and the Return of the Strehlow Collection*, New York; Pickering, Michael (2015): "The Big Picture: The Repatriation of Australian Indigenous Sacred Objects", in: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 30, no. 5, accessed 14 January 2023; Kaus, David (2008): "The Management of Restricted Aboriginal Objects by the National Museum of Australia", in: *ReCollections*, Vol. 3, no. 1, https://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_3_no_1/notes_and_comments/the_management_of_restricted_aboriginal_objects, accessed 13 January 2023; Gibson, Jason (2019): "You're my Kwertengerl': Transforming Models of Care for Central Australian Aboriginal Museum Collections", in: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 240–256.
3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
4 I now use "Curator" to include collections managers.
5 See the discussion of the National Museum of Denmark later in this chapter.
6 For example, see the news links on the South Australian Museums Repatriation web site https://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/the-museum/about/aboriginal-heritage-and-repatriation, accessed 12 January 2023. An online search of "Repatriation of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage" will also bring up links to news events.
7 For Australian museum policies on repatriation see: https://www.nma.gov.au/about/corporate/plans-policies/policies/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-human-remains; https://www.nma.gov.au/about/corporate/plans-policies/policies/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-secret-sacred-private-material; https://www.nma.gov.au/about/corporate/plans-policies/policies/collections-return-of-cultural-objects; https://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/the-museum/about/aboriginal-heritage-and-repatriation; https://museumsvictoria.com.au/collections-research/repatriation-of-ancestral-remains/; https://australian.museum/about/organisation/reports/; https://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/collections_and_research/policies/deaccessioning_and_disposal_policy; https://network.qm.qld.gov.au/~/media/Documents/QMN/About+us/Corporate+Information/Strategic+Collection+Management/qm78-qmn-collection-policy.pdf; https://museum.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/Collections%20Policy%20and%20Procedures.pdf, all accessed 14 January 2023.
8 Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation 2019, https://www.arts.gov.au/documents/australian-government-policy-indigenous-repatriation, accessed 14 January 2022.
9 https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/cultural-heritage/indigenous-repatriation, accessed 14 January 2023.
10 For example: National Museum of Australia, Australian Museum (NSW), Museum Victoria, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, South Australian Museum, Western Australian Museum, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Queensland Museum
11 For example: Central Land Council, Northern Land Council, New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council.
12 For example: National Indigenous Australians Agency: Native Title Representative bodies and service providers, https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/land-and-housing/native-title-representative-bodies-and-service-providers, accessed 12 January 2023.

13 For example: The South Australian Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement was instrumental in arranging the repatriation of several hundred Ancestral remains from Edinburgh University in the 1990's, https://www.alsnswact.org.au/, accessed 14 January 2023.
14 See National Indigenous Australians Agency Communities List https://www.indigenous.gov.au/communities/list-view, accessed 14 January 2023.
15 For example: See Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, http://kalacc.org/; Nyinkka nyunyu Art and Culture Centre, https://www.nyinkkanyunyu.org.au/, accessed 14 January 2023.
16 A listing of Australian state and territory heritage agencies is provided by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment on https://www.awe.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/organisations, accessed 14 January 2023.
17 For example: Anthropology Departments at the Australian National University (https://archanth.cass.anu.edu.au/disciplines/anthropology), the University of Melbourne (https://study.unimelb.edu.au/find/courses/major/anthropology/), the University of Adelaide (https://arts.adelaide.edu.au/study-with-us/undergraduate/anthropology), the University of Sydney (https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/schools/school-of-social-and-political-sciences/department-of-anthropology.html), the University Of Queensland (https://social-science.uq.edu.au/research/anthropology), the University of Western Australia (https://www.uwa.edu.au/study/courses/anthropology-and-sociology), all accessed 14 January 2023.
18 See the Australian Anthropological Society, https://www.aas.asn.au/. The site has a search capacity to identify anthropologists and specialities, see https://www.aas.asn.au/content.aspx?page_id=154&club_id=143481, accessed 14 January 2023.
19 There is an informal international network of repatriation practitioners and researchers. Asking locally will eventually provide some guidance.
20 For example, see AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (AIATSIS Code of Ethics) 2020, https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/code-ethics, accessed 24 January 2023.
21 National Museum of Australia (2004): *Annual Report 2003-4*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra, p. 17, https://www.nma.gov.au/about/corporate/annual-reports/annual-report-2003-04, accessed 14 January 2023.
22 National Museum of Australia (2006): *Annual Report 2005-6.* National Museum of Australia Canberra, p. 21, https://www.nma.gov.au/about/corporate/annual-reports/annual-report-2005-06, accessed 14 January 2023.
23 Pickering, Michael (2020): *A Repatriation Handbook: A Guide to Repatriating Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Remains*, https://www.nma.gov.au/about/publications/repatriation-handbook, accessed 14 January 2023, provides guidance on a range of protocols and issues associated with the repatriation on Ancestral human remains. Many of these protocols and issues are applicable to the repatriation of secret/sacred and significant objects.
24 See Oceania, https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/historical-knowledge-the-world/oceania/, accessed 14 January 2023; CULTURAL SENSITIVITY WARNING: includes images of restricted sacred objects: https://samlinger.natmus.dk/objectbrowse?collection=ES&media=image,rotation&keyword=Australia, accessed 14 January 2023.
25 CULTURAL SENSITIVITY WARNING: This website contains images of secret/sacred objects: https://museudoamanha.org.br/en/us, accessed 24 January 2023.
26 CULTURAL SENSITIVITY WARNING: This website contains an image of a secret/sacred object: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tjurunga, accessed 24 January 2023.
27 Stefanie Schien, Personal Communication, June 2020.
28 Brüderlin,T., Schien,S., and Stoll, S. (2020): *Ausgepackt! 125 Jahre Geschichte(n) im Museum Natur und Mensch:* Exhibition Catalogue, Städtische Museen Freiburg, Petersberg, pp. 50–51.
29 See https://www.nma.gov.au/about/publications/repatriation-handbook#; accessed 24 January 2023.

VII.

Hidden Objects – Sensitive and Restricted Objects in Museum Collections

Issues Surrounding their Storage, Access, Consultations, and Potential Repatriation

Exhibiting Restricted Objects in Museums

Ruptures, Dilemmas and Challenges around Restitution to West Cameroon

Exhibiting Restricted Objects in Museums

Ruptures, Dilemmas and Challenges around Restitution to West Cameroon

Victor Bayena Ngitir

Abstract

The stratification of most African societies and the primacy of the *invisible over the visible* gave rise to what people of West Cameroon, the area formerly referred to as "Grassfields", call *restricted* objects. Known for their attributes as *power objects*, access to them is marked by *restrictions* and taboos. In West Cameroon, traditional objects are known to be born, to live and to die; to have symbolic content and spiritual meanings. On account of their spiritual functions and their recreation through regular sanctification, their alienation and eventual appropriation have created multiple ruptures both at home and abroad. Cameroon's restitution crusade reached its apogee in the 1970s but has ever since remained missing in literature. Hinged on the theory of *functional conservation*, this paper examines the dangers of their alienation, obstacles to their public exhibition and prospects for their restitution.

Exposer des objets restreints des Grasslands dans les musées : ruptures, dilemmes et défis de la restitution (Resumé)

La stratification de la plupart des sociétés africaines et la primauté de l'invisible sur le visible ont donné naissance à ce que les populations des Grasslands camerounais appellent des objets restreints. Connus pour leurs attributs d'objets de pouvoir, leur accès est caractérisé par des restrictions et des tabous. Dans les Grasslands, on dit que les objets traditionnels naissent, vivent et meurent ; qu'ils ont un contenu symbolique et des significations spirituelles. En raison de leurs fonctions spirituelles et de leur recréation par une sanctification régulière, leur aliénation et leur éventuelle appropriation ont créé de nombreuses ruptures, aussi bien à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur du pays. La croisade de restitution du Cameroun a atteint son paroxysme dans les années 1970, mais est restée depuis lors absente de la littérature. S'appuyant sur la théorie de la conservation fonctionnelle, cette étude se penche sur les risques de leur aliénation, les obstacles à leur exposition publique et les perspectives de restitution.

Introduction

The notion of restricted cultural and religious objects is common practice across Sub-Saharan Africa, where they are variously described as "sacred", "secret" or "power" objects. In the area formerly referred to as the "Grassfields" of Cameroon[1] where these objects have for centuries been central in the articulation of traditional religion, political power and social control, they have always been associated with varying degrees of restrictions and taboos, especially regarding their production, acquisition, access, exposure, transfer, use, handling, preservation, conservation and restoration. Generally, their functions range from routine religious ceremonies to occasional mystical performances. Unfortunately, many uninformed western authors describe both these objects and their functions as fetish and primitive. This study focuses on the Tikar and Ngemba kingdoms of the Bamenda area, but its data, analyses and conclusions are applicable to Sub-Saharan Africa. In these communities, the mere public discussion around power objects is considered sacrilege and a profanation of the sacred. The present discourse is thus situated within the on-going *conservation debate* rooted in colonial antecedents and the numerous African calls for restitution. Our common goal is to trace

existing links, identifying objects with their originators, documenting Africa's material heritage lodged in western museums, and finally to establish new trajectories for cultural exchange, information sharing and restitution. It interrogates the ruptures and dilemmas resulting from the alienation and exhibition of *restricted objects* as well as prospects for their restitution.

Conceptualising the Realm of Restricted Objects

The appropriate context for appreciating the fate of Cameroon's lost heritage and especially power objects appropriated by western colonial agents must consider the indelible scars left by Curt von Pavel (1851–1933), Eugen Zintgraff (1858–1898), Gustav Conrau (died 1899) and other German officials in the period of German colonial rule.[2] This era was marked by the ruthless extortion of Cameroon's material and spiritual culture. Matters worsened with the illicit trafficking of antiquities that ran through the colonial period to the 1980s and persisted despite the adoption of UNESCO conventions protecting cultural heritage and repeated calls for restitution.[3] Indeed, the restricted realm is one of supernatural powers, beings and ancestral spirits. It represents an intersection and intercession between the living and the living-dead. It is marked by tangible and intangible actors, vessels and objects with transcendent powers; with distinct living and spiritual forces; meant for initiated members and, consequently, potentially dangerous to non-members.[4]

Research Problem, Questions and Objectives

For centuries, numerous taboos have surrounded the viewing, handling and access to power objects of this region. This category of community art, which western authors have generally labeled as fetish, primitive or uncivilised, consists of objects used in religious ceremonies, *juju* displays, enthronement rites and mystical performances. Until today, information on these objects has remained obscure and scholarly debates surrounding them are rife. This is more problematic when such objects are illegally ferried away from the

continent. What they are, or how they should be handled, exhibited, manipulated, conserved, documented, transmitted or narrated are central to this study. This chapter also examines the ruptures associated with such transfers, laments over their fate on alien territories and in inappropriate contexts, and wonders why they remain incarcerated in the west. It contextualises the local notion of restricted objects and their perception in and out of Africa, identifies the reasons for and methods of their alienation and appropriation, and analyses the dynamics and problems around their return. It answers four fundamental questions: What are restricted objects, how are they viewed in Cameroon and why did some of them find their way into western museums? Finally: What dilemmas and challenges surround their restitution?

Alienation in Western Museums

Empirical research and Darwinian theories reveal not only that Africa is the second largest continent after Asia but also that it is the cradle of humanity, home to the world's first human civilization and the great antiquities of the Nile valley.[5] J. O Vogel submits that, during the scramble for Africa, British and French antiquarians excavated finds equivalent to prehistoric materials unearthed in Europe a century earlier.[6] They included ancient artifacts from Senegal, stone axes from Ghana and ceramics from Senegal, Mali, Niger, Ghana and Cameroon. Then came the monumental shipments to Europe after 1800, when explorers, traders, missionaries and colonial officials opened up the hinterland to trade, subjugating "stubborn" inland kingdoms and consolidating colonial administrations. In Cameroon and most of Sub-Saharan Africa, the colonial sojourn saw Portuguese, Belgian, German, British and French colonial agents amass huge spoils of artefacts and antiquities for exhibition in home museums.[7] In the 1890s, Eugen Zintgraff was active in Bali (North-West Cameroon), razing palaces, subjugating kingdoms and emptying them of antiquities. Like Gustav Conrau in Bangwa Kingdom (South-West Cameroon), Zintgraff frequently travelled home with several shipments of masterpieces, some of them "induced gifts."[8] Similarly, other German officers also ransacked palaces of West Cameroon, carting away masterpieces and diverse valuables. These heritage transfers reached alarming proportions between the 1940s and 1980s and centered on the trafficking of antiquities.[9]

Marie Cornu and Marc-André Renold affirm that the displacement of cultural property took the form of trafficking, plunder, appropriation and trade between dealers during colonial occupation."[10] Francois Rivière and Folarin Shyllon submit that "theft, destruction, looting and smuggling of cultural property continue to distort our collective memory and peoples' identities despite the constant efforts of the international community."[11] The high prices that antiquities brought on the international art market also seduced traffickers and plunderers to exploit local peoples in Africa.[12] Illicit trade in cultural property grew in magnitude, rivalling the drug or diamond trades. By the 1980s it was second only to narcotics, at horrific disadvantage to Indigenous African peoples.[13]

Exhibiting Taboo and Desecrating Sacred Objects: The Need to Understand Life-Cycles

As mentioned earlier, an appropriate understanding of taboo objects from West Cameroon requires living with local communities, understanding the nature of sacred objects, access to them and, above all, their functions. These objects range from special motif stools, masks, costumes and containers to ancestral statues/statuettes, prayer tablets, royal paraphernalia and more. Regularly activated and deactivated as the need arose, they were used in religious ceremonies, warfare and magico-religious performances. They were born; they lived and died. Their birth comprised the processes leading to a final product. This included ritual tree-felling, its associated incantations, sculpting, religious hymns, fasting, nudity, sexual abstinence and prayers. Before use, they were consecrated in special religious rites. Their lifespan comprised the entire length and breadth of the object's functional existence during which it was regularly activated, used and deactivated thereafter. The death of such an object referred to the time it ceased to perform the functions for which it was produced, either on account of its displacement from the original habitat, or disconnection from its ancestral roots. And this is the fate of sacred objects moved to western museums.

Ruptures and Western Appropriation: Objects at Home, Art Abroad

The subject of identifying and interpreting African Indigenous works has crystallised into western and African schools of thought. African Indigenous objects differed markedly from the crafts and collections that found their way into museums in many ways. Unfortunately, recent connotations based on western paradigms perceive objects relocated to western museums as "art" in the European or American sense. They become art by transposition following the shift in paradigm. From cultural, institutional, ceremonial or religious objects, they became art for tourism, research and exhibition. Consequently, their incarceration in western museums desecrates them entirely.

New Modes of Acquisition and Preservation: Strange Displays and Treatment

The dislocation of these objects overseas in colonial and post-colonial periods also represented a rupture from legitimate and Indigenous methods of acquiring objects to alien and somewhat illegitimate modes. Traditionally, these objects originated from local workshops, palace and lineage treasures, legal purchase, bequests, diplomatic gifts and donations. From these sources, community collections were supplied with masterpieces and crafts. European colonial agents, traders and missionaries, on the other hand, acquired objects through force, induced gifts, fake treaties, vandalism, theft, looting, outright seizures and illicit trafficking. This way, African collections were progressively moved from Indigenous treasure contexts to western museums and galleries. What distinguishes between African and western displays lies essentially in the methodologies, techniques, perceptions and protocols via which they are processed. Art conservation, preservation and restoration, for instance, would follow traditional Indigenous techniques.

The *Conservation Debate*[14] centres on where and how power objects should best be preserved. On this axial question, the "West" generally believes that the panacea for proper preservation lies overseas, where sophisticated logistics are available for the diagnosis, treatment, storage, exhibition and restoration of these objects. This is diametrically opposed by the African School and the theory of *functional conservation.*[15] This theory holds that once a traditional object is displaced from its natural habitat it ceases to perform the functions for which it was produced, and consequently is no longer conserved.

Dilemmas and Challenges of Restitution

The issue of cultural return has remained a hot potato at international conferences, arousing passions and emotive language, often because it is connected with the restitution of cherished masterpieces and the sensitive notion of identity. Afolasade Adewumi affirms that

> *most of the collections and objects of noble significance to Africans lie outside the continent and UNESCO has tirelessly worked with international bodies to ensure the return of priceless objects signifying the identity of a people back to them. Despite all their efforts, these objects still haven't moved from where they are to where they originally belong.*[16]

Although the contemporary story of restitution is fairly recent, the alienation and appropriation of Cameroon's cultural objects is centuries old. It reached its apogee in the colonial era when German, British and French agents made huge fortunes from art-grabbing. Northern Tamara makes allusion to five Kom throne figures whisked off to Germany in 1902.[17] One of them found its way into the Museum of Ethnology (then *Museum für Völkerkunde*; nowadays *Weltkulturen Museum)* in Frankfurt am Main in 1904. Two other pairs have been in German museums since the early years of this century. A third was smuggled from the *Laikom* Palace in 1966 and remained in a New York collection until its restitution in 1973. Similarly, the Nso ancestral statue, *Ngonnso,* a piece of prestigious headgear (*ntara'*), royal calabash gourds (*bomsi*) and other valuables were spirited away from the Nso palace in 1906 and later found their way into the Royal Ethnographic Museum (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde)* in Berlin.[18] Two *makomngang* (ritual) masks also disappeared from the Mankon Palace in similar circumstances. In Bafut, sacred sculptural representations of their god and goddess (*mamforti*) disappeared from the palace during the German-Bafut war (1901–1910). Once in these strange locations, they ceased to be *objects* in the African sense and became "art".

Northern alludes to the Cameroon Collection at the Field Museum, Chicago (1920s) and another gathered in the 1930s by an American-born ex-German missionary, Dr Paul Gebauer (1900–1977).[19] The brilliant performance of antiquities from West Cameroon at the Festival of Negro Arts and Culture (FENAC) in Senegal (1966) and the Festival of African Arts and Culture

(FESTAC) in Lagos (1977) bear testimony to the region's artistic prowess. As early as 1906, these collections, along with other treasures from Cameroon and adjacent Nigeria were exhibited at the "Cameroon Gallery" of the Frankfurt Museum.[20] Others found their way into European and American galleries and have never returned. Other western museums flooding with Cameroonian collections are in Germany (Munich, Stuttgart, Berlin, Hanover), the UK (London), France (Paris, Nantes), Belgium (Brussels) as well as in the US (New York and Washington, DC). Today, calls for their restitution are championed by descendants and lobbies from originator communities.

Conclusion

This chapter finds comfort not in lopsided north-south arguments but on the *theory of functional conservation.* An object uprooted from its natural environment ceases to function in rituals and ceremonies. It loses its tangible and intangible value. This to the Africanist school is the worst form of deterioration and represents the *devaluation and violation of African art*. This study reveals that, despite impressive-sounding slogans and declarations by European politicians, professionals and museum promoters, moves towards restitution have remained cosmetic. More and more museums are opening in France, Germany and the US with Cameroonian objects dominating their collections. Second, in Cameroon, the realm of restricted objects is a world of its own, with fire-brand, religious items of mystical and transcendent nature. Most of them found their way into Western museums before, during and shortly after the colonial period through bogus trade deals, missionaries, hinterland explorations, extortion, looting, outright seizures, vandalism, and illicit trafficking. Alienated objects were eventually appropriated by host museums, transformed into Western–style art, were desecrated, commoditised, and today are faced with the dilemmas of legitimacy, documentation and restitution. Restitution must therefore involve identifying source regions and originators, distinguishing originals from replicas, placing Africans at the forefront, and sincere, earnest efforts and communication on the part of the European institutions. Exhibiting simple African objects through replicas, mosaic photos and virtual imaging is good practice, but power objects must not continue to be exhibited in any form if true reconciliation is the intention.

1 The region labelled in colonial times and often still called the Cameroon Grassfields stretches from the expansive rainforests in the South and West of the national triangle to the upper reaches of the Mbam River in the Adamawa, North Cameroon. It comprises the highlands and grassy savannah sitting at approximately 1,000–3,000 m. above sea level, across the continent to the Indian Ocean.
2 Temgoua, Albert-Pascal (2014): *Le Cameroon a l'Epoque des Allemands,1884–2016*, pp. 13–47.
3 See UNESCO (1954): *Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict*, Den Haag; *Convention concerning the Protection of the World's Natural and Cultural Patrimony*, 16th November, 1972; Recommendations for the Protection of Movable Cultural Property, 28th November, 1978; UNESCO (1995): *Convention on Stolen or Illicitly Exported Cultural Objects*, Rome; *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Paris, October 17, 2003; Odendahl, Kerstin (2013): *Cultural Property Regulation and National and International Heritage Legislation: International Protection of Cultural Property*, Athens; Williams, Sharon A. (1978): *The International and National Protection of Movable Cultural Property: A Comparative Study*, New York.
4 Ngitir, Victor Bayena (2017): "Bamenda Grassfields Living Museums: A Colonial Heritage", *in: Cameroon Journal of Studies in the Commonwealth,* Vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 44–67, here p. 24. This work further states that non-initiated males who violate access or other restrictions may be saved by instant initiation. There are also few women's groups barred to men – *chong, takumbeng, fembien.*
5 Darwin, Charles C. R. (1871): *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. London, Vol. 1/1, p. 42.
6 Vogel, Joseph O. (1997): *Encyclopedia of Pre-Colonial Africa,* London, p. 30.
7 Baptista, Cristina (2011): "Empire and Cultural Appropriation: African Artefacts and the Birth of Museums" in: Adelaide Meira Serras (Ed.): *Empire Building and Modernity,* Lisbon, pp. 9–20.
8 Paul N. Nkwi (1986): *Traditional Diplomacy: A Study of Inter-Chiefdom Relations in the Western Grassfields North West Province of Cameroon,* University of Yaoundé, Department of Sociology, p. 23.
9 Ngitir, Victor Bayena (2014): *Bamenda Grassfields Royal Collections and Museums from Ancient Times to the Beginning of the 21st Century: The Symbolisms and Conservation of Palace Art*. PhD thesis, University of Yaounde I.
10 Cornu, Marie; Renold, Marc-André Jean (2010): "New Developments in the Restitution of Cultural Property: Alternative Means of Dispute Resolution", in: *International Journal of Cultural Property*, Vol. 1, pp. 1–31.
11 The *UNESCO World Report Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue* (2009), attributes these displacements to, among other aspects, poverty, institutional weakness, poor understanding of the social and scientific value of cultural property, non-enforcement of the relevant regulatory mechanisms, and lack of clear-cut policies.
12 Shyllon, Folarin (1998): "One Hundred Years of Looting of Nigerian Art Treasures (1897–1996)" in: *Art, Antiquity and Law,* Vol. 3, no. 7, pp. 253–266. See also Drewal, Henry J. (1996): "Past as Prologues" in: Peter R. Schmidt, Roderick J. McIntosh (Eds), *Plundering Africa's Past,* Bloomington and Indianapolis, pp. 110–124.
13 Brent, Michel (1996): "A View inside the Illicit Trade in African Antiquities", in: P. R. Schmidt, R. J. McIntosch (Eds): *Plundering Africa's Past,* Bloomington and Indianapolis, pp. 63–78; Brodie, Neil; Renfrew, Colin (2005): "Looting and the World's Archaeological Heritage: The Inadequate Response" in: *Annual Review of Anthropology,* Vol. 6, no. 34, pp. 343–361; Campbell, Peter B. (2013): "The Illicit Antiquities Trade as a Transnational Criminal Network: Characterizing and Anticipating Trafficking of Cultural Heritage," in: *International Journal of Cultural Property*, Vol. 20, pp. 113–153; Borgstede, Gregory (2014): "Cultural Property, the Palermo Convention, and Transnational Organized Crime", in *International Journal of Cultural Property,* Vol. 21, no. 13, pp. 281–290; Charney, Noah; Denton Paul; Kleberg John, (2010): "Protecting Cultural Heritage from Art Theft," in: *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, (March 2012), Vol. 81, no. 3, pp.1–6.
14 Ngitir, 2017, *Bamenda Grassfields*, p. 44ff.
15 Konare, A.O. (1995): "The Creation and Survival of Local Museums", in: C.D. Ardouin, E. Arinze (Eds): *Museums and the Community in West Africa*, Washington, pp. 5–10.

16 Adewumi, A. Afolasade (2015): "The Achievement of Return and Restitution of Cultural Property in Africa: The Roles of International Bodies", in: *University of Ibadan Journal of Public and International Law (UIJPIL)*, Vol. 5/2, pp. 63–81.
17 Northern, Tamara (1973): *Royal Art of Cameroon.* Dartmouth, p. 5.
18 Ngitir, 2014, *Bamenda Grassfields*.
19 Northern, 1973, *Royal Art of Cameroon*, p. 14.
20 Nigtir, Victor Bayena (2021): "Alienating Grassfields Cultural Objects to Western Museums: Who Cares?" in: *Afo-A-Kom Journal of Culture, Performing & Visual Arts,* Vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 8–9.

VIII.

Law versus Justice?

An Intercultural Approach to the Problem
of European Collections of Colonial Provenance

Droit vs. Justice ?

*Une approche interculturelle du problème des
collections européennes de provenance coloniale*

Introduction

Law versus Justice?
An Intercultural Approach to the Problem
of European Collections of Colonial Provenance

Introduction

Christoph-Eric Mecke

The title of this section describes the field of tension that encompasses the various questions relating to how colonial takings should be dealt with today. Strictly speaking the formulation “law versus justice” is an oversimplification, because even the concept of law is by no means as unambiguous as non-lawyers or even some lawyers believe.

From an historical perspective, “law” and “justice” originally had to be identical, before law began to be seen by contemporaries as a manmade instrument for pushing through political aims and was still viewed as a sacred “law of the forefathers”, which was based on traditional values, or even as a law not of human but of divine provenance. This applied not only to Europe but also to Africa and other continents.

In Europe it was not until the modern era, after personalised power structures had been replaced by nation-states which had a monopoly on the use of force that could be territorially imposed and after all legislative power and law enforcement had been placed with the sovereign state, that law came to be viewed as an instrument of pushing though concrete political aims for the benefit of some and to the detriment of others, which was independent of tradition and could be changed at any time. From then on, contemporaries began to learn that law and justice can sometimes be in complete opposition. However, until well into the 20th century, only a few European contempo-

raries had the greatness of figures like the German poet of Enlightenment Christoph Martin Wieland (1778) who viewed "justice" not as a legitimising force but as a critical authority on colonial legal and power structures (*Meder*). Moreover, the pluralistic understanding in modern-era Europe of legal frameworks in indigenous legal systems was for a long time lost in social contract theories and centralist philosophical ideals (*Meder*).

The papers presented here show that applicable law played and unfortunately continues to play very different roles in the context of looted artefacts. In the past, law sanctioned not only the taking of artefacts but, following the Berlin (or Congo) Conference of 1884/1885, also the bloody colonial suppression and partitioning of the entire African continent (*Taku*). While Europe, following the philosopher Hugo Grotius (1625), one of the founders of international law, began to link looted artefacts, particularly those of religious provenance, with the notion of injustice quite early-on and saw this as a wrong that should be righted by legal means, the legal obligation to repatriate cultural goods looted in wartime, an idea that had been developed since the peace treaties after the Napoleonic Wars (1815), remained limited to the so-called "civilised nations" (*Campfens*) even in the first half of the 20th century, and therefore did not apply to colonial artefacts in European museums and collections.

Deeply rooted in long-standing racist ideology that was widespread throughout Europe, such double standards put a heavy burden not only on colonial law in the past but also on how colonial injustice is dealt with to this day (*Kamerdeen*). This applies both to the legal systems of nation-states in Europe and to many current international legal regimes that are based on Eurocentric sources, which lay down the universal principles of repatriating looted cultural goods only in respect of the present and future, but not of the colonial past (*Kamerdeen*, *Mecke*). The cry for justice (*Taku*), therefore, is also a cry for respect from the former colonial powers towards the colonised communities that were victimised by the double standards mentioned above.

Four fundamentally different legal approaches to the repatriation of cultural heritage of colonial provenance can be distinguished in current national and international law (*Mecke*).

The most innovative approach among these is the human rights approach. Instead of the traditional focus on states and inter-state law in Europe, it aims to take into account the interests of non-state ethnic communities. The

exclusive ownership interests of the descendants of the colonised or the colonisers are replaced by plural collective rights and shared identities of source communities, scientists, artists and other individuals.

Most importantly, the human rights approach dispenses with the historical proof of the unlawfulness of the colonisers' deeds and instead endeavours to justify and support the interests of people of today, in the source communities and beyond. Instead of general binding rights of possession, equitable solutions are sought for each individual case. In summary, the human rights approach shifts the interest away from the colonisers of the past to the social, cultural and religious functions of the artefacts in the present (*Campfens*).

The approach seems to be appealing from today's European perspective as an alternative to both the unconditional repatriation of goods and the complete refusal to do so. However – and this must be stressed here – it does deviate from the expectations of many of the direct descendants of the victims of colonisation.

In his paper, Chief *Taku*, as an international lawyer and great-grandson of Bangwa King Fontem Asonganyi, who was abducted and detained by the German colonists, in fact calls for the restitution of the formerly exclusive ownership rights of the once colonised Bangwa people in Cameroon as a first step on the way to making amends for all colonial injustices of the past.

The papers presented here can only highlight these diverging perspectives of the different courses of action, they cannot resolve them. However, it was in this respect that the PAESE research project, as part of which the 2021 conference in Hanover took place, pointed the way towards the future. The encounters so eloquently described by Chief Taku and the respectful discussions between the descendants of the colonisers and those of the colonised as part of the PAESE project showed that, while the egalitarian intercultural dialogue (*Taku*) which has been set in motion is no guarantee, it is the first and most important step towards finding solutions for the future that are *jointly* developed rather than those of the past which were forced on the colonised communities by the European side.

VIII.

Law versus Justice?

An Intercultural Approach to the Problem
of European Collections of Colonial Provenance

Law versus Justice?
An Intercultural Approach to the Problem of European Collections of Colonial Provenance

Contexts of Colonial Acquisition

Historical and Normative Elements of Legal Provenance Research

Stephan Meder

Abstract

This contribution addresses the importance of "legal" provenance research for the restitution debate over colonial acquisitions. It explores the complexities of analyzing ostensibly voluntary transactions under a strong structural power imbalance and the influence of various legal frameworks, considering both historical and normative aspects of the field and the challenges posed by temporal distance and normative diversity. Citing the principle that actions must be judged according to the relevant standards of the time, questions of which legal system to apply, structural asymmetry, limits to voluntary action, applications of the statute of limitations, and changes to systems over time are all addressed. Examining European and German colonial jurisprudence, the chapter details the shift away from social contract theory and centralist philosophical ideals to a more pluralistic understanding of legal frameworks and increased academic interest in Indigenous legal systems.

Contextes d'acquisition coloniale: éléments historiques et normatifs de la recherche de provenance légale (Résumé)

Ce chapitre traite de l'importance de la recherche sur la provenance légale pour le débat sur la restitution des acquisitions coloniales. Il explore les complexités de l'analyse de transactions ostensiblement volontaires dans le cadre d'un fort déséquilibre structurel de pouvoir et l'influence de divers cadres juridiques, en considérant les aspects historiques et normatifs du domaine et les défis posés par la distance temporelle et la diversité normative. Citant le principe selon lequel les actions doivent être jugées selon les normes pertinentes de l'époque, les questions du système juridique à appliquer, de l'asymétrie structurelle, des limites à l'action volontaire, des applications de la prescription et des changements apportés aux systèmes au fil du temps sont toutes abordées. En examinant la jurisprudence coloniale européenne et allemande, le chapitre détaille le passage de la théorie du contrat social et des idéaux philosophiques centralisateurs à une compréhension plus pluraliste des cadres juridiques et à un intérêt académique accru pour les systèmes juridiques indigènes.

Where did these things come from? Provenance research, which investigates the origins of cultural objects and is usually regarded as a sub-discipline of history or art history, begins with this inquiry. Yet research into origins encompasses not only actual events but also a normative principle, becoming increasingly prominent under the premises of current restitution debates. The legal circumstances under which cultural artefacts were acquired are of interest because decisions have to be made regarding questions of legitimacy and thus whether the objects are to be kept, returned, or whether compensation – in monetary or other form – should be arranged. It makes a difference, for example, whether a cultural object was handed over "voluntarily" or "under pressure", whether it was given as a gift, exchanged, bought, simply taken, stolen, looted, plundered, or brought to the recipient country as "spoils of war". In short: the graver the injustice, the weaker the legitimacy and thus the higher the probability that restitution will be deemed appropriate.

On the Methodology of Legal Provenance Research

Legal provenance research consists of two elements generally referred to by the methodology of jurisprudence as “case” and “norm”. In a first step, the situation and preceding events – the so-called “facts of the case” – must be determined. These address the concrete origin and actual circumstances under which the change of ownership took place. These must be distinguished from the second step, the normative element, which seeks to establish justice. Practitioners of law have the task of applying justice to the concrete facts of the case in order to ultimately present a practical result in the form of a “decision” or “verdict”. While the first, the factual element, can be researched primarily based on a historical approach, the normative element gives rise to particular methodological difficulties which can be characterised by terms such as “temporal distance” and “normative diversity”.

Temporal Distance and Normative Diversity

Temporal distance arises between the moment at which an object was acquired and our postcolonial position today. Since a legal event must be judged against the standards in force at the time of the deed, the first question to be asked is: How is the change of ownership to be evaluated in the light of historical law? If, for example, the object was handed over “voluntarily”, this could be assessed as an indication of legitimacy and thus the right to keep it. But how should we judge a case in which the object that came into the possession of the recipient country had been inalienable according to the law of the time, such as an object dedicated to religious or secret practice? Would the descriptor “voluntary gift” sufficiently legitimise the change of ownership in this case? And what part might have been played by structural asymmetry, power imbalances or dependency relationships between the Indigenous population and colonists? Another problem is the statute of limitations: Can this be waived in the case of restitution claims? Such questions illustrate how the acquisition of a cultural artefact must always be assessed from a postcolonial perspective, beyond the historical legal context. It might

thus come about that a sale justified under historical law is subsequently declared unlawful, or that a claim that theoretically would have expired under limitation is nevertheless still asserted. Past and present thus merge inseparably, leading to a fundamental issue primarily discussed – mutatis mutandis – in other contexts: the relationship between legal history and the laws currently in force.

Alongside "temporal distance", "normative diversity" is another characteristic of legal provenance research: Which law was actually applicable at the time of acquisition? The law of the society or country of origin? The law of the recipient country? Or a combination of legal systems?[1] It is here that work in this field diverges yet further from the tasks of other lawyers. Anyone conducting legal provenance research is confronted with the question as to whether and to what extent the content of past legal systems, such as Indigenous law, can even be determined at all today. Normative diversity also sheds light on the different interests of the actors involved. Colonists, for example, were often anxious to invoke the law of their colonising country because the latter's laws around debt, property or credit opened up opportunities to take advantage of the fact that the native population may not be familiar with it. In cases of legal verdicts with regard to past events, contemporary, post-colonial ideas also come into play when acquisition processes are located at the intersection of different normative systems.

Issues of legal legitimacy can largely be ignored in all restitution cases pertaining to objects that came to Europe in a colonial context. In Germany, the prevailing view is that legal criteria determine whether artefacts may be kept: "The lawful acquisition of every object must be verified".[2] Objections to this have pointed to a lack of "critical reflection" and the inadequacy of proving that an object has been purchased, exchanged and so on. Relationships of dependency, structural asymmetries and power imbalances must also be taken into account.[3]

In Search of Criteria to Assess Legitimacy

French President Emmanuel Macron initiated a turnaround in cultural policy with his Burkina Faso speech of 2017. Until then, restitution claims from Africa had been rejected on the grounds that national cultural property was inalienable.[4] Since 2017, however, German museums have been finding it equally difficult to ignore restitution claims for cultural assets from many countries of origin or ethnic groups. Inquiries must be made into the legality or

illegality of the acquisition in order to ascertain whether and to what extent artefacts from formerly dependent territories are to be returned. The task of a legal framework for provenance research, therefore, is to formulate criteria with which to reach a verdict on the legitimacy of an acquisition and thus on the future fate of a cultural object acquired in colonial times.

"Colonial jurisprudence", which came into force around 1900, thus moves into the spotlight, and not only with its misconceptions but also with its emancipatory and forward-looking approaches. One of these misconceptions is the characterisation of a people as "uncivilised", ruled by "arbitrariness" and without the "rule of law". Approaches pointing in the opposite direction are those which recognise the laws of these peoples, seek to research them more closely and record them in accordance with scientific standards, thus incorporating the interests of the country of origin and the well-being of its inhabitants, at least within a certain framework.

The fact that historians, ethnologists, missionaries, linguists, and lawyers had lively discussions around these issues in early twentieth-century Germany has been largely forgotten today. A closer examination of these debates sheds light on the standards that were developed at the time for judging right and wrong in the German colonial territories. The arguments that seem forward-looking from today's perspective must, of course, also be considered critically in their context of economic policy characterised by the national striving for power. Nevertheless, they can offer pointers for the formulation of criteria to determine whether an artefact should be kept or returned.

Colonial Jurisprudence: Its Roots in Political Philosophy around 1900

The fundament of "modern" statehood is the narrative of the state of nature and the social contract, on which such diverse teachers as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694), Christian Thomasius (1655–1728), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) built their philosophies of natural law and state. According to Thomas Hobbes, at the beginning of history "everyone made a contract with everyone" to permanently transfer undivided sovereignty to a sovereign.[5] This "social contract" marked a turning point, according to Hobbes, because it ended the so-called "state of nature" and established the kind of statehood that we still call "sovereignty" today.

Hobbes famously described the "state of nature", so important for the conceptual history of Indigenous people, as a state of war, or an absence of law and history, where man was "a wolf to man". To end it, a social contract had to be entered, the purpose of which was to secure peace and protect private property through the consensual transfer of undivided power to *one* sovereign.

Inherent in this narrative are several consequences that can only be touched upon here. The state, the community or the legal order did not exist from the beginning but were created artificially by a consensual declaration of will: the social contract. The consequence is a liquidation of any norm formation that could exist outside the state, for example through common law, unions, or customs. All in all, the narrative of the state of nature serves to legitimise a strong, undivided sovereignty, whether of an absolute monarch or the sovereignty of the people.

It is this kind of natural state that Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) also refers to in his statement that in Africa there are no states, no law, no religion and no history: it is the doctrine "that we know from the idea that the state of nature itself is the state of absolute and universal injustice".[6] Informed by this notion, Hegel drafted a theory of "natural man in all his wildness and unruliness", a philosophy of the "uncivilised" peoples, whose common feature was supposed to be that they lacked the "category of universality", only being familiar with the particular.[7]

This philosophy of state, law, religion, and history, which is only roughly sketched here, met with resistance from a movement that became dominant in jurisprudence after the turn of the 19th century. Gustav Hugo (1764–1844), Friedrich Carl von Savigny (1779–1861) and other protagonists of the Historical School of Law rejected the doctrines of the state of nature and the social contract as mere fictions. Savigny in particular refused to accept that the state "came into being through the caprice of individuals, i.e., through contract". This "most widespread view" had, he claimed, "led to consequences as pernicious as they are false".[8] Here, Savigny was primarily referring to the transfer of undivided power to *one* sovereign and the common assumption that the concept of law was reserved for norm-setting by the state. Rather, he purported that law was not created by the will of a sovereign, but primarily by the forces living within a society: the "spirit of the people".

According to this view, every people would have a history, a state, a religion and, of course, a legal system. Law and state, however, are not one and the same thing here: law goes beyond the promulgated *lex scripta*. The formation

of norms outside of law and state, such as via customary or juristic law, is subject to scholarship as *lex non scripta*. This deserves emphasis because the law of those peoples whose cultural artefacts were brought to Europe as a result of colonisation is also a *lex non scripta*.[9]

Interim Findings

Savigny rejected the asserted difference between "civilised" and "uncivilised" peoples as assumed by Hegel and the protagonists of the doctrine of the state of nature. Rather, he praised the advantages of oral legal cultures, even attesting them a "clear awareness of their conditions and relations [...], while we, in our artificially entangled existence, are overwhelmed by our own wealth".[10] He also abhorred the arrogance with which supposedly civilised states regarded the normative orders of oral legal cultures.[11] Both Hegel's centralist position and Savigny's pluralist stance were significant in the debates on colonial law taking place around 1900, with Savigny's approach dominating, at least among scholars informed by legal anthropology.

Colonial Jurisprudence between Centralism and Pluralism

German colonial history began in 1884 with "protective rule" over some territories in Africa and ended abruptly in the First World War. While it thus remained a mere episode, its presence is still felt in debates on collective memory and in the lines of German historical tradition. Colonial civil, criminal, and constitutional law has so far been somewhat neglected by the discipline of jurisprudence. This must be regarded as a deficit since the debates that took place around 1900 are not only of interest to legal history but are also of great importance for the question of provenance law regarding the right to keep cultural artefacts.

Acquisition History in Context

Legal provenance research invokes the factor of time from a twofold perspective. Firstly, because legal conduct can in principle only be judged according to the norms applicable at the time of the event[12] and events from colonial times are thus to be assessed against colonial-era standards. In addition, colonial jurisprudence must also be considered in the context of its time. This includes the assumption that "whites" are cultured, and "natives" are uncultured: "the natives are children" and must be accustomed to obeying the rules of "a state hitherto unknown to them".[13] The background to this is the expectation that the colonies would one day become an "essential factor in the economic life of the empire".[14]

The era of colonial jurisprudence was also the time when the German economy entered into world trade and unbridled expansionism. There is, however, another side to the contemporary debate that deserves to be emphasised from both a provenance law and a post-colonial perspective: most of the contributions are informed by a "purely" epistemological interest in researching Indigenous law and anchoring legal anthropology in science and studies. Almost without exception, they are based on the premise that Indigenous law must be respected and remain unclouded by preconceptions of European legal thought: "The determination of Indigenous law must, as far as is at all possible, be kept at a distance from our cultural law".[15]

"A glorious law of nations": Civil Law rather than Public Law

This approach is also of interest because legal provenance research has thus far been considered more as a sub-field of public law and international law.[16] However these two areas can contribute only little to the field of Indigenous law for at least two reasons, closely interwoven. Firstly, both public law and international law are primarily legal systems of the Global North and thus to a large extent the "laws of colonisers",[17] according to which the removal of artefacts would not, as such, be an injustice given that, from a contemporary point of view, the colonised territories did not constitute states. They lacked

"sovereignty" and thus an essential characteristic of the "modern" philosophy of the state propagated in the wake of Hobbes, Pufendorf or Kant. The territories were classified as "unclaimed", with the result that "states" were permitted to annex them at any time.[18] As early as 1778, the poet and translator Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813) remarked on the "glorious law of nations", describing the theft of a tin spoon by an "O-Tahitian boy", whose deed European seamen sought to punish according to their "positive civil law". Wieland commented that such behaviour was "typical" of Europeans

> *and reeks of the same impertinence with which these gentlemen, in the name of their most gracious kings,* ceremoniously take possession *of every island and peninsula of the South Pacific that they happen to be cast upon by wind, weather or the need for refreshment. It does not occur to them to ask the ancient populations of these islands for their opinion on this misappropriation. A glorious law of nations indeed! And it is these enlightened, philosophical gentlemen, highly erudite in matters of the law, who avenge a pilfered tin spoon with the four-pounder.*[19]

Thus, in Germany too there were voices that considered any kind of occupation or misappropriation to be in violation of international law. Even around 1900, the question was raised as to whether it was right to consider European ideas an "absolutely authoritative norm" to which "the whole world must be subjected".[20] Even the "natives", it was claimed, were aware of order; they could even be said to have a "developed legal consciousness", otherwise there would be a "constant war of every man against every man".[21] Others even spoke of an "intelligent N[...]* people".[22] Nevertheless, colonial jurisprudence was a long way from the "equal rights of all cultures", or even their "equal value" as demanded in current debates. Even its emancipatory approaches cannot hide the fact that it was indeed a "glorious law of nations" whose basic principles rendered occupation permissible.

International law has little to say about a historical event such as the actual "taking possession". It is unable to provide an answer as to which types of acquisition or change of possession might justify a restitution claim. Civil law, on the other hand, can certainly address the normative dimensions of colonial-era acquisition processes. It is therefore interesting that colonial jurisprudence, informed by legal ethnology, sometimes has recourse to civil law. Provenance research is dependent on such references because, as already indicated, the acquisition or appropriation process must also be measured against the standards that applied at the time of the change of ownership.

Colonial Choice of Law as *Iurisprudentia*

The requirement of prudence has often been emphasised in colonial legal literature. German law should not simply be imposed on the Indigenous population; rather, the "autonomy" of the latter's laws should be recognised.[23] On the other hand, the German colonial administration is itself known to have often lacked prudence, leading to a Herero uprising that was brutally crushed in 1904 in the Battle of Waterberg on the basis of the so-called "extermination order".[24] And when an estimated 100,000 Indigenous people were killed in the "Maji Maji Uprising" in 1905/06, a change in colonial policy was deemed necessary.[25]

The new policy found expression in the demand for a more scientific approach, which was supposed to lead to a noticeable improvement in the living conditions of the population in the colonies. The new motto was to preserve African legal systems. But how were lawyers to familiarise themselves with African law? Questionnaires were supposed to offer a solution and had already been resorted to by the co-founder of modern legal ethnology, Valtazar Bogišić (1834–1908).[26] But who could be interviewed? Local legal authorities ("Wali"), village elders or chiefs? Colonial officials or missionaries living in the colonies? Or were "special commissioners" to be sent from home to investigate the law *in situ*?[27]

Beside these difficulties, there was also the issue as to which law should be applied in the colonies: African law? German law? Or a mixture of different legal systems? For legal disputes among whites, who enjoyed the full rights deriving from German citizenship, the legal context was clear. Most interesting for provenance law are the "mixed matters"; that is, disputes between members of different legal systems.[28] The subject was repeatedly discussed around 1900 in the light of increased interaction between Germans and "natives", and it was proposed that legal transactions would be regulated

> *according to the law of the agent, sales according to the law of the seller, land acquisition* [...] *according to the law of the previous owner, the right of inheritance according to the law of the testator, fines according to the law of the injured person,* [and] *a weregild would be valued according to the law of the person killed.*[29]

Even today, the concrete factual situation in which the legal relationship is rooted is the point of departure in the case of contradictory laws between different legal systems.[30] In this context, "rooted" is to be understood as a metaphor intended to indicate the place or point from which the legal event originated. Accordingly, modern European provisions for conflicts of law still declare the law of the seller to be decisive in the case of sale.[31] The primacy of native law was, however, subject to a few limitations from the perspective of colonial law: it was to be applied more in civil law than in criminal law because the former generally defended against attacks against generally recognised legal interests such as life, limb and property.[32] Further, the legal assessment of ritual acts raised particular problems insofar as they could also endanger the life and health of people, such as poison tests and similar ordinances, human sacrifices or sorcery.[33] According to colonial law, concessions had to be made in such cases in order to avoid "an exodus of the native workforce from the protectorate".[34]

Colonial jurisprudence placed particular emphasis on property and real estate law: "As the economically weaker", the "natives" were to be "protected from exploitation by whites". Measures were called for to prevent whites taking advantage of their position and of use of the German Civil Code.[35] These efforts are interesting from the perspective of provenance law because, when considering whether cultural property may remain in the recipient country or must be returned, one decisive factor is by which legal system the sale would originally have been evaluated. This places the focus of interest on Indigenous law and its modifications.

Property Law as the Principal Area of Legal Relations with Indigenous Peoples

Contemporary literature on colonial law often contains references to Indigenous law with its functions and specificities in comparison with European legal systems. In this context, as already indicated, cases are also discussed in which Indigenous people and Europeans compete, and much importance is given to the "reconciliation of cultures separated by a great gulf and to build a bridge from one to the other".[36] In African legal systems, it was claimed, as in all segmentary societies, family law is the real pivotal point, with great value being placed on formalities and solemnities, as is typical of oral legal

cultures.[37] In view of the fundamental differences between Indigenous and European law, special rules would have to be created, especially for "mixed marriages" and the "rights of children born of such marriages".

In addition to family and inheritance law, property law is the second principal area of importance in legal relations between natives and whites.[38] Here, clarification is first required as to what the "natives understand by movable property",[39] in turn raising the question of whether "objects would have to be considered inalienable as a result of special provisions, such as cult regulations".[40] Another area of interest is what we now call the law of credit security. In Africa, credit or debts would often "increase the power of the creditor" to "take away the debtor's entire property".[41] The "issue of credit" therefore requires particularly careful consideration in the case of Indigenous people entering into a legal relationship with whites.

In South-West Africa, "the excesses of unrestricted lending based on the recklessness of the natives" had already led to "serious disadvantages".[42] A general ban on "selling goods to the natives on credit" was to be considered.[43] In any case, "business with the natives should be conducted in cash as far as possible", and general regulations should be put in force "that protect the natives from usury and exploitation and deem certain transactions immoral".[44]

Summary and Conclusions

The considerations of colonial jurisprudence regarding the protection of native people from usury and exploitation are of great importance when evaluating matters of provenance law. But what do we mean by "law"? As stated above, conduct can only be evaluated in legal terms in relation to what was already known at the time of the event. Did protection of the weaker already exist in colonial times? Are the demands made in this respect not merely proposals? And can mere proposals qualify as "law"?

Based on the premises of a centralist state philosophy, the question would have to be answered in the negative.[45] Such a philosophy would only consider laws and – at the very most – some forms of common law as "law". In the legal reality, however, there are a multitude of phenomena that a pluralist philosophy of state seeks to grasp under keywords such as juridical law, autonomy, or dogmatics. At the same time, the centralist and pluralist legal

models also have one important thing in common: both are dependent on consensus; on agreement. In the first case, it is the consent of the electorate and parliament; in the second, that of the legal profession, academia, certain groups, or the public. It is therefore advisable to illustrate the emergence of law using a scale ranging from initial drafts, proposals, or interim results, through preliminary agreement and near-agreement within a small circle, to the recommendation of a general adoption of results, common law, state law and worldwide acceptance. Using such a spectrum, academic postulates of the era had already achieved what could qualify as "law", summarised again in the following.

There is widespread agreement in the literature on colonial law that European law must not simply be imposed on the Indigenous population, but that the normative orders of the "natives" must be given primacy. This applies above all to property law. To this day, the legal assessment of a sale is carried out according to the law of the seller, thus impeding the colonists' successors from seeking to legitimise acts of misappropriation or removal of property with recourse to an alleged "glorious law of nations". Protection against exploitation is another consideration that equally enjoys widespread consensus in the literature. We may, further, assume that such proposals would correspond (or would have corresponded) to the hypothetical (or actual) will of the Indigenous population. Indeed, the demands of colonial jurisprudence following the uprisings of 1904 and 1905/06 were even given a hearing by the imperial government.[46]

While jurists around 1900 certainly contributed notably to the legitimisation of colonialism and genocide, we can nevertheless also discern structures within their discourses that are significant for us today considering the growing importance of postcolonial consciousness. Because it is impossible to differentiate strictly between the object of historical research and the location of contemporary academia, it seems permissible to reach beyond contemporary international law to the – from today's perspective – forward-looking proposals of colonial jurisprudence. Given our lack of knowledge about the actual laws of African peoples around 1900 and the ambiguities surrounding the colonial administration of justice in the short period of its existence, these proposals may claim a degree of legal quality that might guide today's evaluation procedures of specific acquisition histories.

The following criteria can be applied to the assessment of an acquisition. A voluntary sale in the context of a purchase or exchange would advocate for the recipient country keeping the artefact. However, this presumption can be refuted by pointing out, for instance, that the object was an inalienable cult object. The same is likely to apply to a gift, although here it would be necessary to ascertain whether and to what extent the expectation of a reciprocal gift was met.[47]

Verdicts regarding acquisitions made via credit transactions must be reached on a case-by-case basis. The purpose for which the loan was used and the circumstances under which it was rendered available are likely to play an important role here. Moreover, we can safely assume that a structural power imbalance will have existed between lender and borrower, especially in the case of credit transactions. Objects that have been stolen, plundered, or looted, on the other hand, are likely to pose fewer problems. In these cases, objects will have to be returned, or at the very least compensation will have to be offered.

1 What is referred to as "colonial jurisprudence" used to differ between legislation for non-whites, for whites, or legislation for mixed circumstances. See, for instance, Wick, Heinrich (1913): *Das Privatrecht der Farbigen in den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, Münster, p. 23.

2 Parzinger, Hermann (2019): "Wir wollen maximale Transparenz", in: *Neues Deutschland*, 18 January 2019, https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1110323.kolonialismus-wir-wollen-maximale-transparenz.html, accessed 20 April 2023.

3 Goldmann, Matthias; von Loebenstein, Beatriz (2020): "Alles nur geklaut? Zur Rolle juristischer Provenienzforschung bei der Restitution kolonialer Kulturgüter", in: *Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law & International Law (MPIL),* Research Paper no. 2020-19, p. 2. The reasons why this critique is justified are explained in more detail elsewhere: "Provenienzforschung als Disziplin der Rechtsgeschichte", in: Stephan Meder (Ed.) (2022): *Geschichte und Zukunft des Urheberrechts III*, Göttingen, pp. 211–238.

4 Macron, Emmanuel (2017): "Discours de Ouagadougou", in: *Translocations. Anthologie. Eine Sammlung kommentierter Quellentexte zu Kulturgutverlagerungen seit der Antike*, https://translanth.hypotheses.org/ueber/macron, accessed 20 April 2023.

5 On this and the following, see Meder, Stephan (2015): *Doppelte Körper im Recht*, Tübingen, pp. 25–27, 86–94, 119–128.

6 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1986): "Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte. Einleitung", in: *Werke in zwanzig Bänden (1832–1845)*, Vol. 12, Frankfurt am Main, p. 129 (further verification in Meder, 2022, *Provenienzforschung als Disziplin der Rechtsgeschichte*).

7 Hegel, 1986, *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 122. On the contemporary description of non-Europeans "as natural, ahistorical, and lacking culture" see Zimmermann, Andrew (1999): "German Anthropology and the "Natural Peoples", in: *The European Studies Journal,* Vol. 16, p. 97.

8 Savigny, Friedrich Carl von (1840): *System des heutigen römischen Rechts*, Vol. I, Berlin, p. 23, 28.

9 The lex non scripta argument also lays bare the weakness in Hegel's critique of Savigny's theory of legal sources in the former's Elements of the Philosophy of Right (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 1820), § 211, at the end.

10 Savigny, Friedrich Carl von (1814): *Vom Beruf unsrer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft*, Heidelberg, p. 9.

11 "Wir in neueren Zeiten haben sie [die förmlichen Handlungen oraler Rechtskulturen] häufig als Barbarei und Aberglauben verachtet, und uns sehr groß damit gedünkt, daß wir sie nicht haben, ohne zu bedenken, daß auch wir überall mit juristischen Formen versorgt sind", die „von jedem als etwas willkürliches und darum als eine Last empfunden werden", cited after Savigny, 1814, *Vom Beruf*, pp. 10 f. English translation: "We, in latter times, have often made light of them [the formal acts of oral legal cultures] as the creation of barbarism and superstition, and have prided ourselves on not having them, without considering that we, too, are at every step beset with legal forms, [which] are felt by all as something arbitrary, and therefore burthensome." *Of the Vocation of Our Age for Legislation and Jurisprudence.* Translated from the German by Abraham Hayward, London, 1831, p. 27. Available at: http://docenti.unimc.it/luigi.lacche/teaching/2018/18657/files/texts-to-study-preparing-for-the-exam/Savigny%20Of_the_vocation_of_our_age_for_legislati.pdf, accessed 22 April 2023.

12 On *ex post facto* cf. C.1.14.7; Schwarz, Kyrill-A. (2020): *Vertrauensschutz als Verfassungsprinzip*, Baden-Baden, pp. 61–80.

13 Bauer, Paul (1905): "Die Strafrechtspflege über die Eingeborenen der deutschen Schutzgebiete", in: *Archiv des öffentlichen Rechts (AöR)*, Vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 34 f. and 82; Meyer, Felix (1905): *Wirtschaft und Recht der Herero*, Berlin, p. 5; Friedrich, Johann Karl Julius (1911): "Strafrechtsgewohnheiten der Eingeborenen in deutschen Schutzgebieten", in: *Zeitschrift für Kolonialpolitik, Kolonialrecht und Kolonialwirtschaft (ZKKK)*, Vol. XIII, no. 4, p. 299; Karstedt, Oskar (1912): *Beiträge zur Praxis der Eingeborenenrechtsprechung*, Daressalam, p. 49. See also: Utermark, Sören (2012): *Schwarzer Untertan versus schwarzer Bruder*, Kassel, pp. 85–99, 285–303.

14 Meyer, Felix (1907): "Die Erforschung und Kodifikation des Eingeborenenrechts", in: *Zeitschrift für Kolonialpolitik, Kolonialrecht und Kolonialwirtschaft (ZKKK),* Vol. IX, no. 11, p. 847; Friedrich, Julius (1909): "Eingeborenenrecht und Eingeborenenpolitik", in: *Zeitschrift für Kolonialpolitik, Kolonialrecht und Kolonialwirtschaft (ZKKK)*, Vol. XI, no. 6, p. 478.
15 Friedrich, 1909, *Eingeborenenrecht*, p. 300.
16 See, for instance, Dann, Philipp; Hanschmann, Felix (2012): "Postkoloniale Theorie, Recht und Rechtswissenschaft", in: *Kritische Justiz* (KJ), Vol. 45, pp. 127–162; Schönberger, Sophie (2019): "Die Säule von Cape Cross und das Völkerrecht", in: *Historische Urteilskraft*, Vol. 1, pp. 28–31; Goldmann, von Loebenstein, 2020, *Alles nur geklaut?*, pp. 1–26.
17 For an accurate portrayal see Schönberger, 2019, *Die Säule von Cape Cross*, p. 29.
18 Ibid., p. 21. The assumption of unclaimed territory was challenged as early as 1900, however: cf. Meyer, 1905, *Wirtschaft und Recht der Herero*, p. 66.
19 Wieland, Christoph Martin (1984): "Auszüge aus Jacob Forsters Reise um die Welt (1778)", in: *Sämmtliche Werke XIV (1798)*, Hamburg, p. 241 (original italics).
20 Weickmann (1910): "Über die Frage der Schaffung eines selbständigen kolonialen Strafrechts", in: *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Kolonialkongresses*, Berlin, p. 474.
21 Schreiber (1903/04): "Rechtsgebräuche der Eingeborenen der deutschen Schutzgebiete in Afrika", in: *Beiträge zur Kolonialpolitik und Kolonialwirtschaft*, Vol. 5, p. 237; Wilke, in: Weickmann, 1910, *Koloniales Strafrecht*, p. 489; Friedrich, 1909, *Eingeborenenrecht*, p. 299 f.
22 The old discriminatory terms are not used here. See Schreiber (1907), "Zur Kodifikation des Eingeborenen-Rechts", in: *Zeitschrift für Kolonialpolitik, Kolonialrecht und Kolonialwirtschaft (ZKKK)*, Vol. IX, p. 484.
23 See Meder, 2022, *Provenienzforschung als Disziplin der Rechtsgeschichte*.
24 The notorious Lieutenant Lothar von Trotha formulated the idea of genocide in the oft-quoted words: "Within the German border, every Herero with or without a rifle, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, will drive them back to their people and will have them shot as well." Federal Archives (*Bundesarchiv*) Berlin, BArch R 1001/2089, p. 1.
25 E. g. Lederer, Claudia (1994): *Die rechtliche Stellung der Muslime innerhalb des Kolonialrechtssystems*, Würzburg, pp. 71–77.
26 Meder, Stephan (2011): "Valtazar Bogisic und die Historische Schule", in: *Spomenica Valtazara Bogisica*, Vol. 1, Belgrad, pp. 517–537. Albert Hermann Post and Josef Kohler also drew up questionnaires (on the beginnings of legal ethnology in Germany see Meder, 2022, *Provenienzforschung als Disziplin der Rechtsgeschichte*).
27 Meyer, 1907, *Die Erforschung des Eingeborenenrechts*, p. 857.
28 There is a lack of detail on this in recent literature (cf. Meder, 2020*, Provenienzforschung als Disziplin der Rechtsgeschichte).*
29 Schreiber, 1907, *Kodifikation des Eingeborenen-Rechts*, pp. 486, 484.
30 Savigny, Friedrich Carl von (1849): *System des heutigen römischen Rechts*, Vol. VIII, Berlin, pp. 25, 28, 108.
31 Cf. Art. 4 para. 1(a) of the EU Regulation of 17 June 2008 (Rome I): "a contract for the sale of goods shall be governed by the law of the country where the seller has his habitual residence".
32 Bauer, 1905, *Strafrechtspflege über die Eingeborenen*, p. 35.
33 Examples ibid., pp. 80–86, 84; Schreiber, 1907, *Kodifikation des Eingeborenen-Rechts*, p. 485 (parricide, witch-hunting, expulsion of sick individuals, etc.).
34 Bauer, 1905, *Strafrechtspflege über die Eingeborenen*, p. 84. On the "workforce issue", see Utermark, 2012, *Schwarzer Untertan versus schwarzer Bruder*, pp. 60–62 passim.
35 Wick, 1913, *Das Privatrecht*, pp. 4, 21 f.; Schreiber, 1907, *Kodifikation des Eingeborenen-Rechts*, p. 483.
36 Meyer, 1907, *Die Erforschung des Eingeborenenrechts*, p. 868.
37 E.g. Schreiber, 1903/04, *Rechtsgebräuche der Eingeborenen*, pp. 242–255.

38 Schreiber, 1907, *Kodifikation des Eingeborenen-Rechts*, p. 483; Meyer, 1907, *Die Erforschung des Eingeborenenrechts*, p. 867; id., 1905, *Wirtschaft und Recht der Herero*, p. 66–80; Kohler, Josef (1900): "Rechte der deutschen Schutzgebiete", in: *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Rechtswissenschaft*, Vol. XIV, pp. 367–379.

39 Meyer, 1907, *Erforschung des Eingeborenenrechts*, p. 867. There is also mention of purchase or exchange – and of the particularities of a gift, which according to native legal concepts is often based on reciprocity or the requirement of a gift in exchange. For more detail on the particularities of gifts, see Meyer, 1905, *Wirtschaft und Recht der Herero*, pp. 76–78.

40 Meyer, 1907, *Erforschung des Eingeborenenrechts*, p. 867; id., 1905, *Wirtschaft und Recht der Herero*, p. 74 f.; id.: "Das Eingeborenenrecht und seine Kodifikation", in: *Vossische Zeitung*, Supplement to Issue 421, 8 September.

41 Meyer, 1907, *Die Erforschung des Eingeborenenrechts*, p. 867.

42 Ibid., p. 868.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.; Wick, 1913, *Das Privatrecht*, pp. 16–23 (Examples under consideration included acceptance requirements, condition of counter-performance, eliminating risks associated with advance payment, prohibition of sureties, etc.).

45 For more detail on the following see Meder, 2022, *Provenienzforschung als Disziplin der Rechtsgeschichte*, chapter VI.

46 Meyer, 1907, *Erforschung des Eingeborenenrechts*, p. 847. This is not to say that the efforts of jurisprudence in the area of legal anthropology have remained unchallenged (cf. Meder, 2022, *Provenienzforschung als Disziplin der Rechtsgeschichte*).

47 Cf. Meder, Stephan (2012): "Etwas aus Nichts?", in: Manfred Rehbinder (Ed.): *Vom homo oeconomicus zum homo reciprocans?*, Bern, pp. 117–143.

VIII.

Law versus Justice?
An Intercultural Approach to the Problem
of European Collections of Colonial Provenance

The Legal and Moral Conscience of Justice in European Collections of Colonial Provenance

The Bangwa Quest for Restitution and Reparations

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The Legal and Moral Conscience of Justice in European Collections of Colonial Provenance

The Bangwa Quest for Restitution and Reparations

Chief Charles A. Taku

Abstract

The topic of this volume is at the heart of a lively but difficult debate in Africa. The provenance and ownership of the artefacts in European colonial collections are not a subject of reasonable controversy; yet the discussion about ownership of the artefacts and how they came into European colonial collection, while not complicated, is contestable. The available historical record on their acquisition was established by European colonial officers, agents and proxies. The record therefore is unlikely to be a complete and accurate account of the manner in which the artefacts were procured.

The first German colonial incursion in the Bangwa hinterlands of German Kamerun was carried out by Gustav Conrau (1865–1899).[1] He was a German commercial agent, elephant hunter, recruiter and collector on commission, who played a role in German colonial organisation. He came to Bangwa to recruit workers for the colonial plantations along the Atlantic Coast. On arriving in Bangwa, he asked the king Fontem Asonganyi (ca. 1870–1951) to raise the German flag during his stay in 1899.[2] The historical record traces the procurement of some of the most distinctive Bangwa artefacts in the European colonial collection to this German colonial agent.

The death of Gustav Conrau in Bangwa is associated with his unsuccessful attempt to flee following his inability to return the people he had previously

taken to the German plantation. News of his death led to the German colonial administration dispatching a lieutenant of the German Colonial Force, or so-called "*Schutztruppe*", by the name of Kurt Strümpell (1872–1947) to carry out a brutal German expeditionary campaign which exacted collective punishment on the Bangwa people. This and successive campaigns, which lasted about nine years, commenced on 8 February 1900. Apart from the bloodletting and devastation caused, the German expeditionary forces imposed stiff fines and looted artefacts of cultural and spiritual value as well as any objects of treasurable significance they could find. Able-bodied Bangwa men were collectively punished with forced labour on German railway lines, roads and plantations in the coastal areas. It was in this context that most of the Bangwa artefacts later to appear in European colonial collections were looted.

This chapter places the Bangwa artefacts in European colonial collections within the appropriate colonial context in which they were procured. It holds that no reasonable discussion on the subject can be divested from this colonial context, and concludes that these artefacts are a product of colonial historical wrongs and warrant restitution and reparations.

La conscience juridique et morale de la justice dans les collections européennes de provenance coloniale : la quête Bangwa pour la restitution et les réparations (Résumé)

Le thème de ce volume est au cœur d'un débat animé mais difficile en Afrique. La provenance et la propriété des artefacts dans les collections coloniales européennes ne font pas l'objet d'une controverse raisonnable ; cependant, la discussion sur la propriété des artefacts et la façon dont ils sont entrés dans les collections coloniales européennes, sans être compliquée, est contestable. Les documents historiques disponibles sur leur acquisition ont été établis par des officiers, agents et mandataires coloniaux européens. Il est donc peu probable que ces informations soient un compte rendu complet et précis de la manière dont les artefacts ont été obtenus.

La première incursion coloniale allemande dans l'hinterland Bangwa du Kamerun allemand a été menée par Gustav Conrau (1865–1899). C'était un agent commercial allemand, un chasseur d'éléphants, un recruteur et un collecteur à la commission qui a joué un rôle dans l'organisation coloniale allemande. Il est venu à Bangwa pour recruter des travailleurs pour les plantations coloniales de la côte atlantique. À son arrivée à Bangwa, il a demandé au roi Fontem Asonganyi (env. 1870–1951) de hisser le drapeau allemand pendant la durée de son séjour en

1899. L'histoire nous apprend que c'est à cet agent colonial allemand que nous devons l'acquisition de certains des artefacts Bangwa les plus significatifs de la collection coloniale européenne.

La mort de Gustav Conrau à Bangwa est liée à l'échec de sa tentative de fuite après avoir été incapable de ramener les hommes qu'il avait précédemment emmenés dans la plantation allemande. À la suite de son décès, l'administration coloniale allemande a envoyé un lieutenant de la force coloniale allemande, nommé Kurt Strümpell (1872–1947) pour mener une campagne expéditionnaire allemande brutale qui a infligé une punition collective au peuple Bangwa. Cette campagne et les suivantes, qui ont duré environ neuf ans, ont commencé le 8 février 1900. Outre le massacre et la dévastation, les forces expéditionnaires allemandes ont imposé de lourdes amendes et pillé des artefacts de valeur culturelle et spirituelle ainsi que tous les objets de valeur qu'ils ont pu trouver. Les hommes Bangwa valides ont été sanctionnés collectivement par le travail forcé sur les lignes de chemin de fer allemandes, les routes et les plantations dans les régions côtières. C'est dans ce contexte que la plupart des objets d'art Bangwa, qui figureront plus tard parmi les collections coloniales européennes, ont été pillés.

Ce chapitre replace les artefacts Bangwa des collections coloniales européennes dans le contexte colonial dans lequel ils ont été obtenus. Il soutient qu'aucune discussion raisonnable sur le sujet ne peut être dissociée de ce contexte colonial et conclut que ces artefacts sont le fruit de torts historiques coloniaux et justifient des restitutions et des réparations.

Introduction

The Bangwa tribal area became part of British Cameroon pursuant to the treaty of Versailles[3] that placed German colonial territories under the mandate of the League of Nations. According to the British colonial District Officer, Henry Cadman, the Bangwa tribal area is situated north-east of Mamfe Division (currently Manyu Division) along a watershed which forms the international boundary with French Cameroon.[4] Cadman provides an early account of the systemic and widespread crimes committed by German colonial agent Gustav Conrau, known by the Bangwa locals as Tanjok or Majapari (also Majikwara) and of the German expeditionary army deployed to avenge his death by acts including looting and disproportionate collective punishment.[5]

I am a great-grandchild of Fontem Asonganyi[6] the Bangwa King from whom many of the artefacts were looted. Fontem Asonganyi was abducted and detained in Garoua in North Kamerun while many of his subjects who survived the bloodletting were subjected to enforced disappearance, forced labour, collective humiliation and collective fines which were imposed on the Bangwa by the German colonial military commanders. From this perspective, I am a victim of the colonial historical wrongs and crimes which my ancestors and my people suffered. These include the looting of our royal artefacts.

Creative Ingenuity, Conscience and Soul of Black Civilisation

In the introduction to *The Africa Reader: Independent Africa*, Wilfred Cartey and Martin Kilson submitted that, "to validate one's heritage, to explore one's culture, to examine thoroughly those institutions which have persisted through centuries, is perhaps the first step in peoples' search for independence in their quest for freedom from foreign domination".[7] The profound significance of Bangwa artefacts in European colonial collections and the request of the Bangwa for restitution and reparation must be understood in this context.

The Bangwa artefacts may be wrongly interpreted as mere symbols, crafted and revered purely for their aesthetic significance. These artefacts are intrinsically linked to the humanity of the Bangwa, dead, alive and unborn. They are an integral component of Africa's creative ingenuity; the conscience and soul of black civilisation. They symbolise Africa's spirit of independence, freedom, spirituality and the essence of life. To the Bangwa, some of the artefacts are spirit mediums of high cultural and religious significance with which the Bangwa were spiritually connected. Looting and taking them to distant foreign lands deprived the people of their spirituality and subjected them to unspeakable calamities, societal dysfunction and significant depravities.

The significance of the artefacts and the condition of the Bangwa since the artefacts were looted is illustrated by a poem dedicated to the Bangwa Queen sculpture, one of the Bangwa artefacts which was illegally procured by Gustav Conrau. The Bangwa Queen is currently in the hands of the Dapper Foundation in France. The poem titled "The Bangwa Queen, Ngwi Ndem" (God's wife) was written by a noted Cameroonian cultural artist-writer and researcher, Irene Najeme Epie:

Sculpted by the great master carver Anjeh-Nji, for over three hundred years, she graced the confines of the mighty hut, Madonna of the Bangwa race.

Throughout the German punitive wars, she kept her place as Matriarch of all the totem there, to be consulted in times of trouble and need.

Libations were ritually poured upon her as a sign of reverence and respect. Through her benevolence came children and bountiful harvest.

Audience with every other deity could only be granted through her for she was Ngwi Ndem (God's wife).

As war raged on in Bismarck's bid to grab his bit of Africa, her temple was defiled.

Jantzen and Thamalen and their men on mission for Conrau raided her sanctuary and stole her away to their home-place as Zingraff exiled her son Fontem Asonganyi the great to a foreign land.

For forty years or more, she passed from hand to hand, country to country, no one knowing who she was or from whence she came, much less her worth.

Finally, she surfaced in the Franklin Collection in 1930.

Erotic and imposing, as she changed hands, her value in money increased though to those whom she belonged she was priceless.

After ninety years of wandering, She took the podium at Sothebys, her value, a whopping $3.47 million!

She now remains cloistered in the confines of a foreign home waiting to return to the sanctuary of the mighty hut waiting to perform her duties as queen of her people, high up in the hills of Fontem in Lebialem deep in the heart of Cameroon in Central Africa.

She is and always will be the Queen and matriarch of the Bangwa people Ngwi Ndem (God's wife).[8]

For Evelien Campfens,

*notwithstanding the uncertainty concerning the exact circumstances of the loss and diverging views on its voluntary nature, the following circumstances are certain. First, the Bangwa Queen was part of a collection of Bangwa statues taken by Germans in the last year of the nineteenth century and dispatched to the Royal Ethnographic Museum (*Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) in Berlin. This was shortly after the colonial powers had arranged for the division of Africa at the Berlin Conference on West Africa in 1884–85, justifying the appropriation of land and resources by relying on the terra nullius argumentation and their religious duty to spread the 'blessings of civilization'.*[9]

This research finding of Evelien Campfens as well as the historical record support the fact that the Bangwa Queen and the Bangwa artefacts in European colonial collections are part of the European colonial loot no matter the justification provided for procuring them. These artefacts were procured through egregious violations. European colonial powers justified the violations on rights which they allegedly derived from the partition and colonisation of Africa. The appropriation of these objects was an integral part of brutal colonial policy. To the extent that colonialism was deemed legal and justified by the colonial European countries, the looting of the resources and treasures of Africa were deemed legal. The procurement of the Bangwa artefacts occurred in furtherance of this colonial policy which was carried out by German colonial agents.

The museums in which the European collections are on display have consistently pointed to the historical record in their possession to assert and defend their rights of ownership. The right of ownership cannot be settled by the historical record alone, however. The availability of such records is no longer as conclusive as it was during the colonial era when it was established, especially as the original owners of the artefacts were not permitted to participate in the establishment of the record. The former colonial masters are not innocent bystanders on this matter; the persons who appropriated the artefacts were their agents. The colonial powers therefore bear primary responsibility for the appropriation and for the return of these objects to their legitimate owners.

African Heritage

European collections are part of African heritage and patrimony. The museums in which these artefacts are on display did not directly appropriate or loot them. The laws of individual colonial countries guaranteed them property rights over this African patrimony, including the Bangwa Queen, the Bangwa King and the personal symbols of power and authority of my great-grandfather. International law expects erstwhile colonial powers to respect their treaty obligations towards former colonies by ensuring that the independence which they were granted was complete and effective. Former colonial powers have not taken significant measures to ensure that colonial artefacts are returned to the communities from which they were looted, nor

have they paid reparations for the historical wrongs which were committed during the colonial era. They have not encouraged or organised intercultural discussions between the current depositories of the artefacts and their legitimate Bangwa African original owners.

Victim Accounts of Colonial Crimes against the Bangwa

The priceless artefacts and the instruments of power and authority of my great grandfather Fontem Asonganyi were looted during a brutal expeditionary campaign led by the German colonial military officer Kurt von Strümpell on 8 February 1900 to avenge the death of Gustav Conrau in 1898. On arriving back in Germany, Kurt von Strümpell donated these items to the Municipal Museum in Brunswick, Germany. One of the more memorable pieces was sold to the Municipal Museum in Cologne in 1956. The National Museum in Berlin, however, was the depository and the centre of the proliferation of Bangwa artefacts which had been looted by Conrau and other German colonial agents worldwide.[10]

Fontem Defang, the king who succeeded Fontem Asonganyi, provided an account of the indiscriminate collective devastation and looting caused by the German expeditionary force in Bangwa to Elizabeth Dunstan in 1963. He stated that the German expeditionary campaign lasted nine years,[11]during which my great-grandfather Fontem Asonganyi was captured and imprisoned far from his kingdom. He was a prisoner of war. Treasures which were looted under such circumstances cannot be said to have been legally and legitimately procured. Under the laws and customs of war and the principle of proportionality, the degree of devastation that was caused and the looting that occurred cannot be legally justified. Not then and not now.

The wider and immediate context under which the artefacts were procured made the free will of the Bangwa legitimate owners impossible. The widespread and systematic looting which occurred was a consequence of the partition of Africa and the forceful subjugation of Africans to European colonial rule. Adekeye Adebajo describes this systemic policy as the curse of Berlin, during which rules were set for the partition of Africa (1884–1885) under the supervision of German "Iron Chancellor" Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898).[12] Africans were neither consulted nor were they recognised as subjects of international law; as a consequence, the protections offered by the international law were not available to

them. The German punitive expedition and the looting of the Bangwa artefacts was ongoing when European countries were negotiating a peaceful future and better living conditions for their people during the first and second world peace conferences in 1889 and 1907. Africans, the owners of the looted treasures and resources, were not at the negotiating tables of these conferences. Nor did the rules of international law and conventions discussed and signed during these conferences prevent the two world wars from occurring. The ends of both wars and the international treaties and legal orders which were put in place by the victorious allied powers did not change the status of Africa. They did not address the atrocious crimes which Africa had suffered due to European imperialism and colonialism. Rather, German colonial possessions in Africa were partitioned among the allied victorious powers by the League of Nations. The status of the historical wrongs suffered by the Bangwa under colonial rule was not redressed.

This did not, however, dampen the hopes of the Bangwa, from generation to generation, to find and bring back the looted artefacts. The fact that I have come forth more than a century and two decades after the German punitive expedition to seek the restitution and the payment of reparations for our Bangwa ancestral artefacts bears witness to the fact that our cry for justice will never abate until they are returned to their natural environment back in Bangwa and reparations are paid.

Restitution and Reparations

Chief MKO Abiola (1937–1998), the venerated Nigerian businessman and politician, forcefully presented Africa's case for the restitution of Africa's looted artefacts and the payment of reparations in his keynote address at the biennial conference of the African Bar Association which took place in Abuja Nigeria between 18–22 March 1991. Chief Abiola forcefully pointed out that:

> *The Iraqis committed terrible crimes against the Kuwaiti people during six months of brutal occupation. Tell us a single thing that Iraq did to Kuwait which the colonial masters did not do to us for six centuries and still continue to do?* [...] *If Iraq was punished for not returning stolen treasures from Kuwait, we too deserve an immediate return of our plundered treasures now on display in the magnificent museums of Europe and America.*[13]

A distinguished historian and descendant of King Fontem Asonagnyi, Dr George Atem, strongly submitted that the case for the return of the artefact is legitimate and legally justified considering the coercive environment which was created and controlled through brutal colonial rule.[14]

It is well established in international law that colonialism is a crime against humanity. It violates the right to self-determination enshrined in the UN Charter and the International Human Rights Conventions.[15] In recognition of the illegal and unjust nature of colonialism, the United Nations passed Resolution 1514 (XV) for the independence of colonial countries and peoples,[16] by virtue of which many African countries obtained independence from 1960. Independence occurred, however, without the repatriation or restitution of the African heritage; resources and treasures which had been looted and continued to be kept in European colonial collections. I believe that mere political independence without repatriation or restitution of the African heritage currently held in the European colonial collections is incomplete. This kind of so-called independence is an empty shell.

To mitigate the enduring effect of this historical wrong, the United Nations Human Rights Advisory Committee adopted Resolution 20002/5 of 12 August 2002 on the recognition of responsibility and reparation for massive and flagrant violations of human rights which constitute crimes against humanity and which took place during the period of slavery, colonialism and wars of conquest. In its third point, the resolution requested all countries concerned to acknowledge their historical responsibility and the consequences which follow from it, to take initiatives which would assist, notably through debate on the basis of accurate information, in the raising of public awareness of the disastrous consequences of periods of slavery, colonialism and wars of conquest and the necessity for just reparation. In this resolution, the United Nations Human Rights Advisory Committee recognised state responsibility in providing a solution to this and other historical wrongs. International law expects state parties to respect this *erga omnes* obligation as well as other obligations towards former colonies at independence and thereafter. Former colonial powers have done little, however, to encourage dialogue between contesting parties regarding the artefacts in the European collections.

As stated above, the independence of colonial countries and peoples cannot be said to be complete when these artefacts are retained in European colonial collections and displayed as symbols of colonialism and the impunity of its inhuman criminality. This chapter strongly argues, therefore, for the restitution of all African artefacts in general and the Bangwa looted artefacts

in particular in European colonial collections. Additionally, appropriate reparations should be paid to the affected communities from in which the artefacts were looted by brutal colonial means.

Notwithstanding the enduring effects of colonialism from generation to generation, the case for reparations is mired in controversy. This is due to the fact that some governments and people glorify colonialism. Margaret Moore writes that,

> *The discussion of reparations is related to the question of what precisely is the wrong of colonialism. The relationship between justice and colonialism may seem straightforward: almost everyone nowadays agrees that colonialism as a system was deeply unjust. But this conceals widespread disagreement over the very nature of colonialism, as well as over the features that make it unjust.*[17]

This disagreement necessitates a legitimate legal mechanism to provide justice to victims of colonial rule. Such a mechanism will provide appropriate remedy for the restitution of the Bangwa artefacts in European colonial collections. It will determine the reparations which must be paid for the atrocities committed through colonial rule in the affected community.

Like the historical records of colonial collections and colonialism generally, the laws governing the legal status of these looted artefacts were established by the European colonial powers. These laws enabled European imperialism and colonialism with its brutal regimes and enduring consequences, and the looting of the Bangwa artefacts. Law from this perspective was a bane and an enabler of criminality rather than a balm or elixir for justice.

Intercultural Dialogue

The intercultural approach may provide the opportunity for contestants to the European collections to present a new face of humanity away from the European colonial past with a message of hope, peace and justice. It may be an opportunity for the Dapper Foundation in France, the National Museum in Berlin and other museums across Europe to provide access and restitution of our spiritual mediums, products of Black civilisation, creative ingenuity and symbols of life and power which are in their custody. But until now, the

European colonial powers which looted African artefacts have been indifferent to our persistent calls to facilitate the return of these artefacts or to organise intercultural dialogue to examine the competing claims over the artefacts.

The conference organised by the PAESE Project *Provenance Research on Collections from Colonial Contexts – Principles, Approaches, Challenges* took place on 21–23 June 2021. I was a panellist for the topic "Law versus Justice? An Intercultural Approach to the Problem of European Collections of Colonial Provenance". This chapter derives from my contribution to that conference. A key issue that aroused my interest there was the resort to intercultural dialogue to attempt to bridge the differences between the museums and private holdings which are custodians of the European collections and the communities from which the artefacts originated.

After the conference, I received an invitation on behalf of His Majesty King Fon Fontem Asabaton, from the Municipal Museum Brunswick (*Städtisches Museum Braunschweig*) on 30 June 2021, which I honoured from 19–22 July 2021. This visit also took me to the Municipal Museum in Cologne, to which I received another invitation. These invitations kick-started the beginning of the intercultural dialogue which was one of the subjects of the PAESE conference.

On 20 July 2021, I became the first Bangwa in a century and two decades to come face-to-face with the instruments of authority and spiritual power of my great grandfather, His Majesty King Asonganyi, since they were looted by Kurt Strümpell and taken away to Germany. This historic visit was formalised by a joint press statement signed by the director of the Brunswick museum, Dr Peter Joch, and myself. The news of my visit was published in two local newspapers in Brunswick and the Pan African Vision in Washington D. C.[18] The intercultural dialogue thus initiated between the municipal museums in Brunswick and Cologne is an important milestone. It is hoped that this initiative will encourage the National Museum in Berlin, the Dapper Foundation in France and other museums and facilities still holding the Bangwa artefacts to come forth to engage in dialogue with the affected victim community. This intercultural dialogue is not a bar to the request for restitution of the artefacts and the payment of reparations by the erstwhile colonial powers for the historical wrongs committed by them and their colonial agents during colonial rule.

The actions of these two museums must not, however, be misconstrued to represent a changing trend from the colonial policy which legitimised the looting and glorified colonialism. The two museums have set a determined and laudable example for a new beginning. It is not obvious that others will

follow their example, the glorification of colonialism and the legitimisation of the looting of these artefacts being rooted in the historical and international legal framework and value systems of European colonial architecture. The colonial historical record detailing how the objects were procured or looted tends to portray the colonial looting agents as heroes, and was written to immortalise and eternalise colonialism while it lasted. The historical record constitutes the evidence and rationale for the resistance to restitution. It sanitises the brutality with which sacred sanctuaries of revered spiritual mediums were violated. It justifies the plunder and looting of precious salvific agents which united and held the spirit, the soul and the life of our people together. These artefacts on display in museums and private holdings across Europe symbolise the conquest, domination and humiliation of the Bangwa people and Africans in general.

Conclusion

A recovery of these artefacts will redeem the Bangwa from humiliation and restore the spiritual lifelines that held them together. It will mitigate the calamities which the Bangwa have endured since these artefacts were taken to foreign lands. The spiritual attachment to the Bangwa Queen who is held in captivity in the Dapper Foundation in France, the political and spiritual symbols of power and the personal property of Fontem Asonganyi and several other artefacts on display in Museums in Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the USA is unshakeable.

These artefacts belonged to my ancestors who died defending our freedom and our rights of ownership. The artefacts belonged to the Bangwa, their offspring who are alive, and to millions yet unborn. The display of these artefacts by the colonial masters and their successors-in-title symbolises power and wealth which was acquired through force. For the Bangwa, it conveys enduring feelings of shame, humiliation and spiritual deprivation. To Africans generally, the European colonial collections symbolise the fact that colonial powers gave African countries independence but retained their very essence of life. Africa was given cosmetic independence while remaining imprisoned to the ghosts of colonialism and the emboldened curse of Berlin. Refusing even to engage in dialogue with the affected communities and families from

which these artefacts were looted or procured to find acceptable solutions to this collective agony, victimisation and shame prolongs the agony of the Bangwa and other affected communities but not their resolve to press for restitution and reparations.

A Post-Conference Development

The international conference on *Provenance Research on Collections from Colonial Contexts – Principles, Approaches, Challenges* (21–23 June 2021) provided a platform, awareness and an opportunity, which had eluded the Bangwa since the German invasion and the punitive expedition, to come into direct contact with our looted artefacts with a realistic prospect of one day bringing them back to their natural environment in our ancestral home. During the conference, on 23 June 2021, I broke down and cried uncontrollably when the renowned researcher and distinguished cultural heritage law specialist Evelien Campfens projected an enlarged picture of my great-grandfather Fontem Asonganyi and the Bangwa Queen onto the screen during her presentation, which focused on the Bangwa Queen. Prior to her presentation, I had read her well researched article, "The Bangwa Queen: Artifact or Heritage?".[19]

Prior to the conference, Evelien had facilitated contact between Isabella Bozsa and myself. Isabella is a provenance researcher in African History at Leibniz University in Hanover and a participant in the joint research project on provenance research in Lower Saxony (North Germany), with the acronym PAESE.[20] On 15 February 2021, Isabella sent an email inviting me to the conference. She also expressed the wish to have further discussions about the Bangwa cultural objects which were in the municipal museum in Brunswick. I sent a reply the same day, accepting both offers.

My presence during Evelien's presentation at the conference was the closest any person with a direct link to Fontem Asonganyi had been to a strong case for the restitution of the Bangwa ancestral cultural heritage objects in European colonial possessions being made. When the time came for me to present my own paper, shortly after Evelien's presentation, I did not know that the conference would be the platform from which the route to my ancestral looted artefacts, the imprisoned soul of our spirituality and the conscience of our civilisation would be found.

Here is how it unravelled. In the evening of 23 June 2021, after the conference, I received the following email from Isabella Bozsa:

> *Dear Chief Charles Taku*
> *I was very humbled and touched by your talk today at the conference. We are very happy that you accepted to participate as your contribution and perspective was so important and valuable. Thank you so much. As the pandemic seems to be improving in Germany, I would like to ask if you will be maybe available for a visit to Brunswick in July. It would be a great pleasure and honour to invite you to the museum.*

The municipal museum in Brunswick is the depository of the instruments of power, Lefem spirit mediums and ritualistic objects which enhanced the Bangwa efforts and resistance against German aggression and ruthless punitive expedition, which was led by Kurt Strümpell, a citizen of Brunswick. From there, some of the cultural and spiritual objects he stole found their way to the municipal museum in Cologne and potentially elsewhere in Europe.

I honoured the invitation and, several months later, a delegation of the Bangwa led by His Majesty King Fontem Asabaton visited the municipal museum in Brunswick at the invitation of the mayor and the municipality of Brunswick. Recounting in graphic detail the transgenerational harm and devastation which the looting of our spiritual objects caused, the king and his delegation made a strong and emphatic request for the restitution of these cultural and spiritual heritage objects to the ancestral natural environment from where they were looted.

The final decision is still pending. For now, we harbour the guarded optimism that our looted ancestral artefacts, the soul of our spirituality and the conscience of our civilisation, may soon find their way back to the majestic natural spiritual environment from which they were looted. We are inspired by the fighting spirit of our ancestors to pursue the return of these pantheons of our cultural and spiritual heritage. They are our identity, our symbols of power, our spirit mediums, our Lefem authority and the consciences of our civilisation.

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VIII.

Law versus Justice?

An Intercultural Approach to the Problem of European Collections of Colonial Provenance

Law versus Justice?
An Intercultural Approach to the Problem
of European Collections of Colonial Provenance

Contested Heritage

A Human Rights Law Approach to Claims

Evelien Campfens

Abstract

A common response to the issue of colonial looting is that no legal rules apply. But is that so? This chapter argues that it is not a lack of legal norms that explains this belated discussion but, rather, the asymmetrical application of norms. Moreover, the proposition is that a human rights law approach to claims, focusing on the heritage value of cultural objects – instead of a focus on exclusive ownership interests and events in the past – offers tools to structure this field.

Cultural objects have a protected status because of their intangible heritage value to people, as symbols of an identity, since the first days of international law. Despite this, throughout history, cultural objects were looted, smuggled and traded on. At some point, their character tends to change from protected heritage to valuable art or commodity in a new setting, subject to the (private) laws in the country where it ended up. This chapter proposes that, irrespective of acquired rights of new possessors, original owners should still be able to rely on a "heritage title" if there is a continuing cultural link. The term aims to capture the legal bond between cultural objects and people, distinct from ownership, and is informed by universally applicable human rights law norms, such as everyone's right to (access one's) culture.

The chapter is built up as follows: Section 1 starts out with a short overview of legal models for claims to lost cultural objects. Section 2 will analyse developments

in the field of international cultural heritage law, a field of law that increasingly is intertwined with human rights law. Section 3 will further expand on the proposition of a human rights' approach to claims to contested heritage, and on the notion of "heritage title" that is meant as a tool to address the intangible interests at stake.

Patrimoine contesté : une approche des revendications fondée sur les droits humains (Résumé)

Une réponse courante à la question du pillage colonial est qu'aucune règle juridique ne s'applique. Mais est-ce vraiment le cas ? Cet article soutient que ce n'est pas le manque de normes légales qui explique cette discussion (tardive), mais plutôt l'application asymétrique des normes. En outre, la proposition est qu'une approche des revendications fondée sur les droits humains, axée sur la valeur patrimoniale des objets culturels – au lieu de se concentrer sur les intérêts exclusifs de propriété – pourrait offrir des outils pour structurer ce domaine.

Les objets culturels jouissent d'un statut spécial, protégé en raison de leur valeur «patrimoniale» immatérielle pour les personnes, en tant que symboles d'une identité, depuis la naissance du droit international. Malgré cela, tout au long de l'histoire, les objets culturels ont été pillés, passés en contrebande et échangés. À un certain moment, leur statut a tendance à passer de celui de patrimoine protégé à celui d'art ou de marchandise de valeur dans un nouvel environnement, soumis aux lois (privées) du pays dans lequel ils ont atterri. Cet article propose que, indépendamment des droits acquis par les nouveaux propriétaires, les propriétaires ou créateurs d'origine puissent toujours se prévaloir d'un «titre patrimonial» s'il existe un lien culturel permanent. Le concept vise à saisir le lien juridique entre les objets culturels et les personnes, indépendamment de la propriété, et s'appuie sur des normes de droits humains universellement applicables, telles que le droit de tout un chacun à (accéder à) sa culture.

Ce chapitre est construit comme suit. La section 1 commence avec une brève vue d'ensemble des modèles juridiques pour les réclamations concernant les objets culturels perdus. La section 2 analyse ensuite les évolutions dans le domaine des lois internationales sur le patrimoine culturel, un domaine juridique qui est de plus en plus lié aux droits humains. La section 3 développera la proposition d'une approche des droits humains pour les revendications relatives au patrimoine contesté, ainsi que la notion de «titre patrimonial» qui est destinée à servir d'outil pour répondre aux intérêts immatériels spécifiques en jeu.

1. Contested Cultural Objects: Stolen Possession or Lost Heritage?[1]

Cultural objects have a dual nature. They can be seen as possessions, and as such they can be owned and traded and are subject to property law regimes. Yet, it is their intangible (cultural or heritage) value that sets them apart from other goods. That intangible value is an all but static notion: an artefact may be valued by the general public because of its scientific or aesthetic value, but at the same time be of spiritual importance to a community, it may be symbolic of the cultural identity of a people, or it may be a special family heirloom. Whereas, in broad terms, national private law addresses cultural object as possessions, international public law addresses the intangible cultural and heritage interests at stake.

Cultural Objects as Possessions

Private law is the field that traditionally arranges legal claims over lost cultural objects. Laws on ownership and property, however, differ widely per country, with many variations on the theme of how title over a (stolen) good can be transferred to a new possessor. Common law jurisdictions (e.g. the US and the UK) accord relatively strong rights to the dispossessed former owner on the basis of the principle that a thief cannot convey good title, whereas in civil law countries (most European countries) the position of the new possessor is stronger.

Depending on the adoption by a specific country of international treaties that arrange for the restitution of looted cultural objects, this domestic private law will have been adapted to international standards. Nevertheless, these rules only apply to claims that are based on a loss after both states adopted the convention, and only in as far the country where the object is located implemented these standards in national law and obviously do not cover historical cases such as Nazi looted art or colonial takings.

Cultural Objects as Heritage

From a heritage point of view, cultural objects are valued because of their intangible value to people. Throughout history and in most cultures, objects that are symbolic of a religious or historical identity tend to enjoy legal protection in their original setting. Illustrative in this respect is a 1925 Indian court ruling holding that a contested Hindu family idol "could not be seen as a mere chattel which was owned".[2] This intangible heritage value of cultural objects has been the rationale underlying the protected status of cultural objects in international law since its foundation.[3] In that sense Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) already in 1625 declares cultural objects a protected category – in his turn referring to the writings of Polybius and Cicero – where he argues these are exempt from the righ to pillage in times of war:

> *There are some things of that nature,* […] *which even common reason will have spared during war.* […] *Such are temples, porticos, statues, and the like. Cicero much commends Marcellus, because he took such a particular care to preserve all the buildings of Syracuse both public and private, sacred and prohpane, as he had been sent with an army, rather to defend than take the city.* […]. *Our ancestors used to leave to the conquered, what things were grateful to them, but to us of no great importance.*[4]

With regard to wartime looting, the legal obligation to return cultural objects is well established in international law. The peace treaties after the Napoleonic Wars at the outset of the 19th century are generally considered the turning point in the development of the law in this respect: restitution of dispersed heritage on the basis of territoriality – instead of "winners takers" – was declared a principle of justice "amongst civilised nations".[5] Eventually, the legal obligation to return cultural objects looted in times of war was codified in the First Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict Hague Convention.[6]

In spite of the fact that these principles, in the European context, were long recognised, colonial powers generally did not acknowledge legal obligations to return cultural objects to their former colonies. This means that claims that are based on the unlawfulness of the looting at the time are highly complex. In my view, therefore, a human rights' approach offers better prospects to regulate this field. Because it focuses on interests of people today.

2. Human Rights Law Notions

Disputes relating to contested cultural objects do not necessarily have to be approached as issues of property or ownership, but may also be approached as cases that, in their essence, are about lost heritage. This implicates a step back from the model based on absolute and exclusive rights, and towards a model where collective and shared identity values are central to rights with regard to the specific object. The 2005 Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (the Faro Convention), for example, very well illustrates such shift in approach. It defines cultural heritage as "a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, *independently of ownership*, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions".[7] Although the Faro Convention does not aim to create rights – but rather voices policy aims for governments –, it opened the door to a new understanding of cultural objects: away from a focus on property and exclusive rights, and towards a recognition of the collective heritage interests at stake.

Heritage Community

The Faro Convention introduced the concept of "heritage communities": "A heritage community consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations".[8] This idea of heritage communites as "right holders" underscores that, apart from owners, more parties may have legitimate interests in the same herirage. In relation to contested cultural objects these may be creators, former and present owners, but also the general public – reflecting the importance of public access to "universal heritage". Such an approach contrasts with the "all-or-nothing" outcome in an ownership approach: under applicaton of ownership law only one party would be seen as the legitimate "right holder", namely the owner. The notion of heritage communities allowes for more flexibility. It also better suits spiritually important objects or archaeological finds, cultural objects that in their original setting often were inalienable communal property and could not be privately owned. Nevertheless, this special legal status did not "stick" to the objects: after entrance into another jurisdiction they may well be privately owned and traded, and are treated as any other commodity.

Equitable Solutions to Competing Claims

In as far as it concerns competing claims, the Faro Convention provides for the rule that states should "encourage reflection on the ethics and methods of presentation of the cultural heritage, as well as respect for diversity of interpretations"; and "establish processes for conciliation to deal equitably with situations where contradictory values are placed on the same cultural heritage by different communities".[9]

This preference for cooperative solutions reflects soft law and (best) practice in the field of contested cultural objects. The 2015 Operational Guidelines to the 1970 UNESCO Convention, for example, suggest in the event of competing claims (to national cultural property) "to realize [...] interests in a compatible way through, inter alia, loans, temporary exchange of objects [...], temporary exhibitions, joint activities of research and restoration".[10] Such creative solutions are, in fact, not uncommon in practice as it is. For example, when France in 2011 returned looted scriptures to (South) Korea on a renewable long-term loan – to circumvent laws prohibiting French museums to deaccession public collections –, it separated ownership rights from rights to access, use and control.[11]

A solution mirrored by the Korean example is the transfer of title of (presumably looted) Nok and Sokoto statuettes by France to Nigeria, whereas they physically remained in France under the terms of a 25-year loan.[12] In the Korean example physical possession, whereas in the Nigerian example rehabilitation and a formal recognition, were probably key. Besides, also in the field of Nazi looted art, the 1998 Washington Principles prescribe "fair and just solutions, depending on the circumstances of the case". This means it does not add up to a right to the return of full ownership rights, but a right to an equitable solution. Solutions in that field not seldom involve a financial settlement, where recognition by addressing the ownership history (e.g. in a plaque in a museum) also may feature as (part of) solutions found.[13]

A Human Right to Access to (one's) Culture

As mentioned, the Faro Convention does not create binding rights. Nevertheless, binding international human rights instruments provide for a number of rights that may be relevant. Of key importance in that respect is the evolution of the right of "access to culture", as it developed from the right to culture in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural

Rights (ICESCR).[14] According to the 2009 General Comment on that right to culture this has come to include “access to cultural goods”, and this implicates that states should adopt “specific measures aimed at achieving respect for the right of everyone [...] to have access to their own cultural [...] heritage and to that of others.”[15] The 2011 Report of the independent expert in the field of cultural rights, Farida Shaheed, is furthermore instructive where she concludes that:

> *The right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage forms part of international human rights law, finding its legal basis, in particular, in the right to take part in cultural life, the right of members of minorities to enjoy their own culture, and the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination and to maintain, control, protect and develop cultural heritage.*[16]

Shaheed also observes that “varying degrees of access and enjoyment may be recognised, taking into consideration the diverse interests of individuals and groups according to their relationship with specific cultural heritages.” Similar to the Faro Convention, she furthermore makes interesting distinctions between:

- (a) originators or “source communities”, communities which consider themselves as the custodians/owners of a specific cultural heritage, people who are keeping cultural heritage alive and/or have taken responsibility for it;
- (b) individuals and communities, including local communities, who consider the cultural heritage in question an integral part of the life of the community, but may not be actively involved in its maintenance;
- (c) scientists and artists; and
- (d) general public accessing the cultural heritage of others.[17]

Although this list is of a general nature and not per se aimed at lost cultural objects, it underscores that the specific social function of cultural objects, and their meaning to certain (groups of) people, may define entitlement. Moreover, it signals a trend away from national interests and towards community interests.

This model where entitlement to lost cultural objects is based on a “right” of access to one’s cultural heritage, resonates in recent declarations and soft law instruments.[18] The 2019 German Framework Principles, for example, provides as rationale that “all people should have the possibility to access their rich material culture [...] to connect with it and to pass it on to future generations”.[19]

UNDRIP

While the right of "access to culture" in the binding ICESCR may seem vague and unspecified, the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is clear and specific. The UNDRIP entitles indigenous peoples to rights with regard to their cultural heritage, including their lost cultural property.[20] In Article 11(2), this is defined as a right of "redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs".[21] Article 12 deals with rights to objects of special importance – providing for a right to "use and control" where lost ceremonial objects are concerned and a straightforward right to repatriation for objects containing human remains.[22]

Since these provisions are acknowledged as part of the (binding) right of access to culture insofar as the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples is concerned, this is an important instrument in the field of colonial collections.[23] That it is more than "just" a declaration is illustrated by the fact that the UNDRIP was adopted after 20 years of negotiations, by now is supported almost universally, and – in as far as the cultural rights are concerned – is considered having the status of (binding) customary international law.[24] States, in other words, are under the obligation to assist indigenous peoples in providing "redress through effective mechanisms" and to "enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned".[25]

As to the question of what exactly constitutes an indigenous people, the UNDRIP deliberately abstained from a definition to allow for the flexible evolution of the concept.[26] In general terms the link between people, their land and culture, and self-identification as a distinct community, are considered decisive factors.[27]

3. Heritage Title

In my view, the approach taken in the UNDRIP is useful in a more general sense because it relies on today's interests and rights implicated by a continuing situation. Remaining separated from cultural objects that are particularly meaningful to specific people, for example because they are sacred, could add up to a violation of human rights. This, as opposed to a focus on the illegality of the acquisition in the past in a property approach. A shift in focus, in other words, from events in the *past* towards the interests of people *today*.

A second point is that this approach enables the classification of objects, depending on their social function and identity value for the people involved. UNDRIP differentiates for example between ceremonial objects, objects containing human remains and a general category of cultural objects "taken without free, prior and informed consent".[28] In that sense, differences in entitlement follow from the type of object and identity values concerned.

A third element is that the rights involved are defined in terms of access, return or equitable solutions, not in terms of (the restitution of) exclusive ownership rights. Rights, in other words, tailored to the interests involved, enabling remedies that also take account of the interests of other right holders, such as new possessors who gained ownership title under a specific national regime.

As mentioned above, this reflects soft law that promotes creative and more flexible solutions. On the level of human rights law the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights is noteworthy in this regard. In the 2015 *Kaliña and Lokono Peoples v. Suriname* case the Court acknowledged, first of all, pre-existing rights of the indigenous peoples with respect to their ancestral lands. The court futhermore held that the right of access can be compatible with rights of other title holders.[29] It ruled that "the State must establish, by mutual agreement with the Kaliña and Lokono peoples and the third parties, rules for peaceful and harmonious coexistence in the lands in questions, which respect the uses and customs of these peoples and ensure their access to the Marowijne River".

The notion that thus emerges can be denoted as "heritage title".[30] Entitlement in this respect depends on a continuing cultural link between people and cultural objects, and the rights involved are defined in terms of access and control – not in terms of absolute and exclusive ownership. Although

we are accustomed to defining relations between objects and people by way of exclusive ownership, this exclusivity does not always fit cultural *property*. The reason for that is that the intangible heritage values – especially those of earlier foreign owners – are not sufficiently covered by regular ownership laws. Dependant on the type of object and the values it represents, heritage title gives rise to equitable. The specific circumstances and interests involved should determine what is "equitable". Althought, the intangible heritage value of an object may not be the sole point of reference in disputes regarding contested cultural objects, it is important, to acknowledge it as a legitimate interest.

Access to Justice

A last question that needs to be addressed is how to make heritage title operational. Alternative dispute resolution and cultural diplomacy on the interstate level are often promoted as being best equipped to solve disputes in this field.[31] However valid this may be in specific cases, access to justice eventually is key, not only in the recognition of unequal power relations, but also for the development of norms in a field that is hindered by legal insecurity. The question of whether norms can be made operational obviously depends on their binding force. Here, hurdles still exist as the law is evolving. Nevertheless, heritage title may operate as a "narrative norm".[32] Heritage title should thus instruct judges on the interpretation of open norms that exist in all jurisdictions, for example concepts such as "morality", "general principles of (international) law" or "reasonableness and fairness".[33]

In terms of a straightforward human rights claim, the question is which forum could evaluate a claim based on the argument that the continued deprivation of a specific cultural object is an infringement of the right to "access to culture". The Optional Protocol to the ICESCR offers a complaints procedure. This procedure, however, is limited to nationals or groups in the State responsible for the alleged violation, whereas claimants are not usually nationals of a holding State, and is subject to ratification of the Protocol by that State.[34] Within the European human rights system, while a stumbling block is that the European Convention on Human Rights does not include a right to culture, claims could be addressed through the human right to property and a number of other rights.[35]

An interesting roadmap on how to proceed is given by the Colombian Constitutional Court in a 2017 case concerning the “Quimbaya Treasure”.[36] In its ruling, the Court ordered the Colombian government to pursue – on behalf of the indigenous Quimbaya people – the return from Spain of a treasure of 122 golden objects lost at the close of the nineteenth century. The Court argued that under today’s standards of international law – referring to human rights law but interestingly also to the 1970 UNESCO Convention –, indigenous peoples are entitled to their lost cultural objects. *How* such a claim is pursued is left to the discretion of the government, but according to the Court *the fact that* governments should work towards this goal is clear.[37] In a first reaction to the subsequent request by the Colombian authorities for the return of the Quimbaya Treasure, the Spanish authorities, however, declined on the grounds that today the Quimbaya Treasure has become Spanish patrimony.

This, of course, has long been a common European reaction to restitution requests by former colonised people. It is also reminiscent of the (initial) position that the Austrian government took in the *Altmann* case concerning Nazi-looted art: due to national patrimony laws the Klimt paintings that were lost during the Nazi era were inalienable Austrian national cultural heritage. In that case, however, after US Supreme Court established a violation of international law, the Austrian government accepted to abide by an arbitral award and the rights of Altmann prevailed.[38] It illustrates the difficulties in this field, but also highlights the potential of the human rights framework as a universal language to further develop this field.

Conclusion

Although the rationale underlying the protected status of cultural objects in international law is their heritage value, claims to contested cultural objects generally are perceived as a matter of ownership. By doing that, the heritage interests of people cannot adequately be addressed. Soft law instruments, on the other hand, increasingly do acknowledge the interests of former owners in their lost cultural objects. An ethical approach and alternative dispute resolution for settling these types of cases that follows from such a soft law approach, may therefore at times be the best way forward. From a legal perspective, however, this raises a fundamental question. If we believe this is a matter of (delayed) justice, the role of law is to provide for a framework where similar cases can be dealt with similarly.

This paper therefore suggests a human rights law approach to structure this field. Human rights law is particularly equipped to address heritage and identity values; they are of a (more or less) universal nature, and may penetrate and shape how private law is being interpreted and adjudicated. The right of "access to culture" as developed in the realm of the right to culture in Article 15 (1) ICESCR can be a point of reference in such an approach.

1 This paper is based on Campfens, Evelien (2021): "Contested cultural objects: property or heritage?", in: Holly O'Farrell; Pieter J. ter Keurs (Eds): *Museums, Collections and Society. Yearbook 2020*, Leiden, pp. 59–75.
2 *Mullick v Mullick* (1925) LR LII Indian Appeals 245, cited in Prott, Lyndel V.; O'Keefe, Patrick J. (1992): "Cultural Heritage or Cultural Property?", in: *International Journal of Cultural Property*, Vol. 1, p. 307. However, when it comes to the protection of *foreign* heritage interests such special treatment is not a given.
3 On the historical development, see: Campfens, Evelien (2019): "The Bangwa Queen: Artifact or Heritage?", in: *International Journal of Cultural Property*, Vol. 26, pp. 75–110.
4 Grotius, Hugo (1625): *De Jure Belli Ac Pacis* (On the Law of War and Peace), Vol. III, chapter 12, V. For this translation see https://oll.libertyfund.org/page/grotius-war-peace#lf1032-03_label_1362, accessed 10 March 2023.
5 Problematic is that international law for long was biased in this respect. A discussion in Campfens, 2021, *Contested cultural objects*.
6 *The Hague Convention*, adopted 14 May 1954. 249 UNTS 358.
7 *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (adopted 27 October 2005), CETS No. 199 (Faro Convention) (emphasis added), Art. 6.
8 *Faro Convention*, Article 2(b).
9 *Faro Convention*, Article 7 (b).
10 Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, adopted at the UNESCO Meeting of States Parties, 18–20 May 2015 (C70/15/3.MSP/11), para. 19.
11 *Décret No.2011–527 Portant publication de l'accord entre le Gouvernement de la République Française et le Gouvernement de la République de Corée relatif aux manuscrits royaux de la Dynastie Joseon (ensemble une annexe)*, adopted 7 February 2011, see https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000024022738?r=g7YcXLuG3d, accessed 10 March 2023.
12 Cornu, Marie; Renold, Marc-André (2010): "New Developments in the Restitution of Cultural Property: Alternative Means of Dispute Resolution", in: *International Journal of Cultural Property*, Vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 1–31, here pp. 20–21.
13 Campfens, Evelien (2021): *Cross-border claims to cultural objects*, The Hague, p. 106.
14 Article 15(1)(a) of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted 16 December 1966), 993 UNTS 3 (ICESCR). See also Art. 27 of the UDHR.
15 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 21 (2009), UN Doc E/C.12/GC/21, under "Normative content", paras 7, 49(d), 50.
16 Human Rights Council: "Report of the Independent Expert in the Field of Cultural Rights (Farida Shaheed)" submitted pursuant to resolution 10/23 of the Human Rights Council, 22 March 2010 [Doc A/HRC/14/36.
17 Ibid., (62) under "Right Holders", p. 16.
18 Campfens, 2021, *Cross-border claims*, pp. 156–159.
19 Framework Principles for Dealing with Collections from Colonial Contexts (*Erste Eckpunkte Zum Umgang Mit Sammlungsgut Aus Kolonialen Kontexten*), 12 March 2019, https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/pdf/PresseUndAktuelles/2019/2019-03-25_Erste-Eckpunkte-Sammlungsgut-koloniale-Kontexte_final.pdf, accessed 12 March 2023.
20 See also International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (adopted 27 June 1989) 28 ILM 1382. It requests States to take special measures to "safeguard" the cultures of indigenous peoples (Art. 4). UNDRIP is more specific.
21 UNDRIP, Art. 11(2).
22 UNDRIP, Art. 12(1): "Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; […] the right to the use and control

of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains. (2) States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned".

23 According to General Comment No. 21 the right of "access to culture" includes the rights as listed in the UNDRIP.

24 It was adopted by a majority of 144 States in favour, 11 abstentions and four votes against. Since then, these objectors all reversed their vote. See also http://ila-brasil.org.br/blog/the-customary-international-status-of-indigenous-peoples-rights/, accessed 13 March 2023.

25 UNDRIP, Art. 12(2).

26 Following the advice of Special Rapporteur Daes, Commission on Human Rights, Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, "Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples: Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People", Final Report (1995), Doc. E/Cn.4/Sub.2/1995/26.

27 See *Centre for Minority Rights Development (Kenya) and Minority Rights Group International (on Behalf of Endorois Welfare Council) v. Kenya* (2010) ACHPR, Communication No. 276/2003, discussed in Vrdoljak, Ana Filipa (2016): "Standing and collective cultural rights", in: Andrzej Jakubowski (Ed.): *Cultural Rights as Collective Rights. An International Law Perspectiv*e, Leiden, pp. 272–287, p. 281.

28 UNDRIP, articles 11 and 12, see n. 31.

29 The Court ruled with respect to ancestral land that was now owned by third parties that "the State must establish, by mutual agreement with the Kaliña and Lokono peoples and the third parties, rules for peaceful and harmonious coexistence in the lands in questions, which respect the uses and customs of these peoples and ensure their access to the Marowijne River". *Kaliña and Lokono Peoples v Suriname*, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Inter-Am. Ct HR, Series C, No. 309, 25 November 2015, para. 159.

30 See Campfens, Evelien (2020): "Whose Cultural Objects? Introducing Heritage Title for Cross-Border Cultural Property Claims", in: *Netherlandish International Law Review*, Vol. 67, pp. 257–295.

31 E.g. the International Law Association's Principles for Co-operation in the Mutual Protection and Transfer of Cultural Material: "If the [… parties, EC] are unable to reach a mutually satisfactory settlement […] both parties shall submit the dispute to good offices, consultation, mediation, conciliation, ad hoc arbitration or institutional arbitration". International Law Association, Report of the Seventy-second Conference (2006), Principle 9. Annex to Nafziger, James A.R. (2007): "The principles for cooperation in the mutual protection and transfer of cultural material", in: *Chicago Journal of International Law*, Vol. 8, pp. 147–167.

32 Jayme, Erik (2015): "Narrative Norms in Private International Law, The Example of Art law", in *The Hague Academy of International Law, Recueil des cours, Collected Courses*, Vol. 375, p. 41: "These norms speak, but they are flexible and not very precise. They describe certain policies without giving answers in a single case". As an example, he refers to the 1998 *Washington Principles* that judges should take into account. See https://www.kulturgutverluste.de/Webs/EN/Foundation/Basic-principles/Washington-Principles/Index.html, accessed 13 March 2023.

33 In fact, courts in various countries already prevent unjust outcomes to cultural property disputes in a strict private law approach in that way, see Evelien Campfens (2020): "Whose Cultural Objects? Introducing Heritage Title for Cross-Border Cultural Property Claims", in: *Netherlands International Law Review*, Vol. 67, pp. 257–295, section 3.

34 Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted 10 December 2008, entered into force 5 May 2013) UN Doc A/RES/63/117, Art. 2: 'Communications may be submitted by or on behalf of individuals or groups of individuals, under the jurisdiction of a State Party, claiming to be victims of a violation of any of the economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the Covenant *by that State Party*'. Emphasis added.

35 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (adopted 4 November 1950, entered into force 3 September 1953) 213 UNTS 221 (ECHR). In its case law, rights that fall under the notion of "cultural rights" have been recognized. See Jakubowski, Andrzej (2016): "Cultural Heritage and the Collective Dimension of Cultural Rights in the Jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights", in: Jakubowski, 2016, *Cultural Rights as Collective Rights*, pp. 155–179, p. 158 and pp. 178–179.
36 Judgment SU-649/17 (2017) (Republic of Colombia, Constitutional Court).
37 For a discussion, see Mejia-Lemos, Diego (2019): "The 'Quimbaya Treasure' Judgment SU-649/17", in: *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 113, pp. 122–130.
38 For an overview, see e.g. Renold, Caroline; Chechi, Alessandro; Bandle, Anne Laure; Renold, Marc-André (2012): "Cases Six Klimt Paintings – Maria Altmann and Austria", on: *ArThemis*, https://plone.unige.ch/art-adr/cases-affaires/6-klimt-paintings-2013-maria-altmann-and-austria, accessed 13 March 2023.

VIII.

Law versus Justice?

An Intercultural Approach to the Problem
of European Collections of Colonial Provenance

Shifting Goalposts

A Legal Perspective on Cultural Property

Naazima Kamardeen

Abstract

Cultural property has evoked partisan feelings in the minds of both those who retain it and those from whom it has been taken. With the rise of human rights jurisprudence and the corresponding affirmation of cultural rights, the retention of cultural property taken by means legal at the time, yet illegal by modern standards (and unjust by any reasonable yardstick) continues to be a matter of deep concern to many countries including Sri Lanka, which was colonised by three European nations. In ascertaining the possible legal arguments for and against the original taking and current retention of cultural property, it is argued that the operative system of international law during the heyday of European colonialism was created by Europe itself and served its expansionist agenda. The holders of colonial cultural property continue to shift the goalposts through various means to ensure that the property stays in their hands. Against this backdrop, the legal basis for the return of cultural property taken in colonial times has been negated, and what is left is to appeal to a sense of justice that confirms the wrongdoing of the taking as well as the necessity to correct the historical injustice even at this late stage.

Changement d'objectifs. Une perspective légale sur la propriété culturelle (Résumé)

La propriété culturelle a suscité des réactions partisanes, tant chez ceux qui les conservent que chez ceux à qui elle a été enlevée. Avec l'essor de la jurisprudence en matière de droits humains et l'affirmation correspondante des droits culturels, la conservation de la propriété culturelle, obtenue par des moyens alors légaux mais illégaux selon les normes actuelles (et injustes selon tout critère raisonnable), continue d'être un sujet de préoccupation pour de nombreux pays, y compris le Sri Lanka qui a été colonisé par trois nations européennes. En déterminant les arguments juridiques possibles pour et contre l'acquisition initiale et la conservation actuelle de la propriété culturelle, il est avancé que le système opérationnel du droit international à l'apogée du colonialisme européen a été créé par l'Europe elle-même et a servi sa politique expansionniste. Les détenteurs de propriété culturelle n'ont de cesse de changer les règles par divers moyens pour s'assurer que les biens restent entre leurs mains.

Dans ce contexte, la base légale pour la restitution de la propriété culturelle enlevée dans un contexte colonial a été réduite à néant et il ne reste plus qu'à faire appel au sens de la justice, indiquant que ces biens ont été pris à tort et que l'injustice historique doit être corrigée – mieux vaut tard que jamais.

Introduction

Cultural property has long held a special place in the fabric of society. From early times, humans have been fascinated by the different cultures they have seen around them. Apart from a desire to know and participate in other cultures, cultural identity has also posed a threat, especially where one group has sought to suppress another. In such circumstances, it became necessary to suppress or destroy that culture by destroying or suppressing its symbols. The "taking" of cultural objects can therefore be motivated by a number of reasons, as outlined above. One of the sharpest examples of "taking" cultural property without the sanction or approval of the owners or guardians of such objects took place in the colonial era, which is at the focus of this volume.

In the context of colonial cultural property, this chapter will examine the relationship between law and justice with special reference to the temporal

nature of law and the varying conceptions of justice. The historical and contextual perspectives are expected to shed light on why two parties with completely opposing views might both believe that they hold both the legal and moral high ground when it comes to a claim over colonial cultural property. The chapter will then examine instances where the holders of such colonial cultural property attempt to "shift the goalposts" by applying different standards to colonial cultural property than they do to other cultural property. The study will thus establish that such tactics are resorted to with the intention of holding on to such property while giving the impression that it could in fact be returned, provided certain conditions are met. The chapter will conclude by considering some of the options available to those requesting the return of such cultural property.

Definitions of Key Terms

In this chapter, the central focus is on cultural property acquired during colonial times. The term "cultural property" is of a more general nature. Two major international conventions, namely the UNESCO Convention of 1970 and the UNIDROIT Convention of 1995, reflect the same thinking: that cultural property is any item that a country regards "as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science" on "religious or secular grounds". Such property will include art, artefacts, antiques, historical monuments, rare collections, and religious objects that are of particular significance to the cultural identity of a people.[1]

The above definition, while sufficient to describe the nature of cultural property, is not adequate to explain the status of cultural property that finds itself far from its place of origin, is contested as to its ownership, and has no direct importance for the archaeology, prehistory or history of its current place of location. It is only in more recent times that such objects, predominantly taken during colonial occupation, have been endowed with their own definitions. Van Beurden aptly describes these as colonial cultural objects and defines such as "of cultural or historical importance acquired without just compensation or involuntarily lost during the European colonial era."[2]

Sri Lanka's Loss of Cultural Property During Colonial Times

Sri Lanka, sometimes described as "The Granary of the East" and the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean", was a land rich in agricultural and natural reserves. An island with strategic geopolitical advantage, it was the target of European colonisation from the 16th century onwards, falling prey to the Portuguese, Dutch and British for about 375 years in total. During the Portuguese era, King Dharmapala (1551–1597) – who converted to Christianity and took the name Don Juan Dharmapala – made a deed of gift to the Portuguese authorities. It is believed that many items of cultural significance left the country at that time, but they are no longer to be found in public collections in Portugal. Items from this era, however, are found in some German museums.[3] The Dutch era has actual records of much more movement of cultural property. More than 300 items from Sri Lanka are found in various Dutch museums. These have either been captured in battle or gifted by the Dutch governor of Ceylon to the Dutch King.[4]

It was during the British era that the largest movement of cultural property out of Sri Lanka was recorded. More than 3,000 objects have been officially catalogued in over 16 museums in England.[5] Among these is the statue of Tara, the only female reincarnation of Buddha. This bronze statue, which dates to the 10th century AD, was taken by Governor Robert Brownrigg (1758–1833) in 1830. It is now on display at the British Museum but was for long years locked up in a storage room, considered too obscene for exhibition.[6]

Figure 1 | Statue of Tara, London, British Museum, Inv. No. 1830,0612.4
© The Trustees of the British Museum

Legal Regime Pertaining to Cultural Property

Cultural property became a topic of concern only in the 1960s, long after the creation of the UN. It took several years for the UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* (1970) to be drafted.[7]

From the preamble, it appears that the problem that was being addressed was the post-World War II movement of cultural property, and not, in fact, the property looted during the colonial era. While calling on states to designate items as cultural property under their national laws which fall within the definition provided (Article 1), Article 2 mentions that the illicit import, export and transfer of objects is one of the main causes of the impoverishment of the cultural heritage of the countries of origin of such property. It is ironic that such impoverishment is seen as a problem only after 1970, even though the mass scale movement of cultural property happened during the colonial era, when the colonies were at their weakest.

Article 4 recognises, as part of the cultural heritage of each state, cultural property "found" within the national territory (Article 4 (b)). It is contended that the word "found" can be taken to denote an object that found its way into a particular territory even by means that are not legal. As the Convention does not question how the cultural property came to be "found" there, this provision can be read as an attempt to legitimise the illegal presence of cultural property looted during colonial occupation.

Articles 10–14 contain provisions mandating that state parties help each other to recover and return stolen property when requested to do so by the source country. The only acknowledgement of cultural property of a previous era is in Article 15:

> *Nothing in this Convention shall prevent States Parties thereto from concluding special agreements among themselves or from continuing to implement agreements already concluded regarding the restitution of cultural property removed, whatever the reason, from its territory of origin, before the entry into force of this Convention for the States concerned.*

In 1978, UNESCO created the *Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation* (ICPRCP). Sri Lanka then made a request to this committee in April 1980.[8] It was turned down on the basis that no evidence had been submitted to the effect that bilateral negotiations had failed.

Since the convention had come into effect only in 1972, it would affect the movement of objects only after that period and therefore had no bearing on objects from the colonial era. While Sri Lanka, UK, Portugal and the Netherlands are state parties to this Convention, it is not useful to address Sri Lanka's loss of cultural property to these nations. In fact, the wording of the entire Convention reveals a desire to steer clear of colonial cultural property altogether.

The UNIDROIT *Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects* (1995) sets time limits for the return of the latter. According to Article 3, an object must be requested three years from the time the location of the object and the identity of the possessor are known, and 50 years in any event. Neither Sri Lanka nor the United Kingdom are parties to this Convention, although Portugal and the Netherlands are.[9] Therefore this Convention is of limited use to Sri Lanka's cause.

It is contended that the current international legal regime is based largely on Eurocentric sources with colonial origins. Antony Anghie argues that many of the basic doctrines of international law that we regard as universal were in fact forged out of the attempt to create a legal system that could account for relations between the European and non-European worlds in the colonial confrontation. According to Anghie, the set of structures created by international law out of the movement of "New World" European encounters, structures that he convincingly demonstrates are repeated throughout the history of modern international law, constructed the "difference" of Indigenous subjects in such a way as to disable them vis-a-vis normal international law, even as it turned them into prime objects of concern and reform.[10]

By the sixteenth century, the Christian European law of nations and the law of war had begun its radical transformation into a secular and universally applicable international law.[11] The bias that it embodied regarding "native subjects" thus became embedded into, and acquired legitimacy within, the international legal system. It is little wonder that this system of international law that we now use does not support, as a legal right, the return of cultural property removed during the colonial era.

Law versus Justice

In the preceding section, we have observed that the international legal regime concerning cultural property has carefully excluded colonial cultural property from its protective framework. However, initiatives such as the UNESCO *Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to Its Countries of Origin or Its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation* were founded on the premise that there was a basis on which these nations could request restitution. The basis ought, then, to be justice, not law. This would involve an appeal to a sense of fairness rather than to a legally established right. The following section will now focus on justice as a basis for the return of colonial cultural property.

Even if the legal standards may vary, we have been trained to think that justice at least is universal, constant and enduring. However, this is not always the case. In every conflict, each side believes that it is justified in taking the measures that it does and uses all the means at its disposal to do so. Buddhism, which advocates non-aggression, has viewed justice as a concept that is always touted by those who wish to justify their stance, however wrong it may be, because no one wants to admit that the course of action they are undertaking is unjust.

"Who decides what is just and unjust? [...] Our war is always 'just' and your war is always 'unjust'. Buddhism does not accept this position."[12]

Justice has often been used to promote equal treatment among equals. However, the euro-centric international legal system of the 18th and 19th centuries that allowed its proponents to consider "natives" as "uncivilised" apparently saw no contradiction in retaining slavery while it developed a human rights regime, and similarly does not have a problem with retaining looted cultural property while it takes steps to prevent the illicit transfer of the same.

This is the retainment of the colonial mentality, which allows those following it to maintain double standards while advocating equality for all. Until this mentality is erased from our collective consciousness, the situation will never be rectified. The legal regime pertaining to cultural property claims to work to protect it while in fact safeguarding only certain types of such, thus leaving colonial cultural property in a legal vacuum.

Shifting Goalposts

This section will examine shifts in legal standards at various junctures in history with a view to establishing that states seeking the restitution of their cultural property are subject to various requirements at various times. In the centuries leading up to World War II, the positivist agenda that was largely in place throughout Europe enabled conquest and the taking of war booty. After World War II, the legal position changed to reflect the position that conquest was illegal, as was the looting that in many cases ensued. However, this system retained the position that previous takings would remain legal, since the law would not apply retrospectively. Prescriptive periods were also laid down, timeframes that were impossible for newly independent states to meet. Again, these were set through the influence of the very nations who were retaining colonial cultural property, which effectively ensured that goods taken previously would not be returnable.

The most recent example of goalpost-shifting is the false hope that restitution will be made provided that the provenance can be established, even though it is well known that documentation of this type is in most cases unavailable, especially when the property was indiscriminately looted. For example, we find that Governor Brownrigg simply removed the statue of Tara without consulting anyone or making any record. In more recent times there have been negotiations between the Netherlands and Sri Lanka about the possible return of the Cannon of Kandy, a ceremonial cannon gifted by Lewke Disawe to King Rajasinghe of Kandy (1780–1832). The *Rijksmuseum*, where the cannon is currently on display, wished to conduct further provenance research even though available documentation had pointed it to be of Sri Lankan origin and there were no other claimants to the object. The research was carried out under the aegis of a wider project and ran from 2019 to 2022, revealing no further details about the origin of the cannon.[13]

Enactment of legislation to pre-empt efforts at restitution is another method of goalpost-shifting. The British Museum Act of 1963 prevents it from returning objects in the museum, even though international law prevents domestic legislation from being used to hinder international obligations from being met.[14] The British Museum Act has been used to refuse a large number of requests. It is doubtful whether any other country would be allowed to evade international obligations by quoting the terms of a domestic law that is highly flawed in concept.

Another example of shifting goalposts is the term “cultural diplomacy” – the selective return of cultural objects to promote certain ends. Such instances have been justified as fostering cultural exchange, such as the provision of scholarships to study in the country in question. However, cultural diplomacy has also involved the restitution of property to support a diplomatic or economic agenda, which is counterproductive to the interests of affected nations. For example, Belgium’s willingness to return objects to the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1960s and 1970s derived primarily from its wish to preserve its mineral interest in Katanga.[15] This particular manifestation of cultural diplomacy is extremely damaging to the collective interests of states seeking restitution, as it pits them against each other in the race to curry favour with the holders of such property. It also reinforces a type of neo-colonialism, where these nations are forced to part with one thing in order to regain another thing that they should never have lost in the first place.

Conclusion

Cultural property has been acknowledged as an integral part of a state’s identity. We must recognise the flawed bases of law and justice on which we have been operating to date, and acknowledge that they are not in the best interests of humanity. We must affirm universal, rather than convenient, principles. We must see all humans as human, even at this late stage. We must respect the rights of all peoples to their cultural identity, embodied in their cultural property. To this end, the global community must put an end to shifting goalposts and apply the same legal principles to all cultural property, regardless of the time period in which they were looted. Provenance research in former colonies must bear in mind that the victors write the history and maintain the records, and that these records – should they even exist – are likely to be sketchy or silent as to the wrongdoings of the victors. Debates about colonial cultural property should not be left to bilateral negotiation, where former colonies are usually the weaker party. Neo-colonialism in the guise of cultural diplomacy must be stopped completely. The holders of colonial cultural property must realise that they need to approach the negotiations in a spirit of honesty and good faith and treat the other party with respect.

1 See here and in the following: UNESCO (1970): *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property,* Paris, https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/convention-means-prohibiting-and-preventing-illicit-import-export-and, accessed 12 March 2023.
2 Van Beurden, Jos (2016): *Treasures in Trusted Hands*, Leiden.
3 Kamardeen, Naazima (2017): "The Protection of Cultural Property: Post-Colonial and Post-Conflict Perspectives from Sri Lanka", in: *International Journal of Cultural Property*, Vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 429–450.
4 Ibid.
5 De Silva, P. H. D. Hemasiri (1975): *A Catalogue of Antiquities and Other Cultural Objects from Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and Abroad*, Colombo.
6 Wanniarachchi, Senel (2020): "Finders Keepers: On Sex, Tara the Buddhist Deity at the British Museum and Brownness in the Colonies", 8 January 2020, on: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2020/01/08/finders-keepers-on-sex-tara-the-buddhist-deity-at-the-british-museum-and-brownness-in-the-colonies/, accessed 12 March 2023.
7 *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property,* https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/convention-means-prohibiting-and-preventing-illicit-import-export-and, accessed 12 March 2023.
8 ICRPCP, Statement Presented by the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka Concerning the Restitution of Significant Cultural Objects from Sri Lanka, (April 1980), UN Doc. CC.79/CONF.206/COL.10.
9 See UNIDROIT (1995): *Unidroit Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects*, Rome, https://www.unidroit.org/instruments/cultural-property/1995-convention/; Ste Parties, https://www.unidroit.org/instruments/cultural-property/1995-convention/status/, accessed 12 March 2023.
10 Anghie, Antony (2005): *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law*, Cambridge.
11 Porras, Ileana (2006): "Constructing International law in the East Indian Seas: Property, Sovereignty, Commerce and War in Hugo Grotius' De Iure Praedae – The Law of Prize and Booty, or 'On How to Distinguish Merchants from Pirates'", in: *Brooklyn Journal of International Law*, Vol. 31, pp. 741–804.
12 Cf. Anghie, Antony (2011): "The Grotius Lecture: ASIL 2010, International Law In a Time of Change: Should International Law Lead or Follow?", in: *Am. U. Int'l L. Rev.*, Vol. 26, Issue 5, pp. 1315–1376, Quoting *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons,* Advisory Opinion of 8 July 1996, I.C.J. 226.
13 Pilot project: *Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial Era (PPROCE),* https://www.niod.nl/en/projects/pilotproject-provenance-research-objects-colonial-era-pproce, accessed 12 March 2023.
14 British Museum Act (1963), https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/British-Museum-Act-1963.pdf, accessed 12 March 2023.
15 Van Beurden, 2016, *Treasures in Trusted Hands.*

VIII.

Law versus Justice?

An Intercultural Approach to the Problem
of European Collections of Colonial Provenance

Law versus Justice?

Colonial-Era Cultural Heritage in Germany

Christoph-Eric Mecke

Abstract

The article examines the question of how objects in European museums and collections that were part of the colonial-era cultural heritage of formerly colonised peoples should be dealt with legally. It highlights four different legal options for the repatriation of cultural heritage of colonial provenance against the background of current legal policy developments, i.e. private law standards in German law (1), national and international standards of cultural heritage protection law (2), the international human rights law approach (3), and self-regulation by collective public self-commitment in terms of soft law (4). On the basis of the "Nothing about us without us" principle, which is often invoked by descendants of colonised peoples, the article concludes by formulating its own proposal on how to deal with objects of colonial origin in European museums and collections in the future.

Droit vs. justice ? Patrimoine culturel de l›époque coloniale en Allemagne (Résumé)

Cet article se penche sur la question de la gestion juridique des objets dans les musées européens et des collections faisant partie du patrimoine culturel de l'époque coloniale des peuples anciennement colonisés. Il met en lumière quatre options juridiques différentes pour le rapatriement de patrimoine culturel de provenance coloniale dans le contexte de l'évolution actuelle de la politique juridique, à savoir les normes de droit privé en droit allemand (1), les normes nationales et internationales du droit de la protection du patrimoine culturel (2), l'approche du droit international des droits humains (3) et l'autorégulation par l'engagement public collectif en termes de droit souple (soft law) (4). Sur la base du principe « Rien sur nous sans nous », souvent invoqué par les descendants des peuples colonisés, l'article conclut en formulant sa propre proposition sur comment gérer les objets d'origine coloniale dans les musées européens et les collections à l'avenir.

The Problem

Cultural heritage objects which originated from colonised areas in Africa, Asia and the Pacific region, but which are kept in European, and in this case German, museums and collections, are only *one* consequence of decades-long colonial repression and exploitation. But it is a long-term consequence that continues to be there for all to see, visible evidence of this historical injustice. The first public statements in the German literature on the issue of the return of cultural heritage date from just after the end of the German colonial era[1] when, in the Treaty of Versailles of 16 July 1919,[2] the German Reich "waived in favour of the Allied and Associated Powers all its rights in respect of its overseas possessions". However, at the time there was no awareness whatsoever of the injustice which manifested itself in the unintended loss and lack of repatriation of cultural assets and which has continued even since the end of the colonial era.[3] Awareness of the right to cultural repatriation to ethnic victim groups was thus completely lacking even where the question of returns in the civil law sense was raised.[4] Moreover, the fact that the issue is not just a question of ownership in the legal sense was articulated publicly in 1978, not by an official representative of the descendants of the former colonial masters,

but by Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, General Director of UNESCO at the time: "The peoples who were victims of this plunder, sometimes for hundreds of years, have not only been despoiled of irreplaceable masterpieces but also robbed of a memory which would doubtless have helped them to greater self-knowledge and would certainly have enabled others to understand them better".[5]

In their 2018 "Report on the Restitution of African Cultural Heritage", commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron, Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy echoed the appeal made by M'Bow forty years earlier and called for the restitution "in a swift and thorough manner without any supplementary research regarding their provenance or origins, of any objects taken by force or presumed to be acquired through inequitable conditions" including acquisitions by "active [colonial] administrators on the [African] continent during the colonial period (1885–1960) or by their descendants" and by private parties "through scientific expeditions prior to 1960".[6] Since the report was published, European museums and collections outside of France have also been facing much more pressure from the public discourse to justify their actions. In November 2017, a year prior to the report's publication, Emmanuel Macron gave a speech in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso's capital city, which attracted much international attention, in particular the lines: "I belong to a generation of French people for whom the crimes of European colonisation are undeniable and part of our history".[7]

Is it justifiable, considering this, for the descendants of past European colonial powers to hold on to cultural heritage of colonial provenance in their museums and collections? Are they not in fact morally and even legally obliged to offer to return these objects? And if so, to whom exactly should they be returned and under what circumstances should the repatriation occur? Or is it perhaps the case that, more than one hundred years after the end of the German colonial era, current law in fact contravenes any potential moral duty to repatriate the objects, because there are no legal rights to repatriation that could be enforced by the courts? Do perhaps museums lack the legal authorisation to relinquish cultural heritage because there is no state permission to export cultural assets, or because the recipients of such repatriations would not be in a position to legitimise their claim in a way that would stand up in court as complying with the German Code of Civil Procedure? Today's *law versus justice* is a direct continuation of a historical *crime versus justice*, at least in the eyes of many descendants of colonised peoples.

The contradictions within the *external* perspective of law are mirrored by *internal* contradictions within law. This can be seen, for instance, in the fact

that, even in the 20th century, "international law" or "the law of nations" continued to be a reflection of the interests of modern European nations.[8] On the one hand, European occupations outside of the European continent were legitimised on the basis of customary international law by claiming that the occupied Indigenous territories were allegedly "ownerless". The criteria, however, used to describe the alleged lack of ownership were defined unilaterally following the categories of contemporary European public law.[9] What was completely ignored, on the other hand, either wilfully or out of sheer blindness, was the fact that, even by the standards of the time, which were exclusively based on European conditions, thought patterns and political interests, the prerequisites for lawful occupation by the then prevailing law of nations, i.e. the lack of ownership of the colonised regions as defined by European theories of statehood, did not in fact apply and that, as a consequence, the occupations were indeed unlawful under international law at the time.[10]

Moreover, customary international law first introduced the notion of protecting sacred artefacts at an early stage, albeit notwithstanding the traditional right of plunder, under which any goods looted from the enemy during armed conflicts could be declared "ownerless property" (*res nullius*), which legally justified their permanent appropriation.[11] As early as 1815, the European Alliance of Victorious Nations at the Congress of Vienna in fact ordered the restitution of all cultural assets that had been taken by Napoleon.[12] The Hague Convention of 1899 and its slightly modified "Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land" of 1907 marked the end of the legitimisation of the traditional right of plunder during a war on land in Europe, which had already effectively been abolished by customary international law.[13] However, these contemporaneous limitations by international law of the right of plunder were never actually applied to the African colonies.[14] This was mainly due to the fact that the colonial-era European nations almost unanimously drew a distinct line between "civilised" peoples and "cultural states" (in German "*Kulturstaaten*"[15]) on the one hand and peoples outside the sphere of western Christian civilisation and culture on the other,[16] even among the proponents of emancipation movements such as the early women's rights movement in Europe.[17]

Those outside the "civilised" realm could not lay claim to the protection and recognition of the "civilised" law (of nations) that governed the European states and were thus effectively at the mercy of European powers. This applied not just to incidences of the state occupation of land and the seizure of movable objects but also to a vast array of so-called "contracts", which in fact provided the legal basis for the acquisition of land and for the awarding of conces-

sions to private German organisations such as the German Colonial Society for Southwest Africa (*"Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft für Südwestafrika"*) in the early days of German colonialism. These contracts between the tribal leaders and German private colonial societies, which sealed the transfer of huge tracts of land, made a mockery of any modern European notion of contractual justice, even by the standards of the time, alone on the basis of the disparity between the mutually agreed "contractual services". Had German civil law, which was in force at the time, been consistently applied,[18] such "contracts" would have had to have been considered unethical and therefore declared void, which some people in Germany were forced to admit even back then.[19]

Furthermore, the colonial masters and their intellectual precursors and defenders in Germany considered their own legal culture to be of such superiority from the point of view of civilisation that they assumed a "cultural duty to introduce our legal concepts to the Hottentots."[20] On the other hand, the same "legal concepts" that could have protected the colonised peoples and ensured their *de jure* recognition were deliberately withheld from them and instead employed purely for the benefit of their "masters". What went on in the so-called protectorates was considered a matter of internal German interest[21] and the relationship between the protectorates and the German Reich was not governed by the standards of international law but the former were *de facto* under the command of the latter.[22] At the same time, however, the protectorates were not actually part of the territory of the German Reich, precisely in order to avoid the German imperial constitution being applicable to the German colonies.[23] While the German Reich, founded in 1871, had on the basis of its constitution made an important step towards becoming a state formally governed by the rule of law,[24] the German colonies were left completely exposed to the arbitrariness of German officialdom and often also to the brute force of German soldiers and colonial "masters".

The legal inconsistencies, however, were not limited to the colonial era itself but continue to plague any present-day political or legal attempts to reflect on the historical injustices committed in the name of the German state. A case in point were the injustices committed during the Nazi period, where the "Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art" of 1998[25] led to a self-commitment on the part of the German "Federal Government, the Federal States and the municipal governments to locate and return cultural assets confiscated during the period of Nazi persecution"[26], while a similar agreement on an international or national level for cultural heritage confiscated during the colonial era is still lacking.

Furthermore, there is an almost unbearable disparity between the claims for restitution made by the peoples in the former colonies who had their cultural heritage stolen, and the refusal, up to just twenty years ago, by the German authorities, pointing to the alleged duty on the part of the state to permanently preserve the global, and therefore the African, cultural heritage in – notably German – museums.[27] The "Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums", signed and published by eighteen directors of world-renowned museums as recently as 2004, argued along the same lines. Not only did it downplay the historical injustice committed out of a sense of cultural superiority on the part of the European nations; the signatories even went as far as making their *own* counterclaims to those made by Indigenous peoples. Objects of colonial provenance were turned into national or European cultural assets by the assertion that many of the artefacts had "become part of the museums that [...] cared for them, and by extension part of the heritage of the nations which house them."[28]

Can we expect a law and a legal practice clearly still rooted in this thinking to provide universal protection and justice? The problem is and has always been that double standards were and are applied, particularly in dealings between Europe and Africa. Further, there is a lack of political will to take the appropriate measures in response to the centuries-long discriminatory treatment of the legal culture in Africa as compared to the legal culture in modern-day Europe. In Prussia, for instance, state seizures of property effectively ceased with the introduction of the General State Laws of the Prussian States in 1794, and in the exceptional circumstances where such might still occur, compensation was automatically due.[29] In Germany this is still lauded as an important step towards ensuring the protection of private property. In the eyes of the colonial masters, Indigenous African forms of legal association and the power to dispose of property,[30] on the other hand, counted for nothing.

Thankfully, the legal protection of cultural heritage, both nationally and internationally, takes a completely different approach today[31] in that European and African artefacts are no longer treated differently; they are all considered equally worthy of protection and their legitimate ownership is legally recognised in the same way. However, this does not necessarily mean that the protection of cultural heritage automatically extends to cultural assets originating from the colonial era.

Is the law, therefore, only part of the problem, or could it also become key to finding a solution? The next section outlines the existing legal options as well as current legal policy developments. It will then attempt to formulate a

proposal for a solution that is more firmly based on normative standards. As is always the case in law, what ultimately counts even if a solution based on normative standards can be found, is a comprehensive assessment of each individual case. Nevertheless, normative standards ensure transparency of the propositions for all parties involved, which form the consistent basis upon which each individual case must be assessed. Transparency, in turn, is one of the conditions which must be met for decisions and critical comments to remain foreseeable, while consistency in the propositions upon which these decisions are based is a structural precondition for more justice and social acceptance.

Possible Legal Basis for the Repatriation of Cultural Heritage of Colonial Provenance

While the repatriation of cultural heritage of colonial provenance from European museums to their places of origin is not the only way of dealing with these assets, other options such as permanent loan agreements and similar forms of curatorial cooperation can only be successful if it is clear from the point of view of the heirs of the colonised peoples that the colonial principle "All about us without us" is consistently replaced by the principle "Nothing about us without us".[32] Law, on the other hand, comes into play mainly in cases where repatriation claims are denied. This raises the question of whether prevailing national and international law can form the legal basis for repatriation claims that are enforceable by the courts. Four different legal regimes can potentially be used in dealing with colonial-era cultural heritage: a) private law standards, b) national and international standards of cultural heritage protection law, c) collective international human rights for the protection of cultural identities, and – not enforceable by the courts, but under certain circumstances nevertheless even more effective than a judicially enforceable right – d) self-regulation by collective public self-commitment (soft law).

Private Law Standards

Based on private law standards, which apply transnationally, a judicial enforcement of the repatriation of cultural assets would mainly be governed by the owners' claim against the natural or legal person who, according to private law, is *de facto* in possession of the object but not legally entitled to it (wrongful ownership). The claim for the return of property is one of the oldest forms of complaint originating from Roman Law (*rei vindicatio*) and is still at the core of all European legal systems. The claimants and respondents are either natural persons (human beings) or legal persons or entities, i.e., the state or local governments as the authorities which carry legal responsibility for museums, or, depending on the legal structure, these are sometimes the museums themselves.

At first glance and from a postcolonial perspective, European claims for the return of property appear to be the least appropriate legal means by which to fight the battle against the enduring consequences of colonial injustice. However, in terms of the cultural assets which were illegally transferred to Europe in the colonial era – a small part of a much larger whole of colonial injustice – the claims for their return all specifically point to the law that was in force at the site of the seizure (*lex rei sitae*) when it comes to the question of the lawfulness of the acquisition.[33] In the racist dualism of the colonial-era legal order, which was characterised by separate rights for the colonial masters and the Indigenous communities, the legality of the acquisition was generally based on contemporary Indigenous customary law.[34]

German prevailing law could only be applied to the Indigenous peoples of the so-called protectorates by special legal order of the German emperor ("*Kaiser*"). This, however, only occurred in isolated cases and, with the exception of certain areas of public law, the Indigenous populations were still governed by their own laws even under the legal rules of the German colonial power.[35] A contemporary legal commentary on German colonial law specifically stated that "the German laws must not be applied, neither in legal relations between natives, nor in legal relations between natives and whites [...]".[36] This meant that, even from a colonial perspective, Indigenous legal orders, which were largely uncodified, were applicable.[37] As the colonialists were well aware,[38] the local legal systems, though some details differed from one tribe to another, all included the right of protection for objects, whereby these rights were usually held by a family or by the whole community, rarely an individual.[39]

Admittedly, all private, official and legal anthropological[40] records of the uncodified Indigenous tribal laws in force at the time must be treated with circumspection, on the one hand because they regularly include contemporary colonial thinking, be it intentionally or unintentionally, and on the other because they clearly often represent inappropriate attempts at finding parallel structures in European legal thought.[41] While this means that it is no longer possible to reconstruct the different orally transmitted tribal laws in detail and with a high degree of legal and historical accuracy, it can nevertheless be determined that the theft of property committed by a private party, for instance, would have no more resulted in the lawful acquisition of title under Indigenous tribal law than it would under European law.[42] The same can be said for the transfer of the right of disposal of cultic objects, which would clearly have been void according to European law on the basis of the right of special protection for "*res sacrae*" (sacred objects).[43]

Since the claims for repatriation of cultural objects of colonial provenance refer to artefacts located in Germany at the time the actions are filed, any further conditions for the claims fall under German law.[44] According to the latter, it is not possible for any of the parties in the subsequent chain of ownership to claim to have acquired these objects in good faith if they derived from theft or if the original rightful owner or owners were forced to relinquish them against their will and under so-called massive duress or threat of harm.[45] The acquisition of property by possession of a movable object under German law also directly depends on the new owner or owners acting in good faith and is therefore precluded in cases where they know that they are not the rightful owners, or where their ignorance can be shown to be due to reckless conduct.[46]

However, even in the rare cases where all the necessary proof has been provided, a repatriation by court injunction would often be made impossible by a statute of limitations. This does not mean that the claims for repatriation would be rendered void, but it does mean that any such claim would depend on the objects being returned voluntarily and that their repatriation could no longer be enforced by the court.[47] While it is possible, in theory, to introduce legislation under which colonial assets are exempt from a statute of limitations, there has been little political will, to date, to do so. Attempts made by some members of the German Parliament (*Bundestag*) to introduce legislation precluding German museums and other institutions from using a statute of limitations with regard to cultural heritage of colonial provenance failed as recently as 2021.[48]

Moreover, any claims for restitution based on private law are doomed to fail from the outset in cases of appropriation by the sovereign or confiscation by the state, which was consistently sanctioned as lawful under colonial law in force at the time.[49] In this case, as in the cases of claims on the basis of international law dealt with below, the question arises whether there should be any exceptions to the principle of intertemporality. According to this principle of continental European law, which harks back to Roman law and has since the 20th century also been recognised in international law,[50] any legal assessment of the facts of a case may only be based on the law that was in force at the time the events occurred and not on the law that is in force at the time of the legal dispute,[51] even if the laws that were in force at the time of the alleged offence would now be considered morally and historically unjust.[52] Although the principle itself implements a fundamental element of justice (making it unlawful to adapt legal standards retrospectively protects those who obey them from adverse effects later), doubts have been raised on occasion as to whether it should be applied without exception. According to Naazima Kamerdeen, however, it is "difficult to reconcile these two views" in cases of colonial injustice "as there appears to be a conflict". [53] For this reason, transfers of certain assets in GDR times, which are now considered to have been unjust, have in recent years been restricted, at least with regard to future transactions, or even completely denied. However, this has not yet resulted in any practical changes to the legal assessment of cases pertaining to German colonial history.[54]

According to Matthias Goldmann and Beatriz von Loebenstein, many "emancipatory gains" could already be made if the principle of intertemporality were applied strictly and without exception in a truly "critical assessment of the law of the past" by applying "the legal and factual standards of the past", and if "the reconstruction of the law of the past" was thus carried out on the basis of the "concrete standards which were already used to full effect in the past."[55] Using this principle as a basis for their assessment, Goldmann and von Loebenstein have recently come to the conclusion that even just the "colonial presence [in Southwest Africa]" was "probably in violation of international law"[56] by the standards of international law at the time, which then automatically calls into question the lawfulness of all subsequent sovereign acts even if the principle of intertemporality is applied.

National and International Standards of Cultural Heritage Protection

Repatriations of colonial cultural heritage by German institutions[57] have so far been characterised by the fact that neither national nor international legal standards of cultural heritage protection nor the courts have played any significant role,[58] and that, "to date, no generally accepted procedures" have existed.[59] Paradoxically, the most spectacular case in the context of the repatriation of cultural assets of colonial provenance that has so far come before the courts in Germany did not aim to enforce restitution as quickly as possible, but rather to *prevent* repatriation. Following a six-year process of verifying the merits of the claim, the state government of Baden-Württemberg, in recognition of the colonial injustice that had occurred, decided in 2019 to return to the Namibian government the personal effects (a Bible and a whip) of Hendrik Witbooi (c. 1830–1905), a Nama leader ("Kaptein") who was killed in battle by German colonial forces and is a national hero of Namibia today. In 2013, the Namibian government had made a formal claim to the German state of Baden-Württemberg, where the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart had held Witbooi's personal Bible and whip since 1902. A group of Nama tribal elders, however, went before the courts in an attempt to prevent the restitution to the Namibian state authorities and instead to have the objects returned to the Witbooi family.[60] However, the state constitutional court, which heard the case brought by the Nama Traditional Leaders Association shortly before the repatriation was due to take place, declared that it did not have jurisdiction because the dispute was "not covered by state constitutional law but should probably be dealt with in Namibia".[61] The case has drawn attention to an issue that goes beyond the actual matter of repatriation and raises the additional question as to who is in fact the rightful recipient of such objects within their country of origin, if the descendants of the former victims of colonialism do not feel that their interests are represented by the government of the day[62] or where groups of victims are in conflict with each other.[63]

Present-day cultural heritage legislation is not equipped to deal with either of these cases, since both national cultural heritage law and traditional international law focus on the state as the relevant holder of rights and legitimate representative of the communities of origin.[64] There are a number of additional legal obstacles which cause both German and international cultural heritage protection law in its current form not only to fail to contribute anything

towards a resolution of the issue of the persistent consequences of colonial injustice, but to actually become part of the problem. This is due, firstly, to the principle of intertemporality mentioned above being applied when identifying illegal acquisitions and transfers of cultural assets[65]; secondly, to the explicit refusal to apply international law contracts, which regulate the repatriation of illegally imported cultural heritage objects that were removed from the countries of origin during the colonial era[66]; thirdly, to the lack of ratification of relevant international law contracts by Germany[67], and finally, to the limitation of international law to the removal of cultural assets during armed conflicts.[68] together with the legal opinion that "the period of colonial occupation overall" cannot be viewed "as a form of permanent armed conflict".[69] Moreover, standards of national and international cultural heritage protection do not aim to protect the creators of colonial cultural objects and their heirs, but rather the holdings of today's museums, including their collections of colonial provenance.[70] Many existing regulations would actually compound the historical injustice associated with colonialism rather than alleviating it if they were applied to cultural heritage of colonial provenance.[71]

It took almost forty years, until 2007, for the UNESCO Convention of 14 November 1970 to be ratified by the Federal Republic of Germany and for its provisions to be signed into national law. However, both the German Transformation Act of 2007 and the Cultural Heritage Protection Act of 2016 which followed on from it[72] are in fact irrelevant regarding stolen art, if only because they have no retrospective effect. Unlike France and England, Germany does not yet have any special laws pertaining to colonial cultural assets or human remains of colonial provenance which would legally authorise museums and colonial collections to return such objects.[73] Issues such as these remain wholly in the domain of political decision-makers and local governments as the legal entities behind these institutions. As recently as 2018, an official statement by the Federal Government on the question of the repatriation of cultural heritage of colonial provenance read:

> *The overwhelming majority of institutions that maintain cultural assets are operated and controlled by the individual* [Federal] *States and municipal authorities. The conditions of a possible repatriation are governed by Federal, State and Organisational Laws, and especially the Budgetary Regulations* [sic!] *of the Federal, State and Municipal Governments concerned.*[74]

The citing of budgetary regulations designed to protect the German public assets as a framework under which the restitution of cultural heritage of colonial provenance should be governed is, sadly, still a true reflection of the current legal and political mood in Germany.

International Human Rights for the Protection of Cultural Identities

In light of these shortfalls in the national and international laws for the protection of cultural heritage of colonial provenance, the debate on how such assets should be dealt with has in recent years increasingly shifted its focus onto international human rights for the protection of cultural identities.[75] The human rights approach takes a categorically different view to that of the national and international legal provisions, which are solely aimed at the national or transnational protection of cultural heritage. According to Evelien Campfens, the human rights approach moves the "focus on the unlawfulness of the acquisition at the time", which has dominated cultural heritage protection law up to now, to a present-day perspective, where the "continuing human rights violation of remaining separated from certain objects (and therefore being denied access to participate in one's own cultural life)" takes centre stage.[76] The legal importance of the question of the "proven illegality of the acquisition at the [colonial] time" is replaced by recognition of the immaterial "heritage interests of communities" in "cultural objects taken without the 'free, prior and informed consent' of Indigenous peoples".[77]

Moreover, the purely binary principle of agreeing to the repatriation or refusing to do so is extended by other legal options which "may vary from a right to 'access and control'"[78] to "varying degrees of access"[79] to "a straightforward right to repatriation".[80] The question of whether the occurrence was just *or* unjust in the *past* is replaced by a "*weighing of interests* that different right holders may have in the same object" which focuses on the *present day*.[81] While this rather pragmatic approach has the potential to result in developments in the law at some point in the future,[82] it does not provide a guarantee that a solution will be found that will be acceptable to the colonised peoples. The *historical* injustice, however, which in this volume is impressively denounced by Chief Taku from the Bangwa people,[83] is not remedied by pragmatic solutions for the future but must be recognised in the form of a moral assessment of the past and a legal acceptance of the injustices that occurred

then, by committing to restitution and compensation and by officially naming both the victims and the perpetrators of the injustices.

In the international human rights approach, Indigenous individuals and communities are recognised for the first time as legal subjects that have the same rights as states. However, when it comes to enforcing their rights, individuals and Indigenous communities still depend on the political and legal support of the states they are part of.[84] The prevailing cultural rights of Indigenous peoples today are aimed first and foremost at their states of origin rather than third parties such as the former colonial powers.[85] Incidentally, the same applies to the European institutions that retain cultural objects of colonial provenance, in that they themselves depend on the decision-makers in *their own* states of origin to grant the legal authorisation and export permits required for the repatriation of the objects in question.

Apart from the issue of whether and to what extent human rights conventions and declarations are legally binding,[86] which of course does not just affect the human rights approach, and the difficulties involved in precisely pinpointing the right holders in disputes between several claimants, there is one fundamental problem that pertains specifically to the human rights approach. While the "weighing of interests that different right holders may have in the same object"[87] corresponds exactly with today's pragmatic view of the function of law in western societies, it by no means provides the legal recognition of historical injustice, which has been outstanding for more than a century. On the contrary, the human rights approach may in fact even call for the willingness on the part of the descendants of the colonised communities to permanently recognise the rights of "different right holders", *including* those of the descendants of the European colonisers. Unless the human rights approach results in an immediate repatriation of cultural assets of colonial provenance, it can therefore only be a viable solution for the future if and as far as there is in fact a willingness on the part of the descendants of the colonised communities to develop nuanced solutions that go beyond the simple binary paradigm of restitution *or* refusal. This willingness, of course, cannot be forced – neither from a legal nor from a moral standpoint.

Self-regulation by Collective Public Self-Commitment (Soft Law)

By default, the lack of a possible enforcement by the courts is an element that all collective self-commitments made by cultural institutions and associations have in common. Reference texts that set the standards of practice for museum professionals, including, at international level, the "ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums" published by the International Council of Museums[88] or, in Germany, the "Guidelines for German Museums" issued by the German Museums Association[89] are classified in legal theoretical terms as "soft law", as are all forms of self-regulation. However, this is misleading, at least from the perspective of those who are not trained in the legal profession. The term "soft" does not refer to the social effectiveness of self-commitments, which in some cases – depending, of course, on how aware the public in question are of their colonial past – can be even greater than in cases of state legislation. Impressive examples of the effectiveness of soft law in the area of cultural heritage protection were the restitutions made, irrespective of the fact that the limitation period had long since expired, under the "Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art", ratified by many states and non-governmental organisations on 3 December 1998. The principles were put into practice by the German authorities under the watchful eyes of a global public sensitised to Nazi crimes and injustices.[90]

The crucial elements in the case of cultural assets of colonial provenance, therefore, are the contents of today's self-commitments as well as the awareness of colonial injustice among the general public in Europe. However, the current picture in this respect is inconsistent. While the "ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums", which follows the UNESCO Convention of 1970, really just reflects and confirms the current legal position,[91] the "Guidelines for German Museums" follow a trajectory which, on the one hand, goes beyond the current legal situation by taking "ethical lines of approach to the politics of restitution" while on the other leaving the final decision on cultural objects to the discretion of one side only, i.e. the current custodians of cultural heritage in Germany, ignoring any and all calls for dialogue.

This means that the structural inequalities which theoretically date back to the colonial era continue to have an effect in negotiations between non-European claimants and European respondents.[92] Even in those rare cases where the enforcement by the courts would be defeated only by a statute

of limitations, the "Guidelines" offer only a personal recommendation from its authors that museums and the authorities legally responsible for them should refrain from raising objections on the basis of a statute of limitations. At the same time, however, the Guidelines contain an explicit reference to the fact that, in "the rarest of cases" where a claimant may have a "legal right to enforce [restitution] by the courts", museums can, as a last resort, raise an objection based on the statute of limitations, thereby blocking the repatriation for ever.[93]

In all other cases, where claimants can no longer provide sufficient proof to enforce their repatriation request for reasons other than the limitation period having elapsed, the Guidelines *do not* recommend that museums voluntarily agree to reverse the burden of proof in favour of the claimants. In another case of historical injustice perpetrated by Germany, i.e. "the loss of assets due to Nazi persecution", on the other hand, the reversal of the burden of proof was specifically provided for, because according to the "Washington Principles" of 1998, "consideration should be given to unavoidable gaps or ambiguities in the provenance in light of the passage of time and the circumstances of the Holocaust era".[94] This reversal of the burden of proof from the claimant to the respondent, who would then have to prove that the acquisition of the cultural assets was lawful, would also be appropriate in the case of colonial injustice. Admittedly, this recently so-called "maximum demand" has been controversially discussed,[95] but as the passage of time since the colonial era is even greater than since the Nazi period, it is even more difficult to provide proof that would stand up in court.

Instead, the German Guidelines for Museums take "two ethical lines of approach to the politics of restitution", according to which the cultural object must *either* be of "special importance" *or* the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of the object at the time must constitute "an unacceptable 'injustice' by our own [*sic!*] standards today".[96] However, the question of who has the power to ascertain whether the object is of "special significance" or whether an "injustice" occurred that is unacceptable by "our own" standards, remains unanswered, as the "Guidelines" themselves admit.[97] This, however, leaves a lot of space for intentionally or unintentionally Eurocentric interpretations to enter into the process of negotiating restitutions.

However, even in cases where these restitution-political "Guidelines" recommend that an object should be returned, the official restitution requires additional proof of a "legal power on the part of the authority responsible for the museum, to hand over property [even] without legal obligation and

purely on the basis of ethical or moral considerations".[98] In 2019 both the German federal government and the state governments expressed a joint political will to create the legal basis to award such powers in cases where there is a "legal need for action" to "facilitate the repatriation of artefacts from colonial contexts".[99] This means that institutions that wish to return cultural assets of colonial provenance will at least no longer be legally prevented from doing so. Nevertheless, very little has been done with regard to legal policy since 2019. A motion brought before the German Parliament in 2021, which would not only have authorised but legally obligated museums, at least those under federal authority, to "work together with the claimants towards a practical solution in line with the Washington Principles for objects which, from today's perspective, can be shown to have been unlawfully acquired",[100] was defeated. Another motion to appoint "an ethics committee with representatives from communities of origin, museums and the sciences" in disputes regarding the repatriation of cultural heritage of colonial provenance,[101] was also rejected by the German parliament in February 2021,[102] as were other motions to preclude the citing of the statute of limitations with regard to claims of restitution of cultural assets of colonial provenance[103] and to reverse the burden of proof in cases of "collections from colonial contexts whose lawful acquisition cannot be proven [...]".[104]

Admittedly, there has been a clear shift in recent years in how cultural heritage of Indigenous provenance is dealt with today towards an approach that "is focused on the present and looks to the future".[105] This not only concerns the international human rights approach to cultural identity but also collective self-commitments with regard to how colonial injustice is dealt with (soft law) in Germany and even more so in the Netherlands,[106] and has recently even gone as far as the introduction of legal bills in Germany, which can be seen at least as a precursor to hard law, i.e. to a statutory provision for the repatriation of cultural heritage. One such approach that is focused on the present has been part of US state legislation for over thirty years: the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act 1990 (NAGPRA), which obligated "museums with federal funding to repatriate Native American cultural items even if there is no proof of claim, if a cultural affiliation with an Indian or Native Hawaiian tribe can be established".[107] In comparison, Germany still has a long way to go with regard to its cultural heritage of colonial provenance.

Furthermore, in early 2021 the German parliament voted on draft legislation governing the restitution of cultural heritage of colonial provenance in German collections, which shed light on yet another aspect of the issue:

not all collections concerned are under federal, state or municipal authority. The circle of potential respondents in restitution claims in Germany also includes private individuals and institutions. The latter, however, cannot be forced to return objects by law or by means of guidelines, even if these objects originated from actual contexts of colonial violence. The draft legislation therefore intended to prepare the ground by setting up a fund for the "repatriation by private parties of stolen cultural objects from colonial contexts". In cases where private institutions would have to be forced by state seizure to repatriate cultural objects to their communities of origin, the fund could then be used to compensate the institutions, as would be their right under the German constitution.[108] This draft legislation was also rejected by the German Parliament.[109]

How to proceed in the future?

As with the repatriation of Nazi plunder, dealing with cultural heritage of colonial provenance and the historical dimension of colonial injustice requires cross-party political will not to hide behind legal regulations created for the protection of property and cultural assets within a state that is governed by the *rule of law*, and not for the purpose of legally (and morally) processing state crimes committed in the past. Such regulations have been known in Germany as "*juristische Vergangenheitsbewältigung*" since the Second World War. Indeed, the German colonial territories were never governed by the rule of law, which at the time applied exclusively to the territory of the German Empire in Europe. It is doubtful that the cross-party will to deal with the consequences of historical colonial injustice, which can be quite painful for the descendants of the colonial masters, is strong enough in Germany even today. In the last legislative period, in 2021, for instance, different parliamentary motions to "unequivocally identify German colonialism as a crime"[110] and to create a central place of remembrance for the victims of colonialism similar to the Holocaust memorial in Berlin,[111] were rejected. This means that "both German colonialism and the European colonisation of Africa, which was associated with the West Africa Conference convened in Berlin by Otto von Bismarck in 1884/1885 […], continue to remain invisible […]" in the centre of Berlin.[112] Legislative initiatives by individual states, which are also

responsible for the education system, have pointed to the failure to raise awareness of colonial history in recent decades; according to these initiatives, this should begin with schools,[113] where future generations inside and outside of the German Parliament should be made taught more about colonial injustice than has been the case up to now. What has changed recently is that the coalition government in office since December 2021 has explicitly declared a willingness to seek a "dialogue with the communities of origin [in respect of] repatriations" and to develop "a concept for a place of learning and remembrance of colonialism".[114]

Any solution to the problem of how to deal with cultural heritage of colonial provenance in state, municipal or private institutions should in future be based on two fundamental principles. Firstly, any open or concealed form of unilateral power of interpretation and identification on the part of European states must be relinquished. Secondly, the practice of citing the fact that the provenance or circumstances of acquisition of an object can no longer be fully established as a reason for denying a restitution claim brought by representatives of the community of origin must cease. The Municipal Museum of Brunswick (*Städtisches Museum Braunschweig*), for instance, which is part of the PAESE project, has agreed to return an ammunition belt which probably belonged to the Namibian national hero Kahimemua Nguvauva, the leader of the Ovambanderu tribe, even though its provenance has not been ascertained beyond doubt.[115] The most important issue, however, is the necessity of ensuring global transparency with regard to the objects in Germany. Work on this has already begun following the establishment of a central "German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts"[116] in 2019 and a "Three-way strategy for the recording and digital publication of German collections from colonial contexts" devised by a conference of German Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in 2021; the five museums and institutions involved in the PAESE project of Lower Saxony are also members of a pilot group associated with the strategy.[117] Lower Saxony, specifically, has overseen the creation of the PAESE database, where the cultural heritage that is currently kept in its museums and collections can be accessed online.[118] Against this background, the following tasks should be carried out:

1. All cultural assets of colonial provenance should be made available for researchers worldwide through digital databases as soon as possible.
2. Proactive steps should be taken to offer to return all cultural assets which can be proven to have originated from a concrete context of injustice, especially objects that were acquired without the consent of their

owners or under duress, or objects that were acquired from an owner who was not culturally authorised to dispose of the object in question,[119] and if the offer is accepted, the objects should be returned forthwith to the descendants of the victims of colonial injustice.

3. All other cultural objects of colonial provenance where the states or communities of origin make non-competing[120] claims of repatriation by showing their cultural affiliation with the objects should also be returned, unless
   a. the new owners can prove that the original acquisition was legal, for instance in cases where objects were produced specifically for the purpose of being sold to the colonisers or where objects were part of a free and fair exchange of goods, *or*
   b. the claimants specifically agree to a solution other than physical restitution, for instance a permanent loan or a restitution by digital means only.

1 Valentiner, Wilhelm R. (1919): "Nationales oder internationales Museum?, in: Kristina Kratz-Kessemeier, Andrea Meyer, Bénédicte Savoy (Eds): *Museumsgeschichte. Kommentierte Quellentexte, 1750–1950*, Berlin 2010, pp. 247–251, pp. 247 f.; Heidt, Sheila (2021): "Koloniales Unrecht, Rückgabeforderungen", in: Thomas Sandkühler, Angelika Epple, Jürgen Zimmerer (Eds): *Geschichtskultur durch Restitution? Ein Kunst-Historikerstreit*, Köln, pp. 321–345, pp. 334ff..

2 Gesetz über den Friedensschluss zwischen Deutschland und den alliierten und assoziierten Mächten (Versailler Vertrag), 1919, in: Reichgesetzblatt (RGBl.) 1919, No. 140, pp. 687–1349 (Art. 119, p. 895).

3 Heidt, 2021*, Koloniales Unrecht*, p. 334.

4 On the terms "return" and "repatriation" see Müller, Lars (2021): *Returns of Cultural Artefacts and Human Remains in a (Post)colonial Context: Mapping Claims between the Mid-19th Century and the 1970s*, Working Paper Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste 1/2021, Magdeburg, p. 10, https://perspectivia.net/receive/pnet_mods_00004508, accessed 15 May 2023.

5 M'Bow, Amadou-Mahtar (1978): "A Plea for the Return of an Irreplaceable Cultural Heritage to Those who Created it, kommentiert von Clemens Wildt", in: *Translocations. Anthologie: Eine Sammlung kommentierter Quellentexte zu Kulturgutverlagerungen seit der Antike*, https://translanth.hypotheses.org/ueber/mbow, accessed 23 March 2023.

6 Sarr, Felwine; Savoy, Bénédicte (2018): *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics*: http://restitutionreport2018.com/sarr_savoy_en.pdf, p. 61, accessed 23 March 2023.

7 "Je suis d'une génération de Français pour qui les crimes de la colonisation européenne sont incontestables et font partie de notre histoire." https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/11/28/discours-demmanuel-macron-a-luniversite-de-ouagadougou, accessed 23 March 2023.

8 Kaleck, Wolfgang (2018): "Das Recht der Mächtigen. Die kolonialen Wurzeln des Völkerrechts", in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, Vol. 8, pp. 115–120; Hackmack, Judith; Kaleck, Wolfgang (2021): "Warum restituieren? Eine rechtliche Begründung", in: Sandkühler et. al., 2021, *Geschichtskultur durch Restitution?*, pp. 385–410, p. 399.

9 Goldmann, Matthias; von Loebenstein, Beatriz (2020): "Alles nur geklaut? Zur Rolle juristischer Provenienzforschung bei der Restitution kolonialer Kulturgüter (Thieves in the Temple? The Role of Law for the Restitution of Cultural Artefacts)" (May 13, 2020), in: *Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law & International Law (MPIL) Research Paper No. 2020-19*, p. 10, 21.

10 This aspect, which has not yet been fully highlighted even in postcolonial legal theory, is pointed out in ibid., pp. 3–6.

11 Taşdelen, Alper (2015): "Das völkerrechtliche Regime der Kulturgüterrückführung", in: Stefan Groth, Regina F. Bendix, Achim Spiller (Eds): *Kultur als Eigentum. Instrumente, Querschnitte und Fallstudien* (Göttinger Studien zu Cultural Property. Vol. 9), Göttingen, pp. 225–243, p. 225.

12 Campfens, Evelien (2020): "The Bangwa Queen: Artifact or Heritage?", in: Matthias Weller; Nicolai B. Kemle; Thomas Dreier; Karolina Kuprecht (Eds), *Raubkunst und Restitution – Zwischen Kolonialzeit und Washington Principles*, Baden-Baden, pp. 167–209, pp. 181–189; Taşdelen, 2015, *Kulturgüterrückführung*, pp. 225f.

13 Ibid., p. 226; Nietzel, Benno (2021): "Kulturgutschutz in Europa seit dem 19. Jahrhundert zwischen Verrechtlichung und Kolonialpraxis", in: Sandkühler et al., 2021, *Geschichtskultur durch Restitution?*, pp. 147–162, pp. 150–155.

14 Nietzel, 2021, *Kulturgutschutz*, pp. 154–158; Hackmack; Kaleck, 2021, *Warum restituieren?*, p. 388.

15 See note 17 below.

16 Campfens, 2020, *Bangwa Queen*, p. 182.

17 Internationaler Frauenbund (1912): *Die Stellung der Frau im Recht der Kulturstaaten. Eine Sammlung von Gesetzen verschiedener Länder bearbeitet durch die ständige Kommission des Internationalen Frauenbundes die Rechtsstellung der Frau betreffend*, Karlsruhe.

18 Today § 138 of the German Civil Code.

19 Herbert Jäckel, in 1909 a junior lawyer with a doctorate in jurisprudence and philosophy, for instance, felt obliged to refute contemporaneous doubts about the lawfulness of the contractual acquisition of land by the "Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft in Südwestafrika", by publishing a written defence of the colonial policies peppered with legal embellishments: *Die Landgesellschaften in den deutschen Schutzgebieten. Denkschrift zur Kolonialen Landfrage*, Jena 1909, p. 31. Any doubts which might have been voiced concerning the legal validity of a contract with a partner who is not familiar with either the German language or the German Civil Code, is brushed aside by Jäckel with this rather remarkable statement: "It serves no purpose to return to this question time and time again [*sic!*], because after 25 years [of German colonialism], it is no longer possible to provide any proper proof, either for or against."

20 Jäckel (1909): *Landgesellschaften*, p. 36.

21 Goldmann; von Loebenstein, 2020), *Alles nur geklaut?*, pp. 20f.

22 Meyer, Georg (1888): *Die staatsrechtliche Stellung der deutschen Schutzgebiete*, Leipzig, p. 41, 49f.

23 Hammen, Horst (1999): "Kolonialrecht und Kolonialgerichtsbarkeit in den ehemaligen deutschen Schutzgebieten – Ein Überblick", in: *Verfassung und Recht in Übersee*, Vol. 32, pp. 191–209, pp. 195–197.

24 Mecke, Christoph-Eric (2019): "The 'Rule of Law' and the 'Rechtsstaat': A Historical and Theoretical Approach from a German Perspective", in: *Studia Iuridica*, Vol. 79, pp. 29–47, pp. 34f., https://www.wuw.pl/data/include/cms/Studia_Iuridica_79_2019.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

25 Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art, December 3, 1998, on: https://web.archive.org/web/20170426113213/https://www.state.gov/p/eur/rt/hlcst/270431.htm, accessed 23 March 2023.

26 Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Eds): *Erklärung der Bundesregierung, der Länder und der kommunalen Spitzenverbände zur Auffindung und zur Rückgabe NS-verfolgungsbedingt entzogenen Kulturgutes insbesondere aus jüdischem Besitz vom 9. Dezember 1999*, https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/1999/1999_12_09-Auffindung-Rueckgabe-Kulturgutes.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

27 This was the reasoning, as late as 1999, when a restitution claim submitted to the State Museum for Ethnology (*Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde*) in Munich was denied. See Splettstößer, Anne (2015): "Ein Kameruner Kulturerbe? 130 Jahre geteilte Agency: Das Netzwerk Tange/Schiffschnabel", in: Stefan Groth; Regina F. Bendix; Achim Spiller (Eds): *Kultur als Eigentum. Instrumente, Querschnitte und Fallstudien* (Göttinger Studien zu Cultural Property. Vol. 9), Göttingen, pp. 199–223, p. 215, 217.

28 *Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums*, published by eighteen museums in the western World and Russia, https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/news/news-item/news/1999_2013/hm11_1_93/, accessed 23 March 2023. Regarding the question of how the objects should be dealt with in the future, the declaration demands "that objects acquired in earlier times must be viewed in the light of different sensitivities and values, reflective of that earlier era".

29 §§ 74, 75 Introduction to the "Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preußischen Staaten" [= *General State Laws for the Prussian States*] of 1794.

30 Cf. Hauser-Schäublin, Brigitta (2018): "Ethnologische Provenienzforschung – warum heute?", in: Larissa Förster, Iris Edenheiser; Sarah Fründt; Heike Hartmann (Eds): *Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit. Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte*, Berlin, pp. 327–333, p. 331.

31 See, for instance, Spettstößer, Anne; Taşdelen, Alper (2015): "Der Schutz beweglicher materieller Kulturgüter auf internationaler und nationaler Ebene", in: Stefan Groth; Regina F. Bendix; Achim Spiller (Eds): *Kultur als Eigentum. Instrumente, Querschnitte und Fallstudien*, Göttingen, pp. 83–96.

32 Melter, Claus (2017): "'Nichts über uns ohne uns!' – Herero und Nama im Streit um Selbst- und Mitbestimmung gegenüber dem von Deutschen verübten Völkermord", in: *PoliTeknik*, www.politeknik.de/p7762/, accessed 23 March 2023.

33 Siehr, Kurt (2005): "Internationaler Rechtsschutz von Kulturgütern: Schutz der bildenden Kunst in Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft", in: *Revue suisse de droit international et droit européen*, Vol. 15, pp. 53–77.

34 According to § 2 of the "Gesetz betreffend die Rechtsverhältnisse der deutschen Schutzgebiete" [= German Protectorate Law] of 17 April 1886, Deutsches Reichsgesetzblatt, 1886, pp. 75f., German private law was to be applied only according to the rules set out in the Consular Jurisdiction Law of 10 July 1879. Under the latter, citizens' rights could only be applied to those persons who were resident in the regions that fell under the General State Laws of the Prussian States of 1794 and to citizens of "other civilised states" [Meyer (1888): *Die staatsrechtliche Stellung*, p. 107]. An extension of German jurisdiction to the Indigenous peoples by executive order of the Emperor would have been possible according to § 3 No. 1 of the German Protectorate Law of 1886, but this never took place. §§ 3 and 4 of the new Protectorate Law of 10 September 1900 (Deutsches Reichsgesetzblatt 1900, no. 40, pp. 812–817), in conjunction with § 19 of the Consular Jurisdiction Law of 7 April 1900 (Deutsches Reichsgesetzblatt 1900, no. 15, pp. 213–228) only confirmed this legal situation for movable property.

35 Thielecke, Carola; Geißdorf, Michael (2019): "Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten. Rechtliche Aspekte", in: German Museum Association (Ed.): *Leitfaden. Umgang mit Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten*, second edition, Berlin, pp. 105–118, pp. 108–109. The same applied to the British colonies, where the Indigenous laws were seldom completely replaced by English law. See ibid., p. 111.

36 Gerstmeyer, Johannes (1910): *Das Schutzgebietsgesetz nebst der Verordnung betr[effend] die Rechtsverhältnisse in den Schutzgebieten und dem Gesetz über die Konsulargerichtsbarkeit in Anwendung auf die Schutzgebiete sowie den Ausführungsbestimmungen und ergänzenden Vorschriften*, Berlin, p. 26.

37 Kuprecht, Karolina (2020): "Kulturgüter aus der Kolonialzeit und Restitution: Änderungen ohne Änderungen", in: Matthias Weller; Nicolai B. Kemle; Thomas Dreier; Karolina Kuprecht (Eds): *Raubkunst und Restitution – Zwischen Kolonialzeit und Washington Principles*, Baden-Baden, pp. 153–165, p. 154.

38 See Schultz-Ewerth, Erich; Leonhard, Adam (1929): *Das Eingeborenenrecht. Sitten und Gewohnheitsrechte der Eingeborenen der ehemaligen deutschen Kolonien in Afrika und in der Südsee,* Vol. 1, Stuttgart, pp. V–IX, on numerous, initially private initiatives taken since 1893 to identify and present overviews of the laws of the Indigenous peoples. A 1907 Reichstag decree effectively made the recording of the different Indigenous legal orders an official task. The concrete political interests of the German colonialists to make the "best-possible economic use of the colonies" (ibid. p. VII) coincided with the interests of the academic subject of legal anthropology, which at the time was in its infancy, with the works of law professors Albert Hermann Post (1839–1895) preparing the ground and those of Joseph Kohler (1849–1919) breathing life into the new discipline. See also Sippel, Harald (2001): "Der Deutsche Reichstag und das ‚Eingeborenenrecht'. Die Erforschung der Rechtsverhältnisse der autochthonen Völker in den deutschen Kolonien", in: *Rabels Zeitschrift für ausländisches und internationales Privatrecht*, Vol. 61, no. 4, pp. 714–738.

39 Schultz-Ewerth; Leonhard, 1929/1930, *Das Eingeborenenrecht*, Vol. 1, pp. 241, 236, 320–324 (East Africa), Vol. 2, pp. 192–195 (Cameroon), pp. 259–263, 356f. (Southwest Africa).

40 The record of "customs and customary laws" cited in the previous note, for instance, was based in part on a study commissioned by the International Society of Comparative Law and Economy in 1893 which used questionnaires to instruct colonial officials and missionaries on the ground to collect legal anthropological source materials. See ibid., pp. Vf.

41 Zollmann, Jakob (2010): *Koloniale Herrschaft und ihre Grenzen. Die Kolonialpolizei in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894–1915*, Göttingen, pp. 26f.

42 Thielecke; Geißdorf, 2019, *Sammlungsgut*, p. 110.

43 Ibid., pp. 112–114.

44 Art. 43 par. 1 Introduction to the civil code of Germany [= Einführung in das Bürgerliche Gesetzbuch (EBGB)], §§ 985 ff. German civil code [= Bügerliches Gesetzbuch (BGB)].
45 §§ 929 sentence 1, 932, 935 par. 1 sentence 1 BGB, according to which the acquisition in good faith does not apply if the goods were stolen, lost or taken against the will of the person or persons that held the right of ownership.
46 § 937 par. 1 BGB.
47 Thielecke; Geißdorf, 2019, *Sammlungsgut*, pp. 113f.
48 https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2019/kw14-pa-kultur-medien-631622, accessed 23 March 2023, and note 101 below.
49 Thielecke; Geißdorf, 2019, *Sammlungsgut*, p. 110.
50 Ibid., p. 112.
51 Kamardeen, Naazima (2017): "The Protection of Cultural Property: Post-Colonial and Post-Conflict Perspectives from Sri Lanka", in: *International Journal of Cultural Property*, Vol. 24, pp. 429–450, pp. 436f.
52 European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, Glossary, Entry "Prinzip der Intertemporalität", https://www.ecchr.eu/glossar/prinzip-der-intertemporalitaet/, accessed 23 March 2023.
53 Kamardeen, 2017, *Protection*, p. 437.
54 Thielecke; Geißdorf, 2019, *Sammlungsgut*, p. 113.
55 Goldmann; von Loebenstein, 2020, *Alles nur geklaut?,* p. 4.
56 Ibid., p. 22.
57 See the information provided by the German Federal Government on current repatriation projects (Benin Bronzes, Stone Cross from Cape Cross) and repatriations that have already occurred (Hendrik Witbooi's Bible and whip) https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/bundeskanzleramt/staatsministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/sammlungsgut-aus-kolonialen-kontexten-1851438, accessed 23 March 2023.
58 Thielecke; Geißdorf, 2019, *Sammlungsgut*, p. 114.
59 Heidt, 2021, *Koloniales Unrecht*, p. 337.
60 Cf. Bernstorff, Jochen von; Jakob Schuler, "Restitution und Kolonialismus. Wem gehört die Witbooi-Bibel", on: https://verfassungsblog.de/restitution-und-kolonialismus-wem-gehoert-die-witbooi-bibel/, accessed 23 March 2023; Goldmann; von Loebenstein, 2020, *Alles nur geklaut?,* p. 25, claim that the government of Baden-Württemberg fulfilled "not just a moral duty but most likely also a legal obligation", despite the fact that the Hague Convention, which explicitly abolished the right of plunder in times of war that had existed in customary European law for centuries, did not come into force until 1910.
61 Order of the Baden-Württemberg Constitutional Court of 21 February 2019, Az. 1 VB 14/19, at: https://verfgh.baden-wuerttemberg.de/fileadmin/redaktion/m-verfgh/dateien/190221_1VB14-19_Beschluss.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.
62 In the case of Namibia, the government predominantly consists of members of the Ovambo. The Herero and Nama only make up a little over 12% of the population.
63 See also Bernstorff, Jochen von; Schuler, Jakob (2019): "Wer spricht für die Kolonisierten? Eine völkerrechtliche Analyse der Passivlegitimation in Restitutionsverhandlungen", in: *Zeitschrift für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht*, Vol. 79, pp. 553–577, https://www.zaoerv.de/79_2019/79_2019_3_a_553_577.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023, which addresses the difficult legal issue as to which actors in the countries of origin are entitled under international law to speak on behalf of colonised peoples.
64 Krajewski, Markus (2020): *Völkerrecht*, second edition, Baden-Baden, § 1, p. 21.
65 Thielecke; Geißdorf, 2019, *Sammlungsgut*, p. 114.
66 Cf. 1970 *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, Art. 7 b) i): "cultural property imported after the entry into force of this Convention in both States concerned".

67 The *Unidroit Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects* awarded actionable rights, not only to states but also for the first time to private parties, and emphasised that there is a particular interest in the restitution of "an illegally exported cultural object" for its "traditional or ritual use [...] by a tribal or indigenous community" (Art. 5 par. 3 lit. d). Apart from the fact that, here too, the possibility of backdating these rights to before 1995 is precluded, the convention is not actually legally binding in Germany because it has not yet been ratified by the Federal Republic of Germany.
68 See Taşdelen, 2015, *Kulturgüterrückführung*, pp. 227–229 on 20th century international law during times of war. However, in order to avoid the possibility that certain states would withdraw their overall support for the Hague Conventions of 1899, 1907 and 1954, the condemnation of the looting of cultural heritage did not for a long time result in a right to the restitution of cultural assets.
69 According to a legal opinion published in 2018 by the Research and Documentation Services of the German Bundestag: "Ausarbeitung von Kulturgütern aus Kolonialgebieten. Rechtsgrundlagen für Ansprüche auf Restitution", *WD 10 – 3000 – 023/18*, https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/561162/d41c5c7c2312cbd82286e01677c187e8/wd-10-023-18-pdf-data.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.
70 Cf. 1970 *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, Art. 7 b i) prohibiting "the import of cultural property stolen from a museum or a religious or secular public monument or similar institution in another State Party to this Convention after the entry into force of this Convention for the States".
71 Cf. 1970 *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, Art. 7 b ii) according to which "the requesting State [!] shall pay just compensation to an innocent purchaser or to a person who has valid title to that property".
72 Act for the Protection of Cultural Property (= *Gesetz zum Schutz von Kulturgut*) of 31 July 2016, in: Federal Law Gazette [= *Bundesgesetzblatt* (BGBl.)], Part I, p. 1914 (No. 39).
73 Kuprecht, 2020, *Kulturgüter*, p. 157.
74 Deutscher Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 19/5130 (18 October 2018), *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Dr. Kirsten Kappert-Gonther, Erhard Grundl, Margit Stumpp, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN – Drucksache 19/4177*, p. 19, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/051/1905130.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.
75 See the contribution by Evelien Campfens in this volume.
76 Campfens, 2020, *Bangwa Queen*, p. 208.
77 Ibid., pp. 207f.
78 Ibid., p. 208.
79 Human Rights Council (2010): "Report of the Independent Expert in the Field of Cultural Rights, Farida Shaheed", Document A/HRC/17/38, p. 16 (§ 62), p. 19 (§ 76).
80 Campfens, 2020, *Bangwa Queen*, p. 208.
81 Ibid., p. 199.
82 Kuprecht, 2020, *Kulturgüter*, p. 161; Campfens, 2020, *Bangwa Queen*, p. 199.
83 See the contribution by Chief Charles A. Taku in this volume.
84 Manase, Flower (2021): "Restitution and Repatriation of Objects of Colonial Context: The Status of Debates in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya National Museums", in: Sandkühler et. al., *Geschichtskultur durch Restitution?*, pp. 181–189, p. 186: "[…] communities […] often fail to connect with government and associated institutions like national museums to foster their claims."
85 Kuprecht, 2020, *Kulturgüter*, p. 158f.
86 The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2007 (61/295), an annexe of which grants Indigenous peoples "the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage […]" (§ 31), for instance, is not legally binding. Even the *Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*, or in short the *Faro Convention* (2005) is not legally binding either, nor has it been

ratified by Germany. Based on the right to "freely participate in the cultural life of the community" according to Art. 27 of the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Act*, the *Faro Convention* explicitly looks at "cultural heritage [...] independently of ownership" and is limited to the protection of the "common heritage of Europe" (Art. 3 Faro Convention), without clarifying the term in respect of the cultural heritage of non-European colonial provenance that is currently located in Europe.

87 Campfens, 2020, *Bangwa Queen*, p. 199.

88 International Council of Museums (2017): *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*, des International Council of Museums (ICOM), Paris, https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

89 German Museums Association (2021): *Guidelines for German Museums "Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts"*, Berlin, 3rd Edition, https://www.museumsbund.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/mb-leitfaden-en-web.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

90 Cf. below, note 92.

91 The "restitution of cultural property" requires the claimant to provide proof that the property came to Europe "in violation of the principles of international and national conventions", which precludes today's conventions from being applied retrospectively. Moreover, any museum that is willing to return any of its cultural assets must be "legally free to do so" under state law (section 6.3 *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*).

92 See only Manase, 2021, *Restitution*, pp. 182–184; Osadolor, Osarhieme Benson (2021): "The Benin Sculptures: Colonial Injustice and the Restitution Question", in: Sandkühler et. al, *Geschichtskultur durch Restitution?*, pp. 207–221, pp. 207, 215–221, about the history of restitution claims concerning the Benin Sculptures, which has lasted for more than half a century: "Since Nigeria regained independence from Britain in 1960, the Benin Royal Court and the Nigerian Government have consistently demanded a return of the stolen cultural objects [...]."

93 German Museums Association, 2021, *Guidelines*, p. 82.

94 *Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art, released in connection with The Washington Conference on Holocaust Era Assets*, Washington, DC, December 3, 1998, https://www.state.gov/p/eur/rt/hlcst/270431.htm, No. 4. In Germany this consideration is reflected in the possibility of reversing the burden of proof by governmental indications on the implementation of the *Declaration of the German Federal Government, the Federal States ("Bundesländer") and the Central Municipal Associations on the tracing and restitution of cultural property seized as a result of Nazi persecution, in particular from Jewish property* of December 1999 [Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien (2019), *Handreichung zur Umsetzung der Erklärung der Bundesregierung, der Länder und der kommunalen Spitzenverbände zur Auffindung und zur Rückgabe NS-verfolgungsbedingt entzogenen Kulturgutes, insbesondere aus jüdischem Besitz vom Dezember 1999*, New Edition 2019, p. 35, https://www.kulturgutverluste.de/Content/08_Downloads/DE/Grundlagen/Handreichung/Handreichung.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023].

95 Nietzel, 2021, *Kulturgutschutz*, pp. 160–162, disagrees and argues that the "maximum demand" of a reversal of the burden of proof, which "simply [*sic!*] labels the entire phenomenon of European colonialism a complex of injustice" and calls for proof of the contrary in each case, is not "enforceable or practicable". His solution to this problem is that *instead* of carrying out "extensive provenance research [...], research projects on the history of heritage protection" should shift their focus away "from an exclusively western European perspective" and should, in future, "give less priority to the material [i.e. the artefacts of colonial provenance in European collections]" and seek an "open dialogue" as well as "a solution based on ethical and moral considerations, rather than on formal legal principles". Regardless of the question of whether exactly this approach does not express a rather western perspective, Nietzel, however, overlooks three things: *firstly*, open dialogue with the descendants of the colonised and provenance research is not mutually exclusive, but actually mutually dependent.

This was shown by the PAESE project, which, among other things, was the catalyst for this volume of conference proceedings. *Secondly*, "ethical and moral considerations" and "formal legal principles" are not necessarily opposites. This is precisely where the call for a reversal of the burden of proof arises, i.e. in cases where the *descendants of the colonised* are not satisfied by dialogue alone, and *this* decision should most certainly not be in the hands of the descendants of the colonial masters. *Thirdly*, the enforceability or practicability of the reversal of the burden of proof does, in fact, depend on whether the descendants of the colonial masters today are finally becoming aware of the fact that the "entire phenomenon of European colonialism" is part of "a complex of injustice" of historic importance as well as the German persecution of the European Jews in the 20th century.

96 German Museums Association, 2021, *Guidelines*, p. 83.

97 Ibid., p. 83f.

98 Ibid., p. 86.

99 *Erste Eckpunkte zum Umgang mit Sammlungsgut aus kolonialen Kontexten der Staatsministerin des Bundes für Kultur und Medien, der Staatsministerin im Auswärtigen Amt für internationale Kulturpolitik, der Kulturministerinnen und Kulturminister der Länder und der kommunalen Spitzenverbände* (13 March 2019), p. 7, https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2210142/b4e7b4f2249f51cf9d-60cb31ef9888bb/190412-stm-m-sammlungsgut-kolonial-kontext-data.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

100 Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 19/8545 (19 March 2019): *Antrag von Einzelabgeordneten und der Fraktion der Freien Demokratischen Partei (FDP)*, p. 2, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/085/1908545.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

101 Ibid.

102 Deutscher Bundestag, Dokumente, *Textarchiv, 2019, 2./3. Lesung*, https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2019/kw14-pa-kultur-medien-631622, accessed 23 March 2023.

103 Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 19/9340 (11 April 2019), *Antrag von Einzelabgeordneten und der Fraktion DIE LINKE*, p. 2, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/093/1909340.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

104 Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 19/7735 (13 February 2019), *Antrag von Einzelabgeordneten und der Fraktion BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN*, p. 3, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/077/1907735.pdf; Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 19/9340 (11 April 2019), *Antrag von Einzelabgeordneten und der Fraktion DIE LINKE*, p. 2, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/093/1909340.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

105 Kuprecht (2020): "Kulturgüter", p. 163.

106 National Museum of World Cultures (2019), *Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process*, p. 6 (4. Criteria for Claims for Return), https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/sites/default/files/2019-03/Claims%20for%20Return%20of%20Cultural%20Objects%20NMVW%20Principles%20and%20Process_1.pdf, accessed 23 March 2022).

107 Kuprecht, 2020, *Kulturgüter*, p. 163.

108 Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 19/9340 (11 April 2019), *Antrag von Einzelabgeordneten und der Fraktion DIE LINKE*, p. 2, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/093/1909340.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

109 Deutscher Bundestag, *Dokumente, Textarchiv, 2019, 2./3. Lesung*, https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2019/kw14-pa-kultur-medien-631622, accessed 23 March 2023.

110 Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 19/20546 (30 June 2020), *Antrag von Einzelabgeordneten und der Fraktion DIE LINKE*, p. 4, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/205/1920546.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

111 Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 19/7735 (13 February 2019): *Antrag von Einzelabgeordneten und der Fraktion BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN*, p. 2, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/077/1907735.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

112 Hackmack; Kaleck, 2021, *Warum restituieren?*, p. 395.

113 Niedersächsischer Landtag Drucksache 18/9921, *Entschließung des Landtags vom 14.09.2021*, p. 1, https://www.landtag-niedersachsen.de/Drucksachen/Drucksachen_18_10000/09501-10000/18-09921.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

114 Coalition agreement 2021–2025 between the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), ALLIANCE 90/The Greens and the Free Democratic Party (FDP): *Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit*, 20th legislative period of the *Bundestag*, p. 100, https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/1990812/04221173eef9a6720059cc353d759a2b/2021-12-10-koav2021-data.pdf?download=1, accessed 23 March 2023. The agreement drawn up by the previous coalition in the 19th legislative period (2017–2021) had made specific reference only to the "return of cultural assets seized during the period of Nazi persecution", while the "colonial-era cultural heritage in museums and collections" had only been mentioned in the context of "establishing its provenance" (*Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa. Eine neue Dynamik für Deutschland. Ein neuer Zusammenhalt für unser Land*, *Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD,* 19th legislative period of the Bundestag, p. 169, https://gfx.sueddeutsche.de/pdf/Koalitionsvertrag2018.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

115 https://www.provenienzforschung-niedersachsen.de/patronengurt-gehoerte-legendaerem-anfuehrer-der-ovambanderu/, accessed 23 March 2023.

116 https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/pdf/PresseUndAktuelles/2019/2019-10-16_Konzept_Sammlungsgut_aus_kolonialen_Kontexten_oeffentlich.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

117 Niedersächsischer Landtag Drucksache 18/9921: *Entschließung des Landtags vom 14.09.2021*, p. 1f.

118 https://www.postcolonial-provenance-research.com/datenbank/, accessed 23 March 2023.

119 This proposed list does not include all possible cases but is based on the criteria listed in point 4.3 of the Guidelines of the *Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen* [National Museum of World Cultures (2019): *Return of Cultural Objects: Principles and Process*, p. 6, https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/sites/default/files/2019-06/NMVW%20Return%20of%20Cultural%20Objects%20%20Principles%20and%20Process.pdf, accessed 23 March 2023.

120 If and as long as different claimants, who have shown to be culturally affiliated with the same cultural objects of colonial provenance, are in dispute because of their conflicting claims for repatriation, said repatriation to any one of those claimants is highly problematic. Premature repatriation to any one party in a case such as this would mean that the European owners would effectively cast the deciding vote in the dispute, although they have no legal, moral or cultural right to do so, thereby creating a situation which would most likely be irrevocable. Such disputes must be settled among the claimants themselves, supported, for instance, by a process of mediation through a neutral ethics committee.

IX.

Whose Voices?
Beyond the PAESE-Conference

Les voix de qui ?
Au-delà de la conférence PAESE

Whose Voices?
On Power, Terminology and the Definition of Community

A Postscript

Whose Voices? Beyond the PAESE-Conference

Whose Voices? On Power, Terminology and the Definition of Community

A Postscript

Albert Gouaffo, Flower Manase, Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi and Tommy Y. Buga

Editorial Note

This postscript revisits and discusses key questions that came to light during the conference or in the course of collaboration in the PAESE project. In line with the guiding question: "Whose Voices?", the final word of the PAESE conference was given to our colleagues from the countries of origin. Our partners, Flower Manase (National Museum, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania), Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi (National Museum Windhoek, Namibia), Tommy Buga (National Museum and Art Gallery, Port Moresby, PNG) and Albert Gouaffo (University of Dschang, Cameroon), were asked to give a short opening statement focusing on one important point from their perspective. These statements are printed in the following, having been edited for purposes of clarity. Richard Tsogang Fossi (Technical University Berlin) chaired the discussion and has summarised the debate in the paper that follows the statements. We sincerely thank our partners and hope to provide further impulses for the research field and to continue the discussion in the future.

Les voix de qui ? Pouvoir, terminologie et définition de la communauté : Post-scriptum (Note de la rédaction)

Ce post-scriptum reprend et évoque des questions fondamentales mises en lumière pendant la conférence ou dans le cadre de la collaboration au projet PAESE. En accord avec la question directrice : « Les voix de qui ? », le mot de la fin de la conférence PAESE a été donné à nos collègues des pays d'origine. Nos partenaires, Flower Manase (Musée national, Dar es Salaam, Tanzanie), Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi (Musée national Windhoek, Namibie), Tommy Buga (Musée national et galerie d'art, Port Moresby, PNG) et Albert Gouaffo (Université de Dschang, Cameroun), ont été invité à faire une brève présentation préliminaire en mettant l'accent sur un point important à leurs yeux. Ces déclarations sont imprimées dans les pages qui suivent, après avoir été éditées dans un souci de clarté. Richard Tsogang Fossi (Université technique de Berlin) a présidé la discussion et a résumé le débat dans l'article qui suit les déclarations. Nous remercions sincèrement nos partenaires et nous espérons apporter un nouvel élan au domaine de la recherche et poursuivre la discussion à l'avenir.

Flower Manase (National Museum, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)

Defining and Engaging our Communities

My background is in museum collaboration and provenance research, and from this perspective the topic of collection is strongly connected to that of restitution. I feel, however, that more must be done to connect the museums within the communities, which means in effect a community museum. This is an area that was not reflected on much during our conference but highly significant for work in the museum context. Most of the national museums in Europe acquired their inventories in colonised or formerly colonised states. And this conference has shown great similarities in orientation and interpretation, boding well for looking into the future, transforming the museum as such, re-interpreting our collections and trying to reflect not only on collections in Europe but also on those in African museums, as these collections were also put together during colonial times.

But in this transformation process I would emphasise that museums in both Africa and in Europe need to take a few steps back and ask the question: "Who are we serving?" The original objective of the museums was to

serve the higher classes, who were generally educated people. Are we trying to serve these higher classes and elites, or are we trying to engage each and everyone in the community? And if we are aiming for the latter, we should think carefully about our agenda in this aspect of the project and dialogue, especially when it comes to provenance research and restitution.

It is not only the collections and the terminology that need to be revisited, but also the museum catalogues and registry books. These contain a great deal of offensive terminology, especially in reference to people in the countries of origin. We need a clear definition of what we are referring to in the local contexts. We can do this through historical sources. We also need to speak to the owners, as the museums are usually mere custodians. Particularly interesting is the video that shows how the Ngonso from the Nso community were placing demands on these collections and how the museums that currently hold the collections responded.

Given that it is our clearly defined objective to move from the colonial museum setting into a newer version of the museum in which we can engage each and every one from the relevant communities, the question is: Where are we transforming to? Are we realising this objective? And how do we define our communities? Who is our community? Whether we are working with the national, state-owned museum, which has its own political agenda, or with the university museums, which have a different agenda, or the community museum – how do we define our community and how do we engage them? How can we listen to their demands and include them in our decision-making processes?

Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi
(National Museum, Windhoek, Namibia)

Decolonising Knowledge, or: Whose Voices will be Heard?

These restitution debates are a huge step forward, and it is great to see so many projects taking place in different countries, including Germany. This work helps us to shed light on what happened in the past and to look towards the future.

One concern that recurs in the restitution context is that a country might not be ready to receive its cultural heritage if it were to be restituted today. Of course, we wish for our objects to be returned to us. But the museums in the countries of origin, to where the objects would be returned, are in many

cases not ready to accommodate them. Before objects are returned, an honest discussion needs to take place around where the object in question would be accommodated and what will be required to maintain it. This is an issue of restitution that goes much further than the mere act of returning, one that encompasses mutual dialogue and engagement.

My recommendation would be a preparatory phase in which the circumstances are considered and those involved discuss how – and indeed whether at all – the object should or can be displayed or stored. An object that speaks of ritual, for example, a sensitive object, cannot be displayed. All participants in the process should be included in communication about how to respect these particular rituals that are sacred to the communities of origin.

We can achieve this by continuing to engage each other in dialogue and collaboration. The affected communities welcome the willingness of German museums to cooperate and open their doors to scholars who can identify the objects that need to be returned or repatriated, regardless of the circumstances in which those objects were taken. But moving forwards means not only progressing with regard to the objects themselves, but also by decolonizing the knowledge showcased in these museums. It is also important to consider the values attached to the objects by the communities of origin.

We acknowledge that we cannot change what happened in the past. But what we are doing today – me and you – this we can change: the present and the future. What will be our role in this process, and whose voices will be heard in the discussion moving forwards?

Tommy Yaulin Buga
(National Museum and Art Gallery, Port Moresby, PNG)

Linguistic Violence and the Need to Rewrite Object Descriptions

In order for us to correct the mistakes of the past, we need to come together more often and to re-write some of the problems we are facing, especially descriptions of objects. I am referring here specifically to the construction of terms used in museums and institutions here in Europe. While we do not know where these terms came from, it is likely that they reflect the mindsets and attitudes of a certain period in our shared history. It is now for us as a project research team to sit together and re-write certain linguistic errors that have been made in the past.

One question is whether these expressions were indeed "errors", as I have referred to them above, or whether they reflect a past mentality. After all, these objects were not collected in our time, but in a time of other views, of territorial views of others. Based on my experience, I strongly believe that some of the errors were made before English was taught in Papua New Guinea, and that that time, without an understanding of basic English, it was not possible for my people to translate the descriptions of objects. I believe that these errors now need to be discussed and corrected. I recommend including and involving students or technical workers from formerly colonised countries of origin who have worked closely with a lot of objects; this can only be a win-win situation for both sides.

When thinking about how we can progress, I imagine where our conferences might be in terms of debate in five or ten years' time. What sort of terminology will be available to future generations then? And will we have learned to include those from the communities of origin, those who know the objects best, in their definition, categorisation, storage, and description?

Albert Gouaffo (University of Dschang, Cameroon)

Moral Principles of Postcolonial Provenance Research

Having listened to all the presentations of this conference, I have organised my response into three lines of thought: First, I will share my thoughts about postcolonial provenance research; second, I will talk about a moral principle that should guide the framework for our research. And third, I will consider certain challenges that we face in this collaborative effort.

Provenance research is 'normal' research as in many other fields; the process of shedding some light on a collection, as in any museum or in a classic library. But *postcolonial* provenance research is different. It is an interdisciplinary field of research, where specialisms and different areas of expertise meet. You don't need to be an ethnologist or a historian; many disciplines are at work here, such as anthropology, political science and other subjects, even literature, when approaching postcolonial provenance research from a cultural point of view. This is fundamental research in the colonial context.

But what do I mean exactly by the colonial context? This is a context of physical, psychological and verbal violence. Anything acquired by trickery,

exchange, threat or fear has not been acquired on an equal footing. And the African states asking for the return of their cultural heritage are not beggars. We therefore need to find out who acquired these objects, whether we are talking about missionaries, colonial merchants, explorers, or others who were looking for something exotic in the colonies, exerting as they did so that symbolic power given to them by their European origin. Everything appropriated in this context, whether referred to as "acquired", "purchased" or "exchanged", is now – from our postcolonial viewpoint – a problem to be resolved. Where did these objects go, and why? Where are those objects today, and why? And how can we best manage this past that we have inherited? This is my first point.

My second point is that our work therefore needs to be guided by moral principles. In order to have a real, true, provenance debate we have to trust one another; we need transparency and to collaborate on an equal footing. We want to retrieve objects that belonged to our ancestors. Let us look at the context of transnational collaboration. Europe, particularly its natural history museums, now more than ever finds itself confronted by its colonial past. This conference has made this very clear. And the restitution of African objects takes a lot of time. But the moral principle must be that European museums are only authorised to keep and maintain such objects if permission has been acquired legally in the absence of violence or coercion.

But in doing so we face challenges. We listened yesterday to the mayor of the people of Nso, speaking about the Statue of the Ngonso in Cameroon. It is not up to us Africans to prove that this object belongs or belonged to us. It is up to the Europeans to prove that these objects are truly part of *their* cultural heritage and a significant part of *their* identity, having belonged to *their* ancestors. When we – as have the organisers of this conference – speak of "so-called recipient societies", it is a matter of *postcolonial* provenance research. For it is often the case that Europeans are unfamiliar with the communities of origin, cannot locate them on a map, and sometimes are even unaware of their existence.

So what can European museums and researchers do? They can share their research findings and infrastructure. Libraries can open their doors to researchers from the countries of origin. Europeans need to understand that, while we may have known *of* one other for centuries, we still don't really *know* each other very well at all. We generally have fixed ideas of each other, based on what we would like the other to be, but not on how they truly are. We now need to foster a new ethical relationship, not based on concepts of

"them" and "us" but just as "us", thrown together as we are in the world of today, intrinsically connected by our shared past. We may see this past in different ways, but addressing it together could perhaps be the beginning of something new that has hitherto been lacking. Humanity as a whole could benefit immensely from drawing on all the world's knowledges, including African knowledges, and breaking away from the Eurocentric episteme, this particular universalism that originated in Europe.

Richard, you ask me whether we are ready for this dialogue; whether we can both speak *and* understand, and what we can do to dismantle the persistently asymmetrical power relations that are the lasting consequences of the colonial period. I know that it is possible to recalibrate and rebalance these powers in this situation that is the result of history: this inherited history that we did not live ourselves; in which we were not acting subjects. If we want to put an end to this unbalanced relationship, we need to look in the mirror first of all and question what has happened, and evaluate this joint past and the various memories that we have. I take as my point of departure the assumption that we are postcolonial subjects, and as such we rely on a context and a history that we have not lived, but which we have received. It is our postcolonial task to take stock of the situation and of the past and to look at how we can move forwards together. As a postcolonial subject, I suffer from this imbalance in the same way that people from the privileged world do who have inherited this past. But this is nevertheless the past, and it is a huge step forward that we can all sit at the same table today – this is proof that we can work out a shared future together.

IX.

Whose Voices?
Beyond the PAESE-Conference

Beyond the PAESE-Conference

Voices from Africa and Papua New Guinea

Beyond the PAESE-Conference

Voices from Africa and Papua New Guinea

Richard Tsogang Fossi

November 2017, the French president Emmanuel Macron addressed the students at the university Ouaga I Professeur Joseph-Ki-Zerbo in Ouagadougou about ancient African art treasures stored en masse in French and European museums.[1] According to him, African cultural heritage can no longer be held hostage by Europe.[2] As a result, the French president made a ground-breaking promise to return these heritage objects to their rightful owners within a scope of five years.[3] This dauntless promise to return art works looted during French colonial domination inspired hopes in Africa, and meanwhile seismic reactions were registered in Western countries, mostly former colonial masters. Art markets, museums, and art galleries' holders, curators, private collectors and politicians suspected the end of their existence. The fear of losing collections which had somehow become a part of themselves was obvious. Yet, neither the circumstances under which these objects had come to them more than a century before, nor the traumatic and destabilizing effects of their absence in the communities of origin, were subjects of questioning.

Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, who on behalf of the French president submitted a report containing recommendations and a schedule for the return of African heritage objects held in France, called for a new relational ethic.[4] Since then, many people have expected to witness waves of restitutions. Instead, indifferent silence seems to have followed the speech,

and despair to overshadow the glimmer of hope that had arisen: in fact, until 2019, only one object had left France so far for its homeland,[5] followed by 26 others – out of thousands! – in 2021 to the Republic of Benin. Unlike France, Germany as the first colonial master of Cameroon (1884–1916), Togo (1884–1914), Namibia (1884–1914), Tanzania (1885–1914) and Papua New Guinea (1884/1899–1914), decided to invest in intensive, lengthy provenance research programmes.[6] This provenance research encompasses ancestral human remains,[7] ethnological, zoological, botanical and mineralogical objects[8] removed against the backdrop of violent colonial extractive policies. German guidelines on how to deal with collections from colonial contexts have been issued since 2018[9], and researching the provenance of colonial art works has become one of the tasks of the German Lost Art Foundation, academic institutions, and museums, inspiring new perspectives and synergies termed postcolonial.[10]

The PAESE project is therefore one of the first large-scale postcolonial provenance research collaborations to be launched over collections from colonial contexts in Germany. It aimed at investigating the circumstances of the removal of artefacts in colonial times, at fostering provenance research projects in different German federal states, and at establishing, promoting dialogue, transparency, and cooperation with, and networking the communities of origin and Germany.[11] It has proven important to carry out such a project. However, some questions have remained unasked and/or unanswered, especially from an African perspective, for instance pertaining to the prevalence of European laws coined against restitution, the fate of objects whose provenance cannot be clarified due to lack or loss of archives,[12] or the person entitled to keep such pieces. And there are more questions around who has to prove the ownership of the disputed artefacts, or Germany's true commitments towards countries whose art assets have been unlawfully removed, plundered or looted? And so forth.

The last panel, scheduled as a momentous phase of the conference, aimed at giving the floor to those who were/are particularly deprived of their heritage and memories, such as workers in the cultural sector or intellectuals from the communities of origin,[13] who are knowledgeable about these questions. This final postscript culls some points from the discussions that need to be highlighted in the context of a changing political and curatorial landscape.

Postcolonial Provenance Research and New Directions

In the last decades, the term "postcolonial" has become one of the keywords to theorise and investigate colonial history from a critical point of view with the aim of uncovering and dismantling persistent imperial structures, the aftermaths of colonial epistemic, structural and physical violence.[14] As Dirk Göttsche puts it, postcolonial discourse uses individual and collective memory to promote critical knowledge of the history of colonialism and raise awareness of its continuing impact in the present. It also works towards political, social and cultural decolonisation in a globalised, interconnected and yet conflict-ridden world that continues to be marked by colonial legacies such as racism, asymmetrical power relations and uneven access to resources and opportunities.[15]

Postcolonial discourse offers a lens for analysing and understanding the legacies of colonialism and the ways in which the colonial discourse inevitably structured social, racial, cultural, monetary and political hierarchies which still underpin relationships between the West and its Others today, albeit in other forms.[16] The colonial discourse 'advocated' the predominance of the West over other peoples on a racial and social-Darwinist basis in terms of the struggle for existence, and considered the idea of racial equality as a "senseless dream".[17] Against this backdrop, the use of violence, force and systematised slavery against the colonised populations, who were deemed inferior, wild, lazy and uncivilised, became a tool of the so-called civilizing mission.[18]

At the cultural level specifically, this violence culminated on the one hand in the wilful destruction of cultural goods of the colonised[19] and, on the other hand, in the violent, forcible removals of these[20] in order to stock European museums. These removals were also justified through a "saviour paradigm"[21] by museum directors and owners like Felix von Luschan (1854–1924), or Karl Weule (1864–1926), who claimed that, in the clash of two cultures, the weaker was bound to disappear, and that it was urgently necessary to secure their cultural materials as testimonies for upcoming generations and for so-called scientific purposes.[22] As concerns the Christian missions, who equally removed but also destroyed cultural goods with frenzy,[23] their actions were supposed to symbolise and materialise the victory of Christianity over the so-called forces of darkness, paganism and wizardry.[24] Yet, to the museum men and the colonialists of all kinds,[25] as well as the missionaries, these removals, and the change

in value of things that they entailed – commodification and commoditisation[26] – led to wide networks of African artefact trafficking, of which Africans themselves were hardly aware and from which they did not benefit.[27]

In this regard, postcolonial provenance research is deemed necessary in order to uncover the processes of colonial extraction of cultural goods and humans, and also to critically reassess the narratives that surround their display in curatorial practices. Such a critical approach provides impulses to the "postcolonial museum".[28] Such provenance research is understood by Albert Gouaffo as a wide, multiperspectival, multidirectional and transnational process, which is not the sole task or privilege of the museologists, the ethnologists or anthropologists. It is a cross-research process at the intersection of many academic disciplines that help to understand the colonial context. It is pivotal research on the colonial context as one of physical, linguistic/verbal, psychological, military and symbolic violence. Along the same lines, almost everything acquired in the colonies was extracted via processes far from on an equal footing, and thus symbolises the colonial asymmetrical power relations. This calls for a minute scrutiny of the acquisition context.

At the moral or ethical level, postcolonial provenance research must rely on mutual trust, transparency and readiness to discuss on an equal footing, because "the African states asking for the return of their cultural heritage are not beggars", as Albert Gouaffo says (see above). Quests for restitution are not new, but as Bénédicte Savoy has made visible, these have been voluntarily sabotaged and delayed over the years through lies and misinformation by European museum directors or museum holders.[29] This situation will only change when there is a reversed burden of proof: the new White Man's burden. Africans are not the ones to prove that the requested artefacts are parts of their cultural heritage; rather, Europe should have the burden of proving that she acquired the artefacts legally. European museums holding artefacts from the colonial context should become "objects of investigation" and not remain "subjects of research" (Gouaffo). In this sense, they should become like libraries, open without restrictions to the communities of origin. A new ethical relationship in the sense of a postcolonial provenance research should not be based on the principle of "us" and "them" – one of binary exclusion and an essentialisation of identities, but on "us in a common world", where we are connected through our past, even if we do not necessarily share its interpretation. This leads to the idea of museums as "contact zones"[30], e.g., as interacting spaces of possible shifts in meaning and practices. Europe should therefore consider a decentralisation of her knowledge production, including more possible universalities instead of persevering in an exclusive universalism.

Reconnection with Home Communities and the Issue of Restitution

Is there hope that the PAESE project will trigger new ways of dealing with collections from the colonial context, with new approaches to a collaborative provenance research, new methodologies and epistemics as well as a revolutionary handling of the issue of restitution, one that has recently mobilised public opinion worldwide?[31] As mentioned above, the PAESE project calls for closer collaboration with the source communities. According to Flower Manase, however, there is a need to define these communities: Who are the real owners? Who are the potential beneficiaries of restitutions? And who do the museums, which are mere custodians, actually serve today – the higher classes, or elites? Or are they committed to everyone in the community? According to Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi and Tommy Y. Buga, the collaborative approach helps identify which objects may be eligible for restitution based on the values that the communities still attach to them.

As Amuna Wagner puts it, these debates are not only conversations about the past or solely about objects. The restitution movement is concerned with the possibilities of what the homecoming of human bones or cultural objects can mean for our societies and creative economies. Discussing the artefacts' history and unlawful acquisition, and tracing the disputes between museums and the societies of origin, can illuminate new paths into decolonial African futures.[32]

Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that, even in Europe, museums are faced with difficulties such as the contamination of collections through pesticides, which also complicates restitution efforts.[33] Furthermore, the need to work closer with the communities and societies of origin is based on the fact that information about the displaced ancestral remains or the cultural objects as well as their functions is not located at specific places such as the museums or archives only. As Amber Aranui reports from her experience in New Zealand: "It is important to note that provenance information does not survive solely within museum archives. Information can be obtained from a number of sources and be found in a number of different countries".[34] But is researching provenance tantamount to apologising, repatriating and making reparations, or is it only an extension of the old strategies of the 1970s to bury or delay demands for restitution?[35] It is true that restitution alone cannot dissolve all the colonial wrongdoings. Yet, Adebo Abiti holds that "restitution, decolonisation and nation state formation must be addressed by re-evaluating violence against societies that have experienced land displacement, brutal killings

and the looting of cultural objects, all of which have caused unresolved painful memories and injustice".[36] This would give us the chance to rehabilitate local Indigenous knowledge as a form of alternative cultural practice that will today also become a force against persistent colonial epistemic violence.[37]

The restitution issue also has to do with the infrastructures that must welcome the returned cultural goods. Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi notes that, although African countries need their cultural goods back, in many cases they seem not to be ready due to a lack of infrastructures and because of administrative problems. Although she relies as illustrations on the instances of the stone cross "pradao", removed by the German colonial government in 1893 and kept in the German Historical Museum (*Deutsches Historisches Museum*) Berlin, and which was returned to Namibia in August 2019, or the Bible and Whip of the Nama ruler Hendrik Witbooi,[38] this echoes arguments put forward in Europe in the 1970s to counter restitution requests.[39] Indeed, for decades it has been claimed that sub-Saharan Africa is neither equipped nor has the necessary expertise in the domain of conservation, although in recent years new structures and innovative museum practices have been established in Senegal, Benin and Cameroon.[40] What then are the role and degree of implication of source communities in the research and decision-making processes for restitution, bearing in mind that, until now, the recipient countries have been the ones to decide on what to return and when? In this regard, we also need to focus on the local knowhow as concerns expertise on conservation issues, since many of the old artefacts looted or extorted[41] were not taken from museums. This means that there were improved local conservation methods that the colonial domination destabilised and, in some cases, caused to vanish completely.

The Question of Terminologies and the Role of Education

The question of terminologies is of great importance when discussing colonial history and memory in general, and collections from colonial contexts in particular. Postcolonial research and also decolonial[42] curatorial practices,[43] which have to undermine persistent (neo)colonial mindsets so as to enhance counter-narratives and an emancipatory way of dealing with collections from colonial contexts, must pay attention to the words used to construct knowledge and narratives that define the artefacts. Klaus Zimmermann refers to

this linguistic dimension with regard to the Christian missions as "colonial linguistics" (*Kolonialinguistik*) or "missionary linguistics" (*Missionarlinguistik*)[44] and defines this as "the grammatical and lexical description of foreign languages in the context and interests of Christian proselytising of these peoples and, to this end, the writing of Christian treatises".[45] Accordingly, Zimmermann argues that European domination over the belief systems of the Others would not have been possible without this linguistic tool.[46]

Strategies of a critical engagement with the translocated cultural heritage from the colonial context show how the colonial matrix shaped knowledge by excluding knowledge skills of the communities of origin, and by deriding their belief or medical systems and social norms. This is particularly clear when studying the Christian way of labelling cultural goods. Sacral or power objects were and are still recorded simply as "fetishes", "amulets" or "sorcerers' tools" and "witchcraft", while local rulers are referred to as *"Häuptlinge",*[47] a highly pejorative designation of "Others" as *"Naturvölker"*: "primitive peoples".

Still in this regard, the discussions on disputed colonial collections can be channelled by revisiting notions such as "gift", "purchase", "collection", "donor", "communities of origin/source communities", etc. The formulation "so-called communities of origin" by the organisers of the conference,[48] without in return also speaking of "so-called recipient countries", triggered uneasy reactions because, according to Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi, Tommy Y. Buga and Albert Gouaffo, the syntagma appears symptomatic of the persistent colonial mindset. How can communities of origin be qualified "so-called"? Does this mean that nobody knows who and where they are, or that they claim a status which is not true? The expression "shared heritage" also appears problematic because, as Flower Manase puts it, "is it the objects that are shared, or the stories around them? [...] Instead, we are sharing the burden".

Some other notions, such as the terms "gift" or "purchase"[49] also pose questions, as in the case of the Tangue in the *Museum Fünf Kontinente* in Munich (Inventory Number 7087), loot from the plundering of Lock Priso's (1846–1916) houses, the resisting ruler of Bonaberi (then Hickory Town) on the 22 December 1884 by the medical doctor and colonial administrator Max Buchner (1846–1926), assisted by the German marines led by Admiral Eduard von Knorr (1840–1920).[50] According to the inventory of the Munich Museum, this disputed artefact is registered simply as a "gift" (*Geschenk*), without any mention of the plundering war that led to its removal. This highlights the fact, as Flower Manase also stresses, that not only the terminologies, but also the catalogues themselves need to be revisited.

Although the conference did not offer a specific contribution to the topic, the question of the importance of schools as places of implementing nation-building politics[51] was also raised. More than half a century after independence, many school textbooks, especially for sub-Saharan Africa, are written and published in Europe, and European languages have become the official languages. This cannot favour the consolidation and transmission of African cultural heritage, nor can it inspire students to become involved in the renaissance of their cultural identity, said Tommy Y. Buga. In this regard, history curriculum reforms are required as well as the need for workers in the cultural sector to also take part in the process of rethinking the postcolonial school and school textbooks as media of collective, cultural, and historical memory. As Ruth Firer and Sami Adwan note, "history and civics subjects are especially influential tools for conveying values, and therefore play a central role in the formation of public opinion and in forming both self-identity and the attitudes towards the others".[52] In this regard, the influential potential of school textbooks can also be exploited for a better reconnection to one's cultural heritage.

Conclusion

If the collections from colonial contexts remain an unresolved problem, as Jos van Beurden postulates,[53] we must acknowledge the different strategies that the recipient countries and the source communities design every day to overcome the impediments that still obstruct the path to reconciling efforts to deal responsibly with colonial legacies on both sides. How to restore disrupted memories and identities, and how to cope with the necessity to fix the historical, colonial wrongdoings through repatriations and returns of ancestral remains and cultural goods? And how do we envision our future as a shared future, or how do we envision our future while giving Others the chance for their futures to equally exist or coexist? These are questions that still need to be asked if we want to act, not in the sense of colonial antagonism, but in a way that challenges exclusionary and intolerant policies.

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2 Sarr; Savoy, 2018, *Restituer*, p. 11.

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Biographies of the Authors

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Evelien Campfens
is an international lawyer specialised in art and cultural heritage law. She is an academic based at Leiden University, and consults private and public parties on issues concerning looted art (e.g. the European Parliament and the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights). Between 2002 and 2015 Evelien was the general secretary to the Dutch Restitutions Committee for Nazi looted art. She lectures at universities in the Netherlands and abroad, and is member of the Ethical Committee of the Dutch Museum and of the Cultural Heritage Committee of the International Law Association. She frequently engages in the public debate and published widely in her field

Paule-Clisthène Dassi Koudjou
is an archaeologist and museum curator. She holds a master's degree from the University of Yaoundé in Cameroon and is responsible for the conservation of all the museums of the Chieftaincy Route programme in Cameroon. As the former director of the Royal Museum of Batoufam, she participates in the development of museums and has worked on the exhibition "On the Chieftaincy Route, from the visible to the invisible" at the Quai Branly Jacques Chirac Museum in 2022. She is currently training curators at the Institut National du Patrimoine in Paris and is working on the documentation of collections in German museums through the "PAESE" and "TheMuseumLaB" programmes. The valorisation of African heritage in Africa and in Western museums and the provenance research of works from the colonial period are her main research interests.

Jamie Dau
is an anthropologist specialized in provenance research. He studied at the Universities of Mainz, Heidelberg, Toulouse and Vienna where he graduated in Anthropology with a thesis on the plaster cast collection of Felix von Luschan. He worked as assistant at the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe* Hamburg between 2016 and 2017. From 2019 to 2020, he was research assistant at the Anthropological University Collection in Vienna. Since 2020, he works as a provenance researcher with a focus on collections from colonial contexts at the *MARKK*, Hamburg.

Drossilia Dikegue Igouwe
completed a scholarship at the University of Augsburg, a bachelor's degree at the Omar Bongo University, Libreville (Gabon), and a master's degree at the University of Augsburg with the thesis: "Der ethnologische Blick – Günther Tessman und die Pangwe". Since 2019 she has been working on her doctoral thesis as a doctoral scholarship holder of the Centre for Cultural Research Lübeck (ZKFL), worked as an associated employee in a DZK provenance research project and as a lecturer at the Omar-Bongo University (2020–2021). Her focus is on research in cultural assets from Central Africa in European museums, their original intangible meaning and their importance for the African community today, which has been investigated in field research projects (2020, 2021 and 2022).

Joseph B. Ebune
obtained an M.A in African History from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, and a PhD. in History from the University of Buea, Cameroon. Since July 1998, he has been teaching African History in the Department of History, Faculty of Arts of the University of Buea. His research interest in centered on Africa Social History. He is currently serving as the Deputy Director in the Higher Teachers' Technical Training College (HTTTC), Kumba of the University of Buea. He has published extensively including books, book chapters and articles peer-reviewed journals in Cameroon and abroad. Dr. Ebune also participated in the Provenance Research Project on "The 'Blue Rider Post' and the Max von Stetten Collections from Cameroon" at the Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich, Germany (2020–2022).

Larissa Förster
Larissa Förster, PhD, is Head of the Department of Cultural Goods and Collections from Colonial Contexts established in 2019 at the German Lost Art Foundation (*Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste*), and Honorary Professor at the Institute for European Ethnology at the Humboldt University, Berlin. She is a cultural and social anthropologist with a regional focus on Southern Africa and works on issues of postcolonial provenance and return with regard to artefacts and human remains. She co-edited „Museumsethnologie – Eine Einführung. Theorien – Praktiken – Debatten" (2019) and „Provenienzforschung zu ethnografischen Sammlungen der Kolonialzeit. Positionen in der aktuellen Debatte" (2018). She was a member of two working groups of the German Museums Association for guidelines for German museums: "The Care of of Human Remains in Museums and Collections" (2021) and "The Care of Collections from Colonial Contexts" (2021).

Silvia Forni
is Shirley and Ralph Shapiro Director of the Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles, USA. She was formerly Senior Curator of Global Africa, and Deputy Head of the Department of Art & Culture at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada, where she worked until 2022. Her research focuses on the significance of art objects and material culture both in local contexts and as part of global exchange networks. She is the author of numerous essays and book chapters. Among her recent publications is the volume "Africa in the Market: 20th Century art from the Amrad African Art Collection" (2015) edited with Christopher B. Steiner, and "Art, Honor, and Ridicule: Fante Asafo Flags from Southern Ghana" (2017), co-authored with Doran H. Ross.

Richard Tsogang Fossi
holds a PhD in German Studies, specialising in literature, colonial history and memory. In recent years he has been involved in a number of research projects on transnational German colonial history and memory in Cameroon and Germany (Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf-University of Dschang), on school textbooks as vehicles of colonial memory (at Georg Eckert Institute in Brunswick), and on the exhibition project "Hey Hamburg, do you know Duala Manga Bell?" at the MARKK Museum Hamburg. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Technical University of Berlin as part of the joint research project "Reverse Collections' Stories: Mapping Cameroonian art and culture in German museums", funded by the DFG, and directed by Prof. Albert Gouaffo (University of Dschang) and Prof. Bénédicte Savoy (Technical University Berlin). The project resulted in the book *Atlas der Abwesenheit. Kameruns Kulturerbe in Deutschland. Heidelberg: Reimer* (2023), which can be consulted at the following link: https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.1219

Olaf Geerken
is an anthropologist and worked 2020–2021 as an academic researcher with the Georg-August University Goettingen on the PAESE project "Provenances of Tjurungas at the Landesmuseum Hanover and the Hermannsburg collection". He studied Ethnology, Anthropology and Aboriginal Studies in Munich and Adelaide, Australia. For 22 years he worked as an anthropologist with and for the Central Land Council in Central Australia, primarily on Aboriginal land rights and traditional land tenure matters. In the course of his work, he collected valuable experiences in relation to Tjurungas (Aboriginal secret-sacred objects), both in terms of their ongoing use and ceremonial value among current Aboriginal communities, as well as relating to provenance research on secret-sacred objects held in museums in Germany and Switzerland. For the PAESE Project Olaf also has drawn on his experiences in the repatriation of sacred Objects and cultural knowledge within the Australian context.

Albert Gouaffo
is Professor of German Literature and Cultural Studies, as well as Intercultural Communication in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages at the Université de Dschang in Western Cameroon. He is Vice-President of the Association of Sub-Saharan Germanists (GAS). His current research interests include German literature of the colonial period in Africa, German literature of the African diaspora, studies of remembrance and provenance research on cultural goods stolen during the German colonisation. He is co-editor of the "Atlas of Absence: Cameroon's Cultural Heritage in Germany (2023)", which grew out of the research project on reverse collection history funded by the German Lost Art Foundation.

Karin Guggeis
was the overall project manager of the provenance research project on "The 'Blue Rider Post' and the Max von Stetten Collection (1893–1896) from Cameroon in the Museum Fünf Kontinente Munich, Germany" (2019–2022), and now is back at the Department *Sammlung Fotografie und Schriften* in that museum. Her research interests are provenance research, early globalization, and dealers in ethnographica.

Rainer Hatoum

is Head of the Ethnographic Collections and Provenance Researcher at the Brunswick Municipal Museum (*Städtisches Museum Braunschweig*). Since 2007, Hatoum has worked in several collaborative research projects involving, among others, the Navajo Nation and the Kwakwaka'wakw. These projects dealt with different collections of song, object, and archival manuscript materials.

Werner Hillebrecht

has a background in information science. He worked for the Centre for African Studies (CAS/CASS) of Bremen University (1986–1991); from 1992 he was employed at the National Archives of Namibia, then the National Library, and again for the National Archives which he led as Chief Archivist until retirement in 2015. He is researching and has published several articles about aspects of German colonialism in Namibia, as well as bibliographies. Since his retirement, he works as a History and Heritage Consultant, in close cooperation with the National Archives and the Museums Association of Namibia, and is involved in provenance research and repatriation activities.

Katja Kaiser

is a historian and researcher at the Department Humanities of Nature, Museum for Natural History (*Museum für Naturkunde*) Berlin. She is currently working on guidelines on dealing with natural history collections from colonial contexts. She has specialized in colonial history, museum and collection history and published recently a book on the colonial entanglements of the Berlin Botanic Garden and Botanical Museum.

Naazima Kamardeen

is Chair Professor of Commercial Law at the Department of Commercial Law of the University of Colombo and a member of the Law Commission of Sri Lanka. Her research interests include Cultural and Intellectual Property Law, Trade, Investment, Environmental Law, Traditional Knowledge and Biopiracy, and Third World approaches to International Law.

Syowia Kyambi
recognizes the power of entwining the personal with the political and the entangled nature of both. Incorporating photography, video, drawing, sculpture and performance installation Kyambi's approach takes aim at the politics of the time as well as its legacy today. What is remembered, what is archived, and how we see the world anew. Kyambi engages with museums and/or ethnographic collections, personal and public archives, bridging disciplines, visually interrogating our histories, the representation of identity, the effects on the psyche and the nuances in our relationships to each other and the world we live in. She holds a Master in Fine Arts (Plymouth University UK) and is Co-founder of a processed based international residency program focused on autonomy and sustainability ("Untethered Magic", since 2019) and Co-director of the "Transart Institute" (since 2023).

She was represented in the Pavilion of Kenya, La Biennale di Venezia in 2022 as well as in exhibitions in Frankfurt/Main (2022–23), the Lisson Gallery in London (2023) or the Dakar Biennale in Senegal (2022). Her works include a permanent commission 'Infinity: Flashes of the Past' Nairobi National Museum (2007).

She is the recipient of the Centre for Art Design & Social Research fellowship (2018–2020), the UniArts Helsinki fellowship (2018), the Smithsonian Artist Research fellowship (2017) and the Art in Global Health grant from the Wellcome Trust Fund, United Kingdom (2013). Artist residencies include PRAKSIS, Norway (2019), Delfina Foundation, UK (2016) and IASPIS, Sweden (2013). Her work is held in a number of collections including the Kouvola Art Museum, Finland, and the Sindika Dokolo Foundation.

Thomas Laely
is a cultural anthropologist with a focus on museology, political anthropology and African studies. He was the Deputy Director of the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, from 2010 to 2019. In previous years he was active in international arts promotion, 1994–2010, establishing and directing the International Department of the Swiss Arts Council *Pro Helvetia*. Currently, Laely is concentrating on issues of the history and perspectives of ethnological museums, particularly the exploration of new practices of collaboration between cultural history museums in Europe and Africa and is involved in a collaboration between museums in Uganda and Switzerland.

Sabine Lang
After taking her doctoral degree at the University of Hamburg in 1990, cultural anthropologist Sabine Lang conducted fieldwork in the U.S. and was active as an independent scholar for many years. Since early 2017 she has been in charge of provenance research at the Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim, from 2019 to 2021 in the context of the PAESE joint project, from 2022 onwards for other projects on provenance research on collections from colonial contexts.

Katja Lembke
studied Classical Archaeology, Egyptology and Latin in Tübingen, Munich, Rome, and Heidelberg, where she completed her doctorate in 1992. She is corresponding member of the German Archaeological Institute since 2003 and Head of the research project "The Petosiris Necropolis of Hermupolis/ Tuna el-Gebel" since 2004.

From 2005 to 2011 she was director of the *Roemer- and Pelizaeus-Museum* Hildesheim, 2011 she became director at the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover (*Landesmuseum Hannover*). Since 2015, she has been an honorary professor at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. In 2018–22, she was spokesperson for the PAESE project initiated at the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover. Recently, she studied the concentration camp of Shark Island at Lüderitz/Namibia.

Nzila M. Libanda-Mubusisi
has a Master in World Heritage and Cultural Projects for Development (University of Turin, Italy), a Postgraduate Diploma in Heritage Conservation and Management (University of Namibia), a Bachelor of Technology Degree (Namibia University of Science and Technology) and a Diploma in Human Resource Management Business Management (Training College of Southern Africa, South Africa). She is a heritage professional, researcher, cultural economist and has 24 years of work experience in the public service of Namibia. She is working as the Chief Curator of the National Museum of Namibia, since 2009. She coordinated the repatriation of Namibian Heritage and is serving in various ministerial and intergovernmental committees such the Namibia Human Remains and Management Committee, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Tourism Development in Namibia, the Culture Programme Committee of the Namibia's National Commission for UNESCO and the Commonwealth Association of Museums.

Flower Manase
is a researcher and curator at the National Museum of Tanzania. Her research interests focuses on topics of African colonial history, museum and communities, museum and environment/climate change, cultural tourism and public discourse on decolonization, restitution, and repatriation of colonial cultural materials and African (particularly Tanzania ancestors remains). She has been featured in national and international projects, i.e. she has been a member of the board of a research project by the Africa Center for Transregional Research (ACT) in Freiburg funded by the German Lost Art Foundation (2020–2023). She's currently a steering committee member of the Museum Futures Africa project (a pan African project which focuses on new formats of African museology, supported by the Goethe Institute South Africa (2021 to present).

Rachel Mariembe
is an archaeologist, curator and museographer and holds a PhD in Heritage Sciences. As Head of the Department of Heritage and Museum Studies at the Institute of Fine Arts of the University of Douala in Nkongsamba, she has been involved in the realisation of seven community museums in Cameroon, as well as the exhibition "On the Road of Chieftaincies of Cameroon: from visible to invisible" at the Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac, Paris, as Associate Curator. She is also a member of the "Commission of Memory" established by the French President, Emmanuel Macron to address issues around the French colonisation of Cameroon from 1955 to 1971. Her main areas of research are the development of the cultural and creative industries, preventive conservation through the analysis of symbols and social taboos, historical tourism and provenance research.

Christoph-Eric Mecke
studied Law, History and Sociology at the universities of Passau, Tours (France) and Göttingen, made his PhD in Göttingen as a Fellow of the Lower Saxony Grant programme and was research assistant at the universities of Göttingen, Hildesheim, Hanover and Wolfenbüttel. He has been the managing Director of the research project "Family Law in Early Women's Rights Debates" at the Leibniz University Hannover, and a lecturer ibidem. 2019 he habilitated at the University of Wrocław (Poland) and was in 2020/2021 interim professor at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Since 2021 he is associate professor (professor extraordinarius) at the University of Zielona Góra (Poland). His research focuses on the field of legal theory, legal history and comparative law.

Stephan Meder
is a Professor for Civil Law and History of Law at Leibniz University Hannover where he has been a faculty member since 1998. His research interests lie in the areas of History and Philosophy of Law, in which much of his published work has focused on the research of eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Lars Müller
studied History and Politics in Brunswick, Cardiff and Vienna. At the Georg Eckert Institute in Brunswick, he worked on the DFG project "Knowledge about Africa: Discourses and Practices of Textbook Development in Germany and England, 1945–1995"; in this context he also completed his PhD.

From 2019 to 2022, he was the academic coordinator of the PAESE Project. In 2022, he conducted a provenance research project on Hans Schomburgk for the Museums Association Saxony-Anhalt. Since 2023, he has been a research fellow in the project "IN_CONTEXT: Colonial Histories and Digital Collections" at the State Library Berlin (SPK). He also researches transnational debates on (post)colonial restitution.

Martin Nadarzinski
is an associated researcher with DITSL and works at the Lippe State Museum (*Lippisches Landesmuseum*) in Detmold. His PhD project deals with the ethnographic collection of the Baden State Museum (*Badisches Landesmuseum*) from 1875 to today. His further research interests include ethnographic collections and their postcolonial history as well as memory culture and museology.

Victor Bayena Ngitir
was born in Victoria, Cameroon and holds a PhD in Art History and Museum Studies. He has carried out extensive ethnographic research on Grassfields palace museums, art history, archives and cultural heritage. He is senior lecturer at the Institute of Fine Arts, University of Douala, Cameroon.

Elvis Nkome Ngome
holds a PhD in Social and Economic History from the University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon. His research interests cut across Cultural History, Archaeology, Museum studies, and Post-colonial Africa. In addition, he teaches heritage studies, maritime History and other courses. Since 2015 he has attended several conferences in Cameroon and abroad like the Institute for Development Studies (IDS@50) at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, the highly competitive African Leadership Fellowship (ALC) for African Scholars at King's College London/ALC, Nairobi, Kenya, the Women Leadership Colloquium in Yaounde, Cameroon, the Pan-African Conference at the university of Fort Harare, South-Africa 2017. Besides teaching and research, he served as an assistant under the project "The 'Blue Rider Post' and the Max von Stetten Collections from Cameroon" at the Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich (2019–2022).

Frederick Ueriurika Nguvauva
grew up in the Epukiro Constituency, Omaheke Region, Namibia. He studied Public Administration at the University of Namibia and worked for various government Ministries, the City of Windhoek Council and Omaheke Regional Council from where he was promoted to a position of the Deputy Director for Planning and Development Support in the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development.

He hails from the Nguvauva Royal House and thus serves as a Senior Advisor to the Chief of the OvaMbanderu Traditional Authority, Chief Kilus Karaerua Munjuku III NGUVAUVA. He represents the latter authority on the OvaHerero/OvaMbanderu Council for Dialogue on the 1904–1908 Genocide (ONCD 1904–1908) as the Deputy Secretary. He is a member of the Technical Committee for Genocide, Apology and Reparations established by Cabinet to spearhead the negotiation process between Germany and Namibia and serve on the Negotiating Team led by Dr. Zedekia Ngavirue who is Namibia's Special Envoy.

Katharina Nowak
studied Cultural Anthropology, Communication and Media Studies in Bremen, as well as Museum and Exhibition Studies at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg. As a doctoral candidate at the Department of Anthropology and Cultural Research at the University of Bremen, she teaches provenance research, internationalization and regional studies. Her research focuses on collaborative forms of knowledge production and the decolonization of knowledge. She has a regional interest in Pacific Island states. Since April 2021, she has been working as assistant curator for the Oceania collections at the *MARKK* in Hamburg.

Michael Pickering
is Honorary Associate Professor with the Department of Museum and Heritage Studies at the Australian National University, Honorary Professor with the Global Station for Indigenous Studies and Cultural Diversity, at the Hokkaido University, Japan, and a Partner with the Centre for Australian Studies, Cologne University. Since 2022 he has been an independent researcher with a focus on First Nations Heritage.

He has worked extensively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, State and Territory heritage agencies, and museums across Australia over 45 years. He moved to the National Museum of Australia as the Director of the Repatriation Program in 2001 and was Head of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program (2004–2011). From 2013 to 2014 he was the Head of the Australian Society and History Program. In 2015 he took up the position as Head of Research Centre. From 2018 to 2022 he was the Senior Repatriation Advisor at the National Museum of Australia. He is on the editorial boards of several jounals and functions as an Expert Examiner under the Australian Protection of Moveable Cultural Heritage Act 1986. His wide research interests and publications range from material culture, settlement patterns, exhibitions, museum ethics, workplace health and safety to repatriation.

Brigitte Reinwald
has been Professor of African History (since 2004) and Deputy Chair of the Centre for Atlantic and Global Studies (CEAGS, since 2015) at Leibniz Universität Hannover. She is also a full member of the Academy of Sciences and Humanities at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. Her research and teaching focuses on Africa in the Atlantic region, the economic, social and cultural history of West and East Africa, gender, family and generation, migration and transcultural processes, and popular culture and media in urban spaces.

Mareike Späth
is currently curator for the ethnographic collection at the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover (*Landesmuseum Hannover*). She studied Ethnology and African Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and focussed her research on questions of historiography and heritage-making. As part of various academic projects, she worked in East and West Africa, particularly in Tanzania and Madagascar. She worked as curatorial assistant for the African collection at the Museum am Rothenbaum (*MARKK*) in Hamburg before joining the Lower Saxony State Museum Hanover in 2020.

Hannah Stieglitz
is a social and cultural anthropologist and a historian working at the Georg August University Göttingen, Germany. She studied in Göttingen and Dar es Salaam and has since then been concerned with combining the two disciplines in research. She joined the PAESE project in 2018 focusing on colonial provenances in the Ethnographic Collection in Göttingen and their relation to academic practices at university as an institution of knowledge production.

Jennifer Tadge
studied Ethnology and Arabic Studies at the University of Leipzig as well as Museology at the University of Applied Sciences Leipzig. Since 2014 she has been researching the ethnographic collection of the *Landesmuseum Natur und Mensch Oldenburg*. Her projects there included research on the provenances of human remains of non-European origin and, most recently, on an object from the Kingdom of Benin. She is currently finishing her doctoral project on "Colonial collecting practices in military contexts" supervised by Prof Dr Dagmar Freist at the Institute of History, Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg, as part of the PAESE subproject at the Museum in Oldenburg (2018–22).

Chief Charles A. Taku
is a great grandchild of Fontem Asonganyi, King of Bangwa in German Kamerun who resisted German colonial rule shortly after the participation of Africa in 1884. He is a leading international civil law, victims and defence lawyer of 40 years professional and trial experience, a certified specialist in International Law, International Humanitarian Law and practice and International Human Rights Law and Practice. He also is a former President of the International Criminal Court Bar Association (ICCBA), former Vice President of the association of defense counsel at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ADAD) and a Trustee and member for life of the Executive Governing Council of the African Bar Association (AfBA). As President of the International Criminal Court Bar, ICCBA, Chief Taku presented an addressed to the plenary of the ICC during the 20th anniversary of the Rome Statute on 17 July 2018 and during the Assembly of State Parties Conference on 6 December 2018 in the Hague, Netherlands.

Hervé Youmbi
was born in the Central African Republic in 1973 and raised in neighboring Cameroon. He is a visual artist working and living in Douala. He is a founding member of the *Cercle Kapsiki*, a collective of five Cameroonian artists, founded in 1998. His work presents African-centered reflections on the power of both internal and external frameworks, questioning the operations of political, economic, and cultural forces. Youmbi often integrates traditional Cameroonian sculpture techniques within his installations and into performance and video. This allows him to juxtapose indigenous African art traditions with contemporary global art conventions, and to destabilize what is regarded as “traditional” versus “contemporary”.

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