

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 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 Versailles³ 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 Asonganyi⁶ 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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