

ICOFOM Study Series



Decolonizing academic disciplines and collections

ICOFOM ICOM
international
committee
for museology

Vol. 52.1 — 2024

ICOFOM Study Series
Vol. 52, Issue 1 — 2024

**Decolonizing academic
disciplines and collections**

**Descolonizar las disciplinas
académicas y las colecciones**

**Décoloniser les disciplines
et les collections universitaires**

ICOFOM STUDY SERIES, Vol. 52.1 – 2024

International Journal of the ICOM International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM)

The ICOFOM Study Series is a double-blind peer reviewed journal.

Guest Editors / Editoras / Rédactrices

Rainer Brömer

Philipps-Universität Marburg, Deutschland

Susanne Rodemeier

Philipps-Universität Marburg, Deutschland

Editorial Team / Equipo editorial / Équipe éditoriale

Managing Editor, ICOFOM: M. Elizabeth Weiser

Communication Manager, ICOFOM: Anna Leshchenko

Editorial Coordinator: Allison Daniel

Copy Editors: Allison Daniel (English); Marion Bertin (French); Melissa Aguilar (Spanish)

Designer: Melissa Aguilar

Editorial Committee / Consejo editorial / Comité éditorial, 2023

Melissa Aguilar, Museum of Identity and Pride (MIO), Costa Rica

Marion Bertin, Université Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne, Paris, France

Bruno Brulon Soares, University of St. Andrews, Scotland

Supreo Chanda, University of Calcutta, India

Scarlet Galindo, Museo Nacional de la Acuarela Alfredo Guati Rojo, México

Ernest Kpan, National Institute of Art and Cultural Action (INSAAC), Côte d'Ivoire

Lynn Maranda, Emerita Curator, Museum of Vancouver, Canada

Margaret Zheng Yi, Fudan University, China

ISSN: 2306-4161 ICOFOM STUDY SERIES (Online)

ISBN: 978-2-491997-87-8 ICOFOM STUDY SERIES 52.1 Decolonizing Academic Disciplines and Collections

© International Committee for Museology of the International Council of Museums (ICOM/UNESCO)

Published by ICOFOM, Paris, in 2024

Table of Contents

Introduction: Decolonizing academic disciplines and collections	7
<i>Tanja Pommerening, Susanne Rodemeier, Rainer Brömer, Edith Franke Ernst Halbmayer, Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios, Katja Triplett, Benedikt Stuchtey</i>	
Introducción: Descolonizando disciplinas académicas y colecciones	17
Introduction : Décoloniser des disciplines et des collections universitaires	27
<hr/>	
Colonial discourse in the history of Marburg University collections	37
<i>Rainer Brömer, Edith Franke, Ernst Halbmayer, Tanja Pommerening Susanne Rodemeier, Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios, Katrin Weber</i>	
Theoretical and critical views on decolonization	
<hr/>	
Colonial collections, restitution and issues of inequality	53
<i>Jos van Beurden</i>	
Decolonising as rehumanising: Some community lessons	63
<i>Bruno Brulon Soares</i>	
Framing participatory methods in provenance research: From the restitution of objects to a decolonization of knowledge	74
<i>Jan Kuever</i>	
Sensitive objects in museums and university collections: Case studies	
<hr/>	
Provenance research: Entangled histories of objects from Asia and Oceania in the missionary museum “Forum der Völker”	89
<i>Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz</i>	
Collections off the grid, but in a net: In search of (de)colonial issues of South-Asian paintings	103
<i>Caroline Widmer</i>	
Transformation in the National Museum of Indonesia: Never-ending decolonisation	114
<i>Nusi Lisabilla Estudiantin</i>	
A story of the entanglement between Indonesian national heroes, museums, and decolonization	126
<i>Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih</i>	

Decolonizing relations

Indigenous knowledge and scientific collections:	138
Collaborative research with the Ka'apor Indigenous people	
<i>Claudia Leonor López-Garcés, Mariana Françaço, Valdemar Ka'apor,</i>	
<i>Irakadju Ka'apor, Rosilene Tembê, Pina Irã Ka'apor, Pina Ité</i>	
<i>Ka'apor, Ximorã Ka'apor, Wa'i Ka'apor</i>	

Introduction:

Decolonizing academic disciplines and collections

Tanja Pommerening,

Susanne Rodemeier,

Rainer Brömer,

Edith Franke,

Ernst Halbmayer,

Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios,

Katja Triplett,

Benedikt Stuchtey

Internationalizing the debate

Decolonizing academic disciplines and collections has been a topic of intense international and interdisciplinary discussion for some time now. It is also a highly political topic and one of public discourse. We approach it from different perspectives and want to underline how important it is that university collections also face up to their colonial heritage.¹

In the end, what finally counts as an object of colonial provenance is a matter of definition. Today, it is broadly acknowledged that any such definition has to go far beyond formal colonialism. If colonialism “is a relationship of domination between collectives in which the fundamental decisions about the lifestyle of the colonized are made and actually enforced by a culturally different minority of colonial masters ... who are hardly willing to adapt ... associated with ... doctrines of justification based on the colonizers’ conviction of their own cultural superiority” (Osterhammel, 2009, p. 20), then the term colonial refers “to the actual exercise of rule, as well as to the ideologies, discourses (also racial discourses), knowledge systems, aesthetics, and perspectives which preceded formal or actual rule and which supported and safeguarded it for colonization and can have an impact beyond it” (DMB, 2021, p. 24). It includes the subaltern relations of Indigenous groups toward nation states, sometimes called internal colonialism, as well as colonial ideologies “reflected in objects and portrayals of European origin” (DMB, 2021, p. 25).

Universities and academic disciplines in general benefited from colonialism and imperialism, differently from, but not necessarily less than, politics, economics and culture. With the “discovery” of New Worlds, from the perspective of the “Old,” the idea of “Possessing Nature” (Findlen, 1994) acquired new urgency. In this context, we are asking: How is

1 Email: pommeren@staff.uni-marburg.de

the European understanding of scholarship and science reflected in the collections and in the self-image of the academic disciplines? To what extent did scholars from universities and academies serve the colonial states, providing important information? The Scientific Revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries, not least that of the natural sciences, included a revolution in the classification and categorization of knowledge, and thus the collections became also the archive of objects and knowledge of the newly encountered worlds (Delbourgo, 2008). Epistemic power on the one hand, economic and political on the other, drove progressive thinking in Europe under colonial conditions.

Clarifying the provenances of objects in conversation between the curating institutions and the communities of origin helps approach a (newly demanded) central task of the university, namely rethinking its disciplinary histories and thus coming to terms with its past. This process has to include a variety of voices and epistemic approaches as a step towards not merely musealizing science but overcoming Eurocentrism.

Academic disciplines are facing increasing scrutiny over the extent to which their collections include possibly looted artifacts, thus reviewing holdings and policies as well as studying problematic histories is closely connected. Setting up guidelines, agreeing on not to acquire artifacts without clear, documented evidence, placing emphasis on social justice, all in all to ensure that objects were not obtained by exploiting societies weakened by poverty, war, colonialism, political instability – there is, obviously, much work to be done for curators and conservators, as the landscape, be it scientific, political, or cultural, is constantly changing. Staying in constant dialogue may be a challenge but probably the only option, particularly in a cosmopolitan society in which we can understand artifacts and objects as ambassadors of their time.

Since 2021, a group of academics at the University of Marburg has come together to initiate projects addressing the colonial contexts of parts of this university's collections. In order to confront the responsibility constituted by confirmed or suspected contexts of injustice, directors and curators of some of the potentially more "problematic" collections (ethnography, study of religions, anatomy, pharmacognosy, zoology, botany) have embarked on a number of joint activities to clarify both the ethical framework in general and the provenance of specific groups of objects in collaboration with colleagues from communities living in the regions where those objects originated. This group, some of whose members are responsible for collections at our university, includes the authors of this contribution: Tanja Pommerening and Rainer Brömer (History of Pharmacy and Medicine, Medico-Historical Anatomical Collection, Pharmacognostic Collection), Edith Franke, Susanne Rodemeier and Katja Triplett (Study of Religions, Museum of Religion), Ernst Halbmayer and Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios (Social and Cultural Anthropology, Ethnographic Collection) and Benedikt Stuchtey (Modern History, without an academic collection) as well as Martin Brändle (Zoological Collection) and Karl-Heinz Rexer (Herbarium Marburgense).

As part of these initiatives, members of the group put together a workshop program under the same title as this special issue: "Decolonizing academic disciplines and collections".² This event took place from 7-9 June 2023 at the University of Marburg, with the scope of broadening the debate about sensitive objects and colonial provenance in Germany in discussion with international approaches and to examine the dynamics between and with-

² The workshop was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG, project number 527030496), supporting invitations of scholars and practitioners from eight different countries worldwide.

in different world regions. A network for future collaboration emerged in a joint effort to produce sustainable solutions for dealing with objects of scientific interest and to further the critical inquiry into the meanings of objects with an (often but not always violent) colonial provenance.

The concept of decolonization is very complex and should be conceptualized as a continuous effort and process. Everything is under scrutiny. Therefore, aims of the workshop and the proceedings are

- linking the debate about sensitive objects and colonial provenance prevalent in Germany with concepts of decolonization developed in other former colonial and colonized countries;
- bringing together scholars and practitioners from contexts in the Global North and the Global South, examining dynamics of decolonizing collections and disciplines between and within different states and societies;
- investigating the ambivalent role of the colonial legacy in the formation of academic disciplines;
- creating a lasting network for future collaboration to produce sustainable solutions for the treatment of objects in academic collections and the critical examination of the meanings of objects with colonial provenance which, even though their acquisition may have been presumed to be legal at the time, were appropriated on the basis of power differentials between colonized and colonizer.

In recent years, the vivid debate over the appropriate treatment of items from former colonies held in Western collections has taken significant new turns. This discussion has also created an awareness that many academic disciplines in their formation and later development have relied heavily on collections of material objects, often sourced without the consent or even against the will of their producers and original owners, or in ignorance of the significance of these items in the region of origin, notably in colonial contexts. Increasingly, societies in the successor states demand the restitution of objects that hold particular significance for the descendants and their communities or their nations, even accepting potential conflicts that may arise as a result. Consequently, questions about the intricacies of possible repatriation have emerged with regard to the agency of communities of origin or their descendants.

During the workshop, local hosts and international visitors examined selected groups of items (such as ancestor figures, pharmaceutical drugs and human remains) in order to discuss strategies in the light of current debates to ensure adequate treatment of sensitive objects. It is now quite clear that a simple solution of repatriation is not viable (and often not desired by the descendant communities). Accordingly, what is needed is finding new ways of taking seriously the agency of communities whose perspectives and preferences can help develop options of dealing with the objects in adequate ways. These may include, as an alternative to restitution, the transfer of ownership with an option of long-term loan to the institution that is currently curating the items in question, or the use in joint research and teaching projects. It is important to develop a multi-perspective analysis of different groups of actors involved in the processes of the emergence and formation of university collections and disciplines. This is intended to provide the prerequisites for a critical examination of collection concepts and academic taxonomies from a global perspective.

Starting the discussion

An important aim of the workshop was to create an international framework for the long-standing debate in Marburg on how today's academic disciplines and their practitioners deal with the colonial past of their endeavors, considering particularly the role of collecting and collections in the history of those disciplines. Alongside individual presentations, special emphasis was placed on direct communication with people from the countries of origin of parts of the Marburg collections, represented here by participants from Brazil, Tanzania and Indonesia. The discussions focused on individual collections that the visitors explored jointly with the local persons in charge: the Wigand Drug Collection, the Museum of Religions and the Ethnographic Collection (see contribution: "Colonial discourse in the history of Marburg University collections" in this issue).

Among the invited participants were persons who, in their professional capacity, are dealing with questions of how to come to terms with the colonial provenance of scientific collections and their objects in the university or museum sector. These included, from the University of Iringa in Tanzania, Jimson Sanga (also affiliated with the Regional Museum of Iringa) and Jan Kuever (also working with the Cultural Organization *fahari yetu*); from Indonesia, Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih, lecturer at the Universitas Indonesia (at the same time, a PhD student at Leiden University) and Nusi Lisabilla Estudiantin, employee of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (previously a curator at the National Museum of Indonesia in Jakarta), and from Brazil, Claudia Leonor López Garcés from the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi in Belém, a large museum focusing on natural history, ethnography, and archaeology. With her help, a delegation of three people from the Ka'apor ethnic group in Brazil, Valdemar Ka'apor, Irakadju Ka'apor and Rosilene Tembê, were able to attend the workshop after participating in an ERC-funded exchange project in Leiden. A similar number of contributions was delivered by European scholars: from the Netherlands, Jos van Beurden (Independent researcher, Utrecht) and Paul W. Mitchell (University of Amsterdam), from the United Kingdom, Bruno Brulon Soares (University of St. Andrews) and Miranda Lowe (principal curator at the Natural History Museum, London), from Switzerland, Caroline Widmer (curator of Indian paintings at the Rietberg Museum in Zurich), from Sweden, Michael Sappol (University of Uppsala), from Germany, Ina Heumann (Museum für Naturkunde - Leibniz Institute for Evolution and Biodiversity in Berlin) and Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz (Museums Association Thuringia).

Introduction to the workshop contributions on "Decolonizing academic disciplines and collections"

The conference was opened with a keynote lecture by Jos van Beurden (Utrecht) on "Colonial collections, restitution and issues of inequality." As van Beurden further elaborated in his recently published book (van Beurden, 2024), he is concerned with three different forces in the context of colonial collections, which have to be understood in their political, cultural and social dimensions. Among these forces, provenance research in the North-South field of tension is just one element, complemented by the role of globally active art dealers and private collectors and finally, in the global South, a commonly observed controversy between official and unofficial representatives over their respective responsibilities in the process of the restitution of collections.

Miranda Lowe offered her public keynote lecture “Reimagining collecting & collections using decolonial practice in Natural History Museums” in the City Hall; thus, she communicated the topic to a general public in Marburg, which responded with great interest. Her lecture surveyed a variety of colonialisms that can be encountered in a museum landscape, from the emergence of natural history collections at the time of the great colonial empires and the disregard for the role of Indigenous societies in the emergence of scientific disciplines to the continuing inequalities in today’s social structures, which must also be addressed by museum staff. Introducing case studies from the Natural History Museum London (NHM) and beyond, Lowe highlighted the contributions made by Indigenous individuals and populations by collecting natural objects and exchanging botanical and ethnomedical knowledge. The very common absence of non-European actors’ narratives in the Western History of Science is counteracted in an exemplary manner in the exhibitions and presentations of the NHM³, complemented by equal opportunity measures.⁴ While the lecture, for reasons beyond the editors’ control, could not be included in this issue, many aspects of Lowe’s work can be gleaned from the museum’s website, which includes short video clips where Lowe explains how a more inclusive, representative, and holistic interpretation can be worked out.⁵

Theoretical and critical views on decolonization

The first panel of the workshop traced some baselines for the discussion of decolonization from a theoretical perspective.

Based on the thesis that the New Museology only brings about a decolonization of the museum to a very limited extent, Bruno Brulon Soares argued for a reorganization of authorities and agencies in the museum sector and for a process of rehumanizing, according to which more justice and participation of all stakeholders could be guaranteed. In this sense – further elaborated in the publication in this issue – he argues that there is not only a decolonial but a genuinely anti-colonial approach to the legacies created by colonialism.

Jan Kuever based his thoughts upon collaborative field research projects between the cultural heritage organization fahari yetu in Iringa and German universities and museums, where the partners had collected object stories and their connection to German colonial history in possible communities of origin in Tanzania. Provenance research needed in the process of a potential restitution requires the reconstruction and evocation of memory, meaning and all other forms of knowledge associated with them. However, as he pointed out, the goal of researching the provenance of individual objects should not only be to link them back to the communities of origin but to make them resources for their contemporary development. Rather than reproducing colonial knowledge, Kuever argued that scholarly and local communities should be involved in participatory research producing new knowledge about the collections under study.

3 This effort is also visible on the museum homepage, e.g.,
<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/hidden-figures-forgotten-contributions-to-natural-history.html>

4 <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion.html>

5 <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/black-history-at-the-natural-history-museum.html>

Sensitive objects in museums and university collections: Case studies

The following two panels examined approaches to sensitive objects in the areas of religious and ethnographic collections, respectively.

Interdisciplinary perspectives on sensitive cultural and religious objects

In this panel, participants were asked to share their perspective on culturally and religiously sensitive artifacts in museums and university collections and thoughts about why they should be considered sensitive. The contributions of Nusi Estudiantin and Caroline Widmer focused on their perspectives as curators. Estudiantin was a curator at the Indonesian National Museum in Jakarta for about 20 years, until 2023. It was therefore a great asset that she was able to bring her perspective as an insider into the history and ongoing process of decolonization of a national museum in a former colony. Widmer is a specialist in Indian paintings and is responsible for the collection of Indian paintings at the Museum Rietberg in Zurich, Switzerland. She took a different point of view. She focused on miniature paintings that are labeled as Indian, despite the fact that some of them actually come from Pakistan. In her contribution, she particularly illustrates that “the times of power imbalances and colonial precarity or consequences” must be kept in mind in any conceivable way of discussing these images. This applies both in retrospect and in terms of research, publication, handling and exhibition practices in today’s museums. Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz reports on her experiences doing research in a mission museum in Germany, the “Forum der Völker” in Werl. In 2023, she was invited by the Franciscan order as a consultant requested to screen their impressively large collection for sensitive objects. This advice should also include considerations of restitution or repatriation. Her contribution provides insight into the many aspects that a researcher needs to know in advance when deciding on the future of objects in a museum that houses all kinds of objects from areas where missionaries were active before, during and after the colonial period. The fourth contribution in this round comes from Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih, also an expert from Indonesia. She teaches history at the National University (Universitas Indonesia) and conducts research on museology in museums throughout Indonesia. She analyzes the history and current changes in the provincial museums in Aceh (Sumatra), Makassar (Sulawesi) and Jakarta (Java), with a particular focus on how they deal with “their” national heroes: Teuku Umar from Aceh, Hasanudin from Sulawesi and Diponegoro from Java.

The contributions to this panel made it possible to shed light on the problem of sensitive objects in museums from the perspective of museum experts and to gain insights into differences based on the respective location of the actors – be it in areas of the formerly colonized areas or in the territories of the colonial powers. Both the aspect of the subsequent colonization of museum objects and the diversity of views on which aspects can be expected in decolonization processes have enriched the reflection on this topic.

Decolonizing things, collections, and relations

The following panel focused on the role of Indigenous knowledge in the management of ethnographic collections, bringing together local source communities with institutions in the countries of origin as well as collections in former colonial powers. Claudia Leonor López-Garcés and a delegation of three persons from the Ka'apor Indigenous people living in Maranhão in the Brazilian Amazon region embodied the programmatic approach that they advocate. López-Garcés, Valdemar Ka'apor, Irakadju Ka'apor and Rosilene Tembê joined the event in Marburg on their way back from a research visit to the National Museum of Ethnology and the University of Leiden (Netherlands), where they had been jointly studying a collection of Ka'apor objects, and in the year before, partners from Leiden had participated in a joint workshop in Belém, as part of the ERC project BRASILAE, aimed at reexamining the role of Indigenous knowledge in the “making of science.” The core concept in this project was a collaboration on equal footing between originators and current custodians of the material sources of knowledge, exploring the meaning of the object and trying to retrieve and preserve traditional techniques of their production through the engagement with the elders in their communities. At the workshop, V. Ka'apor, I. Ka'apor and R. Tembê offered a short oral presentation in their own language on the role of naturalist knowledge in their communal lives. The published version assembles more first-hand references from a larger number of participants in the joint research project and broadens the spectrum of relevant types of knowledge from different communities.

In his presentation,⁶ Jimson Sanga presented the complex history of an ancestor of the Hehe in Iringa, Chief Mkwawa, from the perspective of collective memory among the living descendants. Chief Mkwawa died in 1898 after violent pursuit by the German colonial “protection force” (*Schutztruppe*), and the search for his skull continues to play a significant role for the identity of people in Iringa. Currently, members of the Hehe community are urging the return of other ancestral remains (such as the skeleton of Mkwawa's father Munyigumba, possibly held in Berlin) and historical objects, including weapons and related materials, in view of strengthening the relationship between the living and their ancestors. According to Sanga, the reinforcement of kinship plays a greater role in this process than the commonly discussed aspects of self-determination and self-representation. To achieve these aims, researchers in Tanzania need to be involved in complementing and clarifying the personal identities of ancestors whose remains are to be tracked outside the country.

Sensitive objects in natural history and medicine

Collections of objects from the natural sciences and medicine tend to be less involved in debates about repatriation and colonial structures than, for example, ethnographic collections. While this distinction may seem obvious, medicine and scientific disciplines have a strong basis in knowledge generated in colonial contexts. Accordingly, contributors from natural history (Miranda Lowe and Ina Heumann) aimed at discussing specific experiences with processes and discourses of decolonization. While Lowe's keynote lecture presented the British example of the Natural History Museum and its collection (see above), Ina Heumann from the Museum für Naturkunde (Museum of Natural History) in Berlin delved into an episode of German colonial rule in what is now Tanzania. Heu-

6 Unfortunately, written versions of every talk could not be included in this issue.

mann, who is the co-head of the museum's department of "Humanities of Nature" (with Anita Hermannstädter) and also heading the research cluster "Open Heritage. Exploring Collections, Creating Futures" (together with Christiane Quaiser and Tahani Nadim), talked about "On being sensitive. Dinosaurs and national identities". Her talk focused on the (in)famous German paleontological expedition, between 1909 and 1913, to the Tendaguru Formation in south-eastern Tanzania, where fossil bones of one of the tallest dinosaurs were found and prepared for transportation to Berlin (Heumann et al., 2018). These fossils are still on exhibition at the city's Museum of Natural History, even though claims for repatriation have been raised from Tanzania. Heumann gave profound insights into the expedition and the actors involved, highlighting especially the contributions of the Tanzanian workers drafted into the project at the time. Many of these fossils are considered to be of worldwide significance, yet the question remains whether returning these pieces to the country where the local workforce had first prospected and excavated them should be considered as an equitable and practical solution.

Her presentation was followed by an elaborate statement from Jimson Sanga who very clearly explained his own position, stressing that adequate compensation for the financial gains the museum made through the highly popular exhibition of the Tanzanian specimens would be more helpful to the country than the repatriation of the fossils. During the division of Germany, the Museum – at the time located in East Germany – used to offer positions for scientists from Tanzania to be involved in research on equal terms with their hosts, which is no longer taken for granted today.

In any case, the participants agreed that the rights to the fossils, 10 of which were included in Germany's official register of nationally significant cultural property in 2011,⁷ should include the assurance that the specimens are available unreservedly for any researcher from the international scientific community and that the museum feels responsible for providing the best possible storage while publishing the background of its history.

Two contributions addressed the use of human bodies and their parts in medical education and research. Michael Sappol's talk at the workshop was a strong plea for a confrontation with history through confronting historical objects, including specimens whose provenance is today deemed problematic or outright unacceptable. Following guidelines from national and international museums associations, many collections that include human bodies or their parts currently tend to restrict public access. By contrast, Sappol argued for the open presentation, with an adequate historical contextualization, of what he called "human biomaterials." He fully endorsed the necessity of decolonization as an attempt to face up to historical crimes, stressing the importance of first knowing history's different facets, not least through the objects attesting to these crimes. While emphasizing the importance of symbolic acts of reparation, Sappol argued that these gestures should not be allowed to obfuscate the losses of land, resources and political as well as economic power incurred through colonialism. During his talk, the extensive use of close-ups showing specimens from anatomical and pathological collections raised serious concerns.

⁷ Under section 7 of the Act on the Protection of Cultural Property in the current version of 2016 (official translation: https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_kgsg/englisch_kgsg.html#p0080), database for the state of Berlin https://www.kulturgutschutz-deutschland.de/DE/3_Datenbank/Kulturgut/Berlin/function/liste_node.html entries no. 3901-3910.

Paul Wolff Mitchell, researcher for the project “Pressing matter: Ownership, value and the question of colonial heritage in museums” in Amsterdam, focused on how practices and presumptions filling dissection halls with the bodies of socially marginalized people in Europe, and later North America, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were extended into an expanding colonial-imperial network to amass the bones of racialized others for collection and study. He examined cases entangled in anthropology’s disciplinary formation, centered in present-day Germany, Indonesia, South Africa, Scotland, Australia, Liberia and the United States, tracing a “politics of dis-articulation”.

Roundtable discussion on “Decolonizing academic disciplines and collections”

The international workshop ended with a two-hour roundtable discussion on the main topic: “Decolonizing academic disciplines and collections,” led by Katja Triplett. In preparation for the event, she wrote to all invited participants with encouragement to contribute to the concluding session. At the workshop, the discussants, Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih, Claudia López, Paul Mitchell, Michael Sappol and Jos van Beurden (in alphabetical order of last name), presented a short statement each addressing their personal approach to the topic. They outlined what to them was the most important “concrete question” that had arisen during their care for a collection or in their own work on sensitive objects. The discussants had been invited to also ponder the question of how they would suggest to adequately treat sensitive objects, considering their own work and experience. They were welcome to provide an example, preferably a particular object, to illustrate their statements.

First, Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih related a concrete example connected to her work and her personal story: the painting of a slave. She outlined various responses to the painting in her personal context and how these inspired her to engage in museum work. She also discussed specific problems of such a “sensitive object” in the context of decolonization. Claudia López stated that in her case, the “person” and not the “object” is the center of her research and engagement. She emphasized the role of Indigenous knowledge and the emotional engagement with the subject matter. Dreams about an object are as much a matter of study as the material object itself.

Paul Mitchell briefly discussed concrete cases reflecting on ethical and affective considerations around disclosing provenance information about human remains in collection spaces. He also related his personal journey towards his research topic to illustrate the positionality in research and the underlying emotional relationship with an object.

Michael Sappol outlined his personal life experience and how he came to his core research. He elaborated on what Jos van Beurden mentioned at the conference: “talk not about us, talk with us,” pondering on the question of identity and personhood. Sappol stated that people are fundamentally anatomical beings.

Jos van Beurden’s statement centered around a concrete example that illustrates his approach to the topic: a *kris* from Java that once belonged to a national hero and that had disappeared from view but appeared in the ethnographic museum in Leiden in 2019 and was returned to Indonesia two years later.

After the round of individual statements, the audience was invited to join the discussion. The concluding session of the international workshop ended with contributions by Miranda Lowe, Claudia López and Valdemar Ka'apor, among others. Lowe urged the participants to make themselves more vulnerable, emphasizing that decolonial practices do tax people's minds; one ought to engage in "emotional labor." Van Beurden suggested "to color the staff," creating greater diversity among the employees as a step towards decolonizing academic collections and disciplines in Marburg. Claudia López pleaded to truly integrate Indigenous knowledge without any academic separations; it should be accepted in the university. In this context, she introduced Guerrero's (2010) term *corazonar*, which means to simultaneously think and feel. According to López, the term includes the Spanish word for "heart" but can also be understood as "co(n)-razón," meaning "with reason." Valdemar Ka'apor supported her viewpoint to integrate Indigenous knowledge and epistemic science, adding further arguments.

Thus, a wide range of topics opened up during the two-and-a-half days could barely be discussed. Subsequent communications, not least in the process of preparing the proceedings of this workshop, have helped sharpen several of the questions arising from the original debates. The contributions to this issue have benefited from these discussions as well as from the generous editorial support provided by the ICOFOM team. The issue editors' most heartfelt thanks are going to Elizabeth Weiser, editor-in-chief of ICOFOM publications. Without her patient thoroughness, this issue might not have seen the light of day.

Literature

- Delbourgo, J. (Ed.). (2008). *Science and empire in the Atlantic world*. Routledge.
- DMB - German Museums Association. (2021). *Guidelines for German museums: Care of Collections from colonial contexts*. 3rd edition. Deutscher Museumsbund.
- Findlen, P. (1994). *Possessing nature*. University of California Press.
- Guerrero Arias, P. (2010). *Corazonar: una antropología comprometida con la vida*. Abya-Yala, UPS.
- Heumann, I., Stoecker, H., Tamborini, M., & Vennen, M. (2018). *Dinosaurierfragmente: Zur Geschichte der Tendaguru-Expedition und ihrer Objekte, 1906-2018*. Wallstein.
- Osterhammel, J. (2009). *Kolonialismus. Geschichte - Formen - Folgen*. Beck.
- van Beurden, J. van. (2024). *The empty showcase syndrome. Tough questions about cultural heritage from colonial regions*. Amsterdam University Press.

Introducción:

Descolonización de disciplinas académicas y colecciones

Tanja Pommerening,

Susanne Rodemeier,

Rainer Brömer,

Edith Franke,

Ernst Halbmayer,

Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios,

Katja Triplett,

Benedikt Stuchtey

Internacionalizando el debate

La descolonización de disciplinas académicas y colecciones ha sido tema de intensa discusión internacional e interdisciplinaria durante algún tiempo. También es un tema altamente político y de debate público. Abordamos este tema desde diferentes perspectivas y queremos subrayar la importancia de que las colecciones universitarias también enfrenten su herencia colonial.¹

Al final, lo que cuenta como objeto de procedencia colonial es una cuestión de definición. Hoy en día, se reconoce ampliamente que cualquier definición debe ir mucho más allá del colonialismo formal. Si el colonialismo “es una relación de dominación entre colectivos en la cual las decisiones fundamentales sobre el estilo de vida de los colonizados son tomadas y realmente impuestas por una minoría culturalmente diferente de amos coloniales ... que apenas están dispuestos a adaptarse ... asociados con ... doctrinas de justificación basadas en la convicción de superioridad cultural de los colonizadores” (Osterhammel, 2009, p. 20), entonces el término colonial se refiere “al ejercicio real del dominio, así como a las ideologías, discursos (también discursos raciales), sistemas de conocimiento, estéticas y perspectivas que precedieron al dominio formal o real y que lo apoyaron y lo resguardaron para la colonización y pueden tener un impacto más allá de ella” (DMB, 2021, p. 24). Incluye las relaciones subalternas de los grupos indígenas hacia los estados nacionales, a veces llamado colonialismo interno, así como las ideologías coloniales “reflejadas en objetos y representaciones de origen europeo” (DMB, 2021, p. 25).

Las universidades y las disciplinas académicas en general se beneficiaron del colonialismo e imperialismo de manera diferente, pero no necesariamente en menor medida que la política, la economía y la cultura. Con el llamado ‘descubrimiento’ de Nuevos Mundos, desde la perspectiva de lo “Antiguo”, la idea de “Poseer la Naturaleza” (Findlen, 1994) adquirió nueva urgencia. En este contexto, nos preguntamos: ¿Cómo se refleja el entendimiento europeo de la erudición y la ciencia en las colecciones y en la autoimagen de las disciplinas

1 Email: pommeren@staff.uni-marburg.de

académicas? ¿Hasta qué punto los académicos de universidades y academias sirvieron a los estados coloniales, proporcionando información importante? La Revolución Científica de los siglos XVII y XVIII, no menos la de las ciencias naturales, incluyó una revolución en la clasificación y categorización del conocimiento, y así las colecciones se convirtieron también en el archivo de objetos y conocimientos de los mundos recién encontrados (Delbourgo, 2008). El poder epistémico por un lado, económico y político por el otro, impulsó el pensamiento progresista en Europa bajo condiciones coloniales.

Aclarar las procedencias de los objetos en la conversación entre las instituciones curadoras y las comunidades de origen ayuda a abordar una tarea central (recientemente demandada) de la universidad, a saber, repensar sus historias disciplinarias y así llegar a un acuerdo con su pasado. Este proceso debe incluir una variedad de voces y enfoques epistémicos como un paso hacia no solo musealizar la ciencia, sino superar el eurocentrismo.

Las disciplinas académicas enfrentan un escrutinio creciente sobre el grado en que sus colecciones incluyen artefactos posiblemente saqueados, por lo tanto, revisar las posesiones y las políticas, así como estudiar las historias problemáticas, están estrechamente relacionados. Establecer directrices, acordar no adquirir artefactos sin evidencia clara y documentada, haciendo hincapié en la justicia social, en resumen, asegurar que los objetos no fueron obtenidos explotando sociedades debilitadas por la pobreza, la guerra, el colonialismo, la inestabilidad política, hay, obviamente, mucho trabajo por hacer para los curadores y conservadores, ya que el panorama, ya sea científico, político o cultural, está en constante cambio. Mantener un diálogo constante puede ser un desafío, pero probablemente sea la única opción, particularmente en una sociedad cosmopolita en la que podemos entender los artefactos y objetos como embajadores de su tiempo.

Desde 2021, un grupo de académicos en la Universidad de Marburg se ha reunido para iniciar proyectos que abordan los contextos coloniales de partes de las colecciones de esta universidad. Para enfrentar la responsabilidad constituida por contextos de injusticia confirmados o sospechosos, directores y curadores de algunas de las colecciones potencialmente más “problemáticas” (etnografía, estudio de religiones, anatomía, farmacognosia, zoología, botánica) han emprendido una serie de actividades conjuntas para clarificar tanto el marco ético en general como la procedencia de grupos específicos de objetos en colaboración con colegas de comunidades que viven en las regiones donde esos objetos se originaron. Este grupo, algunos de cuyos miembros son responsables de colecciones en nuestra universidad, incluye a los autores de esta contribución: Tanja Pommerening y Rainer Brömer (Historia de la Farmacia y Medicina, Colecciones de Historia Médica y Anatomía, Colección Farmacognóstica), Edith Franke, Susanne Rodemeier y Katja Triplett (Estudio de Religiones, Museo de Religión), Ernst Halbmayer y Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios (Antropología Social y Cultural, Colección Etnográfica) y Benedikt Stuchtey (Historia Moderna, sin una colección académica), así como Martin Brändle (Colección Zoológica) y Karl-Heinz Rexer (Herbarium Marburgense).

Como parte de estas iniciativas, los miembros del grupo organizaron un programa de talleres bajo el mismo título que este número especial: “Descolonización de disciplinas académicas y colecciones”.² Este evento tuvo lugar del 7 al 9 de junio de 2023 en la Universidad de Marburg, con el objetivo de ampliar el debate sobre objetos sensibles y procedencia colonial en Alemania en discusión con enfoques internacionales y examinar las dinámicas entre y dentro de diferentes regiones del mundo. Surgió una red para colaboraciones futuras en un esfuerzo conjunto por producir soluciones sostenibles para

2 El taller fue financiado por la Fundación Alemana de Investigación (DFG, número de proyecto 527030496), apoyando la invitación de académicos y profesionales de ocho países diferentes en todo el mundo.

tratar objetos de interés científico y para promover la investigación crítica sobre los significados de los objetos con una procedencia colonial (a menudo, pero no siempre, violenta).

El concepto de descolonización es muy complejo y debe conceptualizarse como un esfuerzo y proceso continuo. Todo está bajo escrutinio. Por lo tanto, los objetivos del taller y las intenciones a futuro son

- vincular el debate sobre objetos sensibles y procedencia colonial prevalente en Alemania con conceptos de descolonización desarrollados en otros países antiguamente coloniales y colonizados;
- reunir a académicos y profesionales de contextos del Norte Global y del Sur Global, examinando dinámicas de descolonización de colecciones y disciplinas entre y dentro de diferentes estados y sociedades;
- investigar el papel ambivalente del legado colonial en la formación de disciplinas académicas;
- crear una red duradera para futuras colaboraciones con el fin de producir soluciones sostenibles para el tratamiento de objetos en colecciones académicas y el examen crítico de los significados de objetos con procedencia colonial, los cuales, aunque su adquisición pudo haber sido legal en su momento, fueron apropiados en base a diferencias de poder entre colonizador y colonizado.

En los últimos años, el vibrante debate sobre el tratamiento adecuado de objetos de antiguas colonias en colecciones occidentales ha tomado nuevos giros significativos. Esta discusión también ha creado una conciencia de que muchas disciplinas académicas, en su formación y desarrollo posterior, han dependido en gran medida de colecciones de objetos materiales, a menudo obtenidos sin el consentimiento o incluso contra la voluntad de sus productores y propietarios originales, o en ignorancia del significado de estos objetos en la región de origen, especialmente en contextos coloniales. Cada vez más, las sociedades en los estados sucesores demandan la restitución de objetos que tienen una importancia particular para los descendientes y sus comunidades o sus naciones, incluso aceptando los conflictos potenciales que puedan surgir como resultado. En consecuencia, han surgido preguntas sobre las complejidades de posibles repatriaciones en relación con la agencia de las comunidades de origen o sus descendientes.

Durante el taller, los anfitriones locales y los visitantes internacionales examinaron grupos seleccionados de objetos (como figuras ancestrales, medicamentos farmacéuticos y restos humanos) para discutir estrategias a la luz de los debates actuales para asegurar el tratamiento adecuado de objetos sensibles. Ahora está claro que una solución simple de repatriación no es viable (y muchas veces no es deseada por las comunidades descendientes). Por lo tanto, lo que se necesita es encontrar nuevas formas de tomar en serio la agencia de las comunidades cuyas perspectivas y preferencias pueden ayudar a desarrollar opciones para tratar los objetos de manera adecuada. Estas pueden incluir, como alternativa a la restitución, la transferencia de propiedad con opción de préstamo a largo plazo a la institución que actualmente cura los objetos en cuestión, o el uso en proyectos de investigación y enseñanza conjuntos. Es importante desarrollar un análisis multiperspectivo de los diferentes grupos de actores involucrados en los procesos de emergencia y formación de colecciones y disciplinas universitarias. Esto pretende proporcionar los requisitos previos para un examen crítico de los conceptos de colección y taxonomías académicas desde una perspectiva global.

Iniciando la discusión

Un objetivo importante del taller fue crear un marco internacional para el debate de larga trayectoria en Marburg sobre cómo las disciplinas académicas de hoy y sus practicantes manejan el pasado colonial de sus esfuerzos, considerando especialmente el papel de la recolección y las colecciones en la historia de esas disciplinas. Junto a presentaciones individuales, se hizo especial énfasis en la comunicación directa con personas de los países de origen de partes de las colecciones de Marburg, representados aquí por participantes de Brasil, Tanzania e Indonesia. Las discusiones se centraron en colecciones individuales que los visitantes exploraron en conjunto con las personas locales a cargo: la Colección de Drogas Wigand, el Museo de Religiones y la Colección Etnográfica (ver contribución: “Discurso colonial en la historia de las colecciones de la Universidad de Marburg” en este número).

Entre los participantes invitados estaban personas que, en su capacidad profesional, están lidiando con preguntas sobre cómo llegar a términos con la procedencia colonial de colecciones científicas y sus objetos en el sector universitario o museístico. Estos incluyeron, de la Universidad de Iringa en Tanzania, Jimson Sanga (también afiliado al Museo Regional de Iringa) y Jan Kuever (también trabajando con la Organización Cultural Fahari Yetu); de Indonesia, Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih, profesora en la Universitas Indonesia (al mismo tiempo, estudiante de doctorado en la Universidad de Leiden) y Nusi Lisabilla Estudiantin, empleada del Ministerio de Educación y Cultura de Indonesia (anteriormente curadora en el Museo Nacional de Indonesia en Jakarta); y de Brasil, Claudia Leonor López Garcés del Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi en Belém, un gran museo centrado en historia natural, etnografía y arqueología. Con su ayuda, una delegación de tres personas del grupo étnico Ka’apor en Brasil, Valdemar Ka’apor, Irakadju Ka’apor y Rosilene Tembê, pudieron asistir al taller después de participar en un proyecto de intercambio financiado por el Consejo Europeo de Investigación en Leiden. Un número similar de contribuciones fue entregado por académicos europeos: de los Países Bajos, Jos van Beurden (investigador independiente, Utrecht) y Paul W. Mitchell (Universidad de Ámsterdam), del Reino Unido, Bruno Brulon Soares (Universidad de St. Andrews) y Miranda Lowe (curadora principal del Museo de Historia Natural, Londres), de Suiza, Caroline Widmer (curadora de pinturas indias en el Museo Rietberg en Zurich), de Suecia, Michael Sappol (Universidad de Uppsala), de Alemania, Ina Heumann (Museum für Naturkunde - Instituto Leibniz de Evolución y Biodiversidad en Berlín) y Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz (Asociación de Museos de Turingia).

Introducción a las contribuciones del taller sobre “Descolonización de disciplinas académicas y colecciones”

La conferencia se inauguró con una conferencia magistral de Jos van Beurden (Utrecht) titulada “Colecciones coloniales, restitución y cuestiones de desigualdad”. Según van Beurden, como él amplió en su libro recientemente publicado (van Beurden, 2024), se preocupa por tres fuerzas diferentes en el contexto de las colecciones coloniales, las cuales deben entenderse en sus dimensiones políticas, culturales y sociales. Entre estas fuerzas, la investigación de procedencia en el campo de tensión Norte-Sur es solo un elemento, complementado por el papel de los comerciantes de arte y coleccionistas privados globalmente activos, y finalmente, en el Sur global, una controversia comúnmente observada entre representantes oficiales y no oficiales sobre sus respectivas responsabilidades en el proceso de restitución de colecciones.

Miranda Lowe ofreció su conferencia magistral pública “Reimaginando la recolección y las colecciones usando prácticas decoloniales en los museos de historia natural” en el

Ayuntamiento; así, comunicó el tema al público general en Marburgo, que respondió con gran interés. Su conferencia examinó una variedad de colonialismos que se pueden encontrar en el paisaje museístico, desde el surgimiento de las colecciones de historia natural en la época de los grandes imperios coloniales y el desprecio por el papel de las sociedades indígenas en el surgimiento de disciplinas científicas hasta las desigualdades continuas en las estructuras sociales actuales, que también deben ser abordadas por el personal del museo. Introduciendo estudios de caso del Museo de Historia Natural de Londres (NHM) y más allá, Lowe destacó las contribuciones realizadas por individuos y poblaciones indígenas mediante la recolección de objetos naturales e intercambio de conocimientos botánicos y etnomédicos. La ausencia muy común de narrativas de actores no europeos en la historia occidental de la ciencia se contrarresta de manera ejemplar en las exhibiciones y presentaciones del NHM³, complementadas con medidas de igualdad de oportunidades.⁴ Aunque por razones fuera del control de los editores, la conferencia no pudo incluirse en este número, muchos aspectos del trabajo de Lowe se pueden obtener del sitio web del museo, que incluye clips de video cortos donde Lowe explica cómo se puede desarrollar una interpretación más inclusiva, representativa y holística.⁵

Visiones teóricas y críticas sobre la descolonización

El primer panel del taller trazó algunas líneas base para la discusión de la descolonización desde una perspectiva teórica.

Basado en la tesis de que la Nueva Museología solo logra una descolonización del museo hasta cierto punto, Bruno Brulon Soares abogó por una reorganización de autoridades y agencias en el sector museístico y por un proceso de rehumanización, según el cual se podría garantizar más justicia y participación de todas las partes interesadas. En este sentido, como él desarrolló más en la publicación de este número, argumenta que no solo hay un enfoque decolonial, sino genuinamente anticolonial hacia los legados creados por el colonialismo.

Jan Kuever basó sus reflexiones en proyectos colaborativos de investigación de campo entre la organización del patrimonio cultural fahari yetu en Iringa y universidades y museos alemanes, donde los socios habían recopilado historias de objetos y su conexión con la historia colonial alemana en posibles comunidades de origen en Tanzania. La investigación de procedencia necesaria en el proceso de una potencial restitución requiere la reconstrucción y evocación de memoria, significado y todas las demás formas de conocimiento asociadas con ellos. Sin embargo, como señaló, el objetivo de investigar la procedencia de objetos individuales no debería ser solo vincularlos de nuevo a las comunidades de origen, sino convertirlos en recursos para su desarrollo contemporáneo. En lugar de reproducir conocimientos coloniales, Kuever argumentó que las comunidades académicas y locales deberían participar en investigaciones participativas que produzcan nuevos conocimientos sobre las colecciones en estudio.

3 Este esfuerzo también es visible en el sitio web del museo, por ejemplo, en <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/hidden-figures-forgotten-contributions-to-natural-history.html>

4 <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion.html>

5 <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/black-history-at-the-natural-history-museum.html>

Objetos sensibles en museos y colecciones universitarias: Estudios de caso

Los siguientes dos paneles examinaron enfoques sobre objetos sensibles en las áreas de colecciones religiosas y etnográficas, respectivamente.

Perspectivas interdisciplinarias sobre objetos culturales y religiosamente sensibles

En este panel, los participantes compartieron su perspectiva sobre artefactos culturalmente y religiosamente sensibles en museos y colecciones universitarias, así como pensamientos sobre por qué deberían considerarse sensibles. Las contribuciones de Nusi Estudiantin y Caroline Widmer se centraron en sus perspectivas como curadoras. Estudiantin fue curadora en el Museo Nacional de Indonesia en Jakarta durante unos 20 años, hasta 2023. Por lo tanto, fue un gran activo que pudo aportar su perspectiva como participante en la historia y el proceso continuo de descolonización de un museo nacional en una antigua colonia. Widmer es especialista en pinturas indias y es responsable de la colección india en el Museo Rietberg en Zurich, Suiza. Ella adoptó un punto de vista diferente, enfocándose en pinturas en miniatura etiquetadas como indias, a pesar de que la mayoría de ellas provienen en realidad de Pakistán. En su contribución, ilustra de manera impresionante que “los tiempos de desequilibrios de poder y precariedad colonial o sus consecuencias” deben tenerse en cuenta en cualquier forma concebible de discusión sobre estas imágenes. Esto se aplica tanto en retrospectiva como en términos de investigación, publicación, manejo y prácticas de exhibición en los museos de hoy en día. Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz informa sobre sus experiencias realizando investigaciones en un museo misionero en Alemania, el “Forum der Völker” en Werl. En 2023, fue invitada por la orden franciscana como consultora para examinar su impresionante colección en busca de objetos sensibles. Este consejo también debería incluir consideraciones sobre restitución o repatriación. Su contribución ofrece una visión de los muchos aspectos que un investigador necesita conocer de antemano al decidir sobre el futuro de los objetos en un museo que alberga todo tipo de objetos de áreas donde los misioneros estuvieron activos antes, durante y después del período colonial. La cuarta contribución en esta ronda proviene de Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih, también una experta de Indonesia. Ella enseña historia en la Universidad Nacional (Universitas Indonesia) y realiza investigaciones sobre museología en museos de toda Indonesia. Ella analiza la historia y los cambios actuales en los museos provinciales en Aceh (Sumatra), Makassar (Sulawesi) y Jakarta (Java), con un enfoque particular en cómo manejan a “sus” héroes nacionales: Teuku Umar de Aceh, Hasanudin de Sulawesi y Diponegoro de Java.

Las contribuciones a este panel permitieron iluminar el problema de los objetos sensibles en los museos desde la perspectiva de expertos en museos y obtener percepciones sobre las diferencias basadas en la ubicación respectiva de los actores, ya sea en áreas de los antiguamente colonizados o en los territorios de las potencias coloniales. Tanto el aspecto de la colonización posterior de los objetos del museo como la diversidad de puntos de vista sobre qué aspectos se pueden esperar en los procesos de descolonización han enriquecido la reflexión sobre este tema.

Descolonizando cosas, colecciones y relaciones

El siguiente panel se centró en el papel del conocimiento indígena en la gestión de colecciones etnográficas, reuniendo a comunidades locales de origen con instituciones en los países de origen, así como colecciones en antiguas potencias coloniales. Claudia Leonor López-Garcés y una delegación de tres personas del pueblo indígena Ka'apor que vive en Maranhão en la región amazónica brasileña encarnaron el enfoque programático que defienden. López-Garcés, Valdemar Ka'apor, Irakadju Ka'apor y Rosilene Tembê se

unieron al evento en Marburgo en su camino de regreso de una visita de investigación al Museo Nacional de Etnología y a la Universidad de Leiden (Países Bajos), donde habían estado estudiando conjuntamente una colección de objetos Ka'apor, y en el año anterior, los socios de Leiden habían participado en un taller conjunto en Belém, como parte del proyecto ERC BRASILIAE, destinado a reexaminar el papel del conocimiento indígena en la “creación de la ciencia”. El concepto central en este proyecto fue una colaboración en pie de igualdad entre los originadores y los custodios actuales de las fuentes materiales del conocimiento, explorando el significado del objeto y tratando de recuperar y preservar las técnicas tradicionales de su producción a través del compromiso con los ancianos en sus comunidades. En el taller, V. Ka'apor, I. Ka'apor y R. Tembé ofrecieron una breve presentación oral en su propio idioma sobre el papel del conocimiento naturalista en sus vidas comunitarias. La versión publicada reúne más referencias de primera mano de un mayor número de participantes en el proyecto de investigación conjunto y amplía el espectro de tipos de conocimiento relevantes de diferentes comunidades.

En su presentación⁶, Jimson Sanga presentó la compleja historia de un ancestro de los Hehe en Iringa, el jefe Mkwawa, desde la perspectiva de la memoria colectiva entre los descendientes vivientes. El jefe Mkwawa murió en 1898 después de una violenta persecución por parte de la “fuerza de protección” colonial alemana (Schutztruppe), y la búsqueda de su cráneo sigue desempeñando un papel significativo en la identidad de las personas en Iringa. Actualmente, miembros de la comunidad Hehe están instando al retorno de otros restos ancestrales (como el esqueleto del padre de Mkwawa, Munyigumba, posiblemente retenido en Berlín) y objetos históricos, incluidas armas y materiales relacionados, con el fin de fortalecer la relación entre los vivos y sus ancestros. Según Sanga, el refuerzo del parentesco juega un papel más importante en este proceso que los aspectos comúnmente discutidos de autodeterminación y autorepresentación. Para lograr estos objetivos, los investigadores en Tanzania deben participar en complementar y aclarar las identidades personales de los ancestros cuyos restos se rastrean fuera del país.

Objetos sensibles en historia natural y medicina

Las colecciones de objetos de las ciencias naturales y la medicina tienden a estar menos involucradas en los debates sobre repatriación y estructuras coloniales que, por ejemplo, las colecciones etnográficas. Aunque esta distinción puede parecer obvia, las disciplinas médicas y científicas tienen una sólida base en el conocimiento generado en contextos coloniales. En consecuencia, las contribuciones de la historia natural (Miranda Lowe e Ina Heumann) tuvieron como objetivo discutir experiencias específicas con procesos y discursos de descolonización. Mientras que la conferencia magistral de Lowe presentó el ejemplo británico del Museo de Historia Natural y su colección (véase arriba), Ina Heumann del Museo für Naturkunde (Museo de Historia Natural) en Berlín profundizó en un episodio del dominio colonial alemán en lo que hoy es Tanzania. Heumann, quien es co-directora del departamento de “Humanidades de la Naturaleza” del museo (junto con Anita Hermannstädter) y también encabeza el clúster de investigación “Open Heritage. Explorando Colecciones, Creando Futuros” (junto con Christiane Quaisser y Tahani Nadim), habló sobre “Ser sensible. Dinosaurios e identidades nacionales”. Su charla se centró en la (in)fame expedición paleontológica alemana, entre 1909 y 1913, a la Formación Tendaguru en el sureste de Tanzania, donde se encontraron y prepararon para su transporte a Berlín los huesos fósiles de uno de los dinosaurios más altos (Heumann et al., 2018). Estos fósiles aún están en exhibición en el Museo de Historia Natural de la ciudad, aunque se han planteado reclamaciones para su repatriación desde Tanzania. Heumann proporcionó profundas

6 Lamentablemente, no se pudo incluir las versiones escritas de todas las charlas

reflexiones sobre la expedición y los actores involucrados, destacando especialmente las contribuciones de los trabajadores tanzanos reclutados en el proyecto en ese momento. Muchos de estos fósiles se consideran de importancia mundial, sin embargo, queda la pregunta de si devolver estas piezas al país donde el personal local las prospeccionó y excavó por primera vez debería considerarse una solución equitativa y práctica.

Le siguió una declaración elaborada de Jimson Sanga, quien explicó claramente su propia posición, enfatizando que una compensación adecuada por las ganancias financieras que el museo obtuvo a través de la exhibición muy popular de los especímenes tanzanos sería más útil para el país que la repatriación de los fósiles. Durante la división de Alemania, el Museo, en ese entonces ubicado en la Alemania Oriental, solía ofrecer posiciones para científicos de Tanzania para que participaran en la investigación en igualdad de condiciones con sus anfitriones, algo que hoy no se da por sentado.

En cualquier caso, los participantes estuvieron de acuerdo en que los derechos sobre los fósiles, diez de los cuales fueron incluidos en el registro oficial de propiedades culturales de importancia nacional de Alemania en 2011,⁷ deben incluir la garantía de que los especímenes estén disponibles sin reservas para cualquier investigador de la comunidad científica internacional y que el museo se sienta responsable de proporcionar el mejor almacenamiento posible mientras publica el trasfondo de su historia.

Dos contribuciones abordaron el uso de cuerpos humanos y sus partes en la educación e investigación médica. La ponencia de Michael Sappol en el taller fue un fuerte llamado a confrontar la historia a través de objetos históricos, incluidos especímenes cuya procedencia hoy se considera problemática o inaceptable. Siguiendo las pautas de asociaciones nacionales e internacionales de museos, muchas colecciones que incluyen cuerpos humanos o partes de estos tienden actualmente a restringir el acceso público. Por el contrario, Sappol abogó por la presentación abierta, con una contextualización histórica adecuada, de lo que llamó “biomateriales humanos”. Apoyó plenamente la necesidad de descolonización como un intento de enfrentar los crímenes históricos, enfatizando la importancia de conocer primero las diferentes facetas de la historia, no menos a través de los objetos que atestiguan estos crímenes. Aunque enfatizó la importancia de los actos simbólicos de reparación, Sappol argumentó que estos gestos no deben permitir que se oculten las pérdidas de tierras, recursos y poder político y económico incurridos a través del colonialismo. Durante su ponencia, el uso extensivo de primeros planos que mostraban especímenes de colecciones anatómicas y patológicas suscitó serias preocupaciones.

Paul Wolff Mitchell, investigador del proyecto “Asunto urgente: Propiedad, valor y la cuestión del patrimonio colonial en los museos” en Ámsterdam, se centró en cómo las prácticas y presunciones que llenaron los salones de disección con los cuerpos de personas socialmente marginadas en Europa, y más tarde en América del Norte, a finales del siglo XVIII y principios del XIX, se extendieron en una red colonial-imperial expansiva para acumular los huesos de otros racializados para su colección y estudio. Examinó casos enredados en la formación disciplinaria de la antropología, centrados en la Alemania actual, Indonesia, Sudáfrica, Escocia, Australia, Liberia y los Estados Unidos, trazando una “política de desarticulación”.

⁷ Bajo la sección 7 de la Ley de Protección del Patrimonio Cultural en la versión actualizada de 2016 (traducción oficial al inglés:

https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_kgsg/englisch_kgsg.html#p0080), la base de datos para el estado de Berlín https://www.kulturgutschutz-deutschland.de/DE/3_Datenbank/Kulturgut/Berlin/function/liste_node.html incluye las entradas números 3901-3910.

Mesa redonda sobre “Descolonización de disciplinas académicas y colecciones”

El taller concluyó con una mesa redonda dirigida por Katja Triplett sobre el tema principal: “Descolonización de disciplinas académicas y colecciones”, En preparación para el evento, ella escribió a todos los participantes invitados animándolos a contribuir a la sesión final. En el taller, los panelistas, Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih, Claudia López, Paul Mitchell, Michael Sappol y Jos van Beurden (en orden alfabético del apellido), presentaron una breve declaración cada uno abordando su enfoque personal sobre el tema. Esbozaron cuál era para ellos la “pregunta concreta más importante” que había surgido durante su cuidado de una colección o en su propio trabajo sobre objetos sensibles. A los panelistas se les pidió también que reflexionaran sobre cómo sugerirían tratar adecuadamente los objetos sensibles, considerando su propio trabajo y experiencia. Se les invitó a proporcionar un ejemplo, preferiblemente un objeto particular, para ilustrar sus declaraciones.

Primero, Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih relacionó un ejemplo concreto conectado con su trabajo y su historia personal: la pintura de un esclavo. Esbozó varias respuestas a la pintura en su contexto personal y cómo estas la inspiraron a participar en el trabajo de museo. También discutió problemas específicos de dicho “objeto sensible” en el contexto de la descolonización.

Claudia López declaró que en su caso, la “persona” y no el “objeto” es el centro de su investigación y compromiso. Enfatizó el papel del conocimiento indígena y el compromiso emocional con el tema. Los sueños sobre un objeto son tan importantes para el estudio como el objeto material en sí.

Paul Mitchell discutió brevemente casos concretos que reflejan consideraciones éticas y afectivas en torno a la divulgación de información de procedencia sobre restos humanos en espacios de colección. También relacionó su viaje personal hacia su tema de investigación para ilustrar la posición en la investigación y la relación emocional con un objeto.

Michael Sappol delineó su experiencia personal y cómo llegó a su investigación central. Elaboró sobre lo que Jos van Beurden mencionó en la conferencia: “hablar no de nosotros, sino con nosotros”, reflexionando sobre la cuestión de la identidad y la personalidad. Sappol afirmó que las personas son fundamentalmente seres anatómicos.

La declaración de Jos van Beurden se centró en un ejemplo concreto que ilustra su enfoque sobre el tema: un kris de Java que alguna vez perteneció a un héroe nacional y que había desaparecido de la vista pero apareció en el museo etnográfico de Leiden en 2019 y fue devuelto a Indonesia dos años después.

Después de la ronda de declaraciones individuales, se invitó al público a unirse a la discusión. La sesión final del taller internacional concluyó con contribuciones de Miranda Lowe, Claudia López y Valdemar Ka’apor, entre otros. Lowe instó a los participantes a mostrarse más vulnerables, enfatizando que las prácticas decoloniales realmente desafían las mentes de las personas; uno debería involucrarse en un “trabajo emocional”. Van Beurden sugirió “colorear el personal”, creando una mayor diversidad entre los empleados como un paso hacia la descolonización de las colecciones y disciplinas académicas en Marburgo. Claudia López abogó por integrar verdaderamente el conocimiento indígena sin separaciones académicas; debería ser aceptado en la universidad. En este contexto, introdujo el término “corazonar”, de Guerrero (2010), que significa pensar y sentir simultáneamente. Según ella, el término incluye la palabra española “corazón” pero también se puede entender como “co(n)-razón”, que significa “con razón”. Valdemar Ka’apor apoyó su punto de vista de integrar el conocimiento indígena y la ciencia epistémica, añadiendo más argumentos.

Así, se abrió una amplia gama de temas durante los dos días y medio que apenas se pudieron discutir. Las comunicaciones posteriores, no menos en el proceso de preparación de las actas de este taller, han ayudado a clarificar varias de las preguntas que surgieron de los debates originales. Las contribuciones a este número también se han beneficiado de estas discusiones, así como del generoso apoyo editorial proporcionado por el equipo de ICOFOM. El agradecimiento más sincero de los editores de este número va para Elizabeth Weiser, editora jefa de las publicaciones de ICOFOM. Sin su paciencia y minuciosidad, este número no habría visto la luz del día.

Referencias

- Delbourgo, J. (Ed.). (2008). *Science and empire in the Atlantic world*. Routledge.
- DMB - German Museums Association. (2021). “*Guidelines for German museums: Care of Collections from colonial contexts*”. 3rd edition. Deutscher Museumsbund.
- Findlen, P. (1994). *Possessing nature*. University of California Press.
- Guerrero Arias, P. (2010). *Corazonar: una antropología comprometida con la vida*. Abya-Yala, UPS.
- Heumann, I., Stoecker, H., Tamborini, M., & Vennen, M. (2018). *Dinosaurierfragmente: Zur Geschichte der Tendaguru-Expedition und ihrer Objekte, 1906-2018*. Wallstein.
- Osterhammel, J. (2009). *Kolonialismus. Geschichte - Formen - Folgen*. Beck.
- Van Beurden, J. van. (2024). *The empty showcase syndrome. Tough questions about cultural heritage from colonial regions*. Amsterdam University Press.

Introduction :

Décolonisation des disciplines académiques et des collections

Tanja Pommerening,

Susanne Rodemeier,

Rainer Brömer,

Edith Franke,

Ernst Halbmayer,

Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios,

Katja Triplett,

Benedikt Stuchtey

Internationalisation du débat

La décolonisation des disciplines académiques et des collections est un sujet de discussion international et interdisciplinaire intense depuis quelques temps déjà.¹ Il s'agit également d'un sujet hautement politique et d'un débat public. Nous l'abordons sous différents angles et souhaitons souligner l'importance pour les collections universitaires de faire face à leur héritage colonial.

En fin de compte, ce qui est perçu comme un objet de provenance coloniale est une question de définition. Aujourd'hui, il est largement admis que toute définition doit aller bien au-delà du colonialisme formel. Si le colonialisme « est une relation de domination entre des collectifs dans laquelle les décisions fondamentales sur le mode de vie des colonisés sont prises et effectivement imposées par une minorité culturellement différente de maîtres coloniaux ... qui sont à peine disposés à s'adapter ... associée à ... des doctrines de justification basées sur la conviction des colonisateurs de leur propre supériorité culturelle » (Osterhammel, 2009, p. 20), alors le terme colonial se réfère « à l'exercice réel du pouvoir, ainsi qu'aux idéologies, discours (y compris les discours raciaux), systèmes de connaissance, esthétiques et perspectives qui ont précédé la règle formelle ou réelle et l'ont soutenue et protégée pour la colonisation et peuvent avoir un impact au-delà de celle-ci » (DMB, 2021, p. 24). Cela inclut les relations subalternes des groupes autochtones envers les États-nations, parfois appelées colonialisme interne, ainsi que les idéologies coloniales « reflétées dans les objets et représentations d'origine européenne » (DMB, 2021, p. 25).

Les universités et les disciplines académiques ont généralement bénéficié du colonialisme et de l'impérialisme, différemment mais pas nécessairement moins que la politique, l'économie et la culture. Avec la soi-disant « découverte » de Nouveaux Mondes, du point de vue de l'Ancien, l'idée de « Posséder la Nature » (Findlen, 1994) a acquis une nouvelle urgence. Dans ce contexte, nous nous demandons : comment l'entendement européen de la science et de l'érudition se reflète-t-il dans les collections et dans l'auto-image des

1 Courriel : pommeren@staff.uni-marburg.de

disciplines académiques ? Dans quelle mesure les universitaires ont-ils servi les États coloniaux en fournissant des informations importantes ? La Révolution Scientifique des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles, notamment celle des sciences naturelles, a inclus une révolution dans la classification et la catégorisation des connaissances : ainsi les collections sont devenues aussi l'archive d'objets et de connaissances des mondes nouvellement rencontrés (Delbourgo, 2008). Le pouvoir épistémique d'une part, économique et politique d'autre part, a stimulé la pensée progressive en Europe dans des conditions coloniales.

Clarifier les provenances des objets dans le cadre d'une conversation entre les institutions de conservation et les communautés d'origine permet d'aborder une tâche centrale (récemment exigée) de l'université, à savoir repenser ses histoires disciplinaires et ainsi faire face à son passé. Ce processus doit inclure une variété de voix et d'approches épistémiques comme une étape vers non seulement la muséalisation de la science mais aussi pour surmonter l'eurocentrisme.

Les disciplines académiques font face à un examen croissant quant à la mesure dans laquelle leurs collections incluent des artefacts possiblement pillés ; ainsi, la révision des collections et des politiques ainsi que l'étude des histoires problématiques sont étroitement liées. Établir des lignes directrices, convenir de ne pas acquérir d'artefacts sans preuves claires et documentées, mettre l'accent sur la justice sociale, tout cela vise à s'assurer que les objets n'ont pas été obtenus en exploitant des sociétés affaiblies par la pauvreté, la guerre, le colonialisme, l'instabilité politique - il y a, évidemment, beaucoup de travail à faire pour les conservateurs, car le paysage, qu'il soit scientifique, politique ou culturel, est en constante évolution. Rester en dialogue constant peut être un défi, mais probablement la seule option, en particulier dans une société cosmopolite où nous pouvons comprendre les artefacts et les objets comme des ambassadeurs de leur temps.

Depuis 2021, un groupe d'universitaires de l'Université de Marburg s'est réuni pour initier des projets abordant les contextes coloniaux de certaines collections conservées par cette université. Afin de confronter la responsabilité constituée par des contextes de injustices confirmées ou soupçonnées, les directeurs et conservateurs de certaines collections potentiellement plus « problématiques » (ethnographie, étude des religions, anatomie, pharmacognosie, zoologie, botanique) ont entrepris plusieurs activités conjointes pour clarifier à la fois le cadre éthique en général et la provenance de groupes spécifiques d'objets en collaboration avec des collègues des communautés vivant dans les régions d'origine de ces objets. Ce groupe, dont certains membres sont responsables des collections de notre université, comprend les auteurs de cette contribution : Tanja Pommerening et Rainer Brömer (Histoire de la Pharmacie et de la Médecine, Collection Médico-Historique Anatomique, Collection Pharmacognostique), Edith Franke, Susanne Rodemeier et Katja Triplett (Étude des Religions, Musée de la Religion), Ernst Halbmayer et Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios (Anthropologie Sociale et Culturelle, Collection Ethnographique) ainsi que Benedikt Stuchtey (Histoire Moderne, sans collection académique) ainsi que Martin Brändle (Collection Zoologique) et Karl-Heinz Rexer (Herbier Marburgense).

Dans le cadre de ces initiatives, les membres du groupe ont mis en place un programme d'ateliers sous le même titre que ce numéro spécial : « Décoloniser les disciplines académiques et les collections² ». Cet événement a eu lieu du 7 au 9 juin 2023 à l'Université de Marburg, dans le but d'élargir le débat sur les objets sensibles et la provenance coloniale en Allemagne, en discutant avec des approches internationales et en examinant les dynamiques entre et au sein des différentes régions du monde. Un réseau de collaboration future a émergé dans un effort conjoint pour produire des solutions durables pour traiter

2 Le workshop a été financé par la Fondation allemande pour la recherche (DFG, numéro de projet 527030496), soutenant les invitations de chercheurs et de praticiens provenant de huit pays différents à travers le monde.

les objets d'intérêt scientifique et pour approfondir l'analyse critique des significations des objets ayant une provenance coloniale (souvent mais pas toujours violente). Le concept de décolonisation est très complexe et devrait être conceptualisé comme un effort et un processus continu. Tout est sous examen. Par conséquent, les objectifs de l'atelier et des actes sont :

- de relier le débat sur les objets sensibles et la provenance coloniale prévalant en Allemagne avec les concepts de décolonisation développés dans d'autres pays anciennement coloniaux et colonisés ;
- de réunir des universitaires et des praticiens provenant de contextes du Nord Global et du Sud Global, examinant les dynamiques de la décolonisation des collections et des disciplines entre et au sein des différents États et sociétés ;
- d'examiner le rôle ambivalent de l'héritage colonial dans la formation des disciplines académiques ;
- de créer un réseau durable pour une collaboration future afin de produire des solutions durables pour le traitement des objets dans les collections académiques et l'examen critique des significations des objets ayant une provenance coloniale, qui, bien que leur acquisition ait pu être présumée légale à l'époque, ont été appropriés sur la base des différences de pouvoir entre colonisés et colonisateurs.

Ces dernières années, le débat animé sur le traitement approprié des objets provenant d'anciennes colonies détenues dans les collections occidentales a pris de nouveaux tournants significatifs. Cette discussion a également attiré l'attention sur le fait que de nombreuses disciplines académiques, dans leur formation et leur développement ultérieur, ont largement reposé sur des collections d'objets matériels, souvent acquis sans le consentement ou même contre la volonté de leurs producteurs et propriétaires d'origine, ou dans l'ignorance de la signification de ces objets dans la région d'origine, notamment dans des contextes coloniaux. De plus en plus, les sociétés des États successeurs exigent la restitution d'objets ayant une signification particulière pour les descendants, leurs communautés ou leurs nations, même en acceptant les conflits potentiels qui peuvent en découler. Par conséquent, des questions sur les subtilités de la restitution possible ont émergé en ce qui concerne l'agence des communautés d'origine ou de leurs descendants.

Pendant l'atelier, les hôtes locaux et les visiteurs internationaux ont examiné des groupes sélectionnés d'objets (comme des figures d'ancêtres, des médicaments pharmaceutiques et des restes humains) afin de discuter des stratégies à la lumière des débats actuels pour assurer un traitement adéquat des objets sensibles. Il est désormais clair qu'une solution simple de restitution n'est pas viable (et souvent pas souhaitée par les communautés de descendants). Par conséquent, ce qui est nécessaire, c'est de trouver de nouvelles façons de prendre au sérieux l'agence des communautés dont les perspectives et préférences peuvent aider à développer des options pour traiter les objets de manière adéquate. Cela peut inclure, en alternative à la restitution, le transfert de propriété avec une option de prêt à long terme à l'institution qui conserve actuellement les objets en question ou l'utilisation dans des projets de recherche et d'enseignement communs. Il est important de développer une analyse multi-perspectives des différents groupes d'acteurs impliqués dans les processus d'émergence et de formation des collections universitaires et des disciplines. Cela est destiné à fournir les pré-requis pour un examen critique des concepts de collection et des taxonomies académiques d'un point de vue global.

Un objectif important de l'atelier était de créer un cadre international pour le débat à Marburg sur la manière dont les disciplines académiques d'aujourd'hui et leurs praticiens traitent du passé colonial, en tenant compte particulièrement du rôle de la collecte et des collections dans l'histoire de ces disciplines. En plus des présentations individuelles, un accent particulier a été mis sur la communication directe avec des personnes originaires des pays d'origine de certaines parties des collections de Marburg, représentées ici par des participants du Brésil, de Tanzanie et d'Indonésie. Les discussions ont porté sur des collections spécifiques que les visiteurs ont explorées conjointement avec les responsables locaux : la Collection de médicaments Wigand, le Musée des Religions et la Collection Ethnographique (voir la contribution : « Discours colonial dans l'histoire des collections de l'Université de Marburg » dans ce numéro).

Parmi les participants invités figuraient des personnes qui, dans le cadre de leur activité professionnelle, s'occupent de la manière de traiter la provenance coloniale des collections scientifiques et de leurs objets dans le secteur universitaire ou muséal. Il s'agissait notamment de Jimson Sanga de l'Université d'Iringa en Tanzanie (également affilié au Musée Régional d'Iringa) et de Jan Kuever (également travaillant avec l'Organisation Culturelle fahari yetu) ; d'Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih, chargée de cours à l'Universitas Indonesia (et en même temps doctorante à l'Université de Leyde) et de Nusi Lisabilla Estudiantin, employée du Ministère de l'Éducation et de la Culture d'Indonésie (anciennement conservatrice au Musée National d'Indonésie à Jakarta) ; et de Claudia Leonor López Garcés du Musée Paraense Emílio Goeldi à Belém, un grand musée axé sur l'histoire naturelle, l'ethnographie et l'archéologie au Brésil. Avec son aide, une délégation de trois personnes de l'ethnie Ka'apor au Brésil, Valdemar Ka'apor, Irakadju Ka'apor et Rosilene Tembê, ont pu assister à l'atelier après avoir participé à un projet d'échange financé par le Conseil européen de la recherche à Leyde. Un nombre similaire de contributions a été présenté par des universitaires européens : des Pays-Bas, Jos van Beurden (chercheur indépendant, Utrecht) et Paul W. Mitchell (Université d'Amsterdam) ; du Royaume-Uni, Bruno Brulon Soares (Université de St. Andrews) et Miranda Lowe (conservatrice principale au Musée d'Histoire Naturelle de Londres) ; de Suisse, Caroline Widmer (conservatrice des peintures indiennes au Musée Rietberg à Zurich) ; de Suède, Michael Sappol (Université d'Uppsala) ; d'Allemagne, Ina Heumann (Musée pour la Nature - Institut Leibniz pour l'Évolution et la Biodiversité à Berlin) et Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz (Association des Musées de Thuringe).

Lancement de la discussion

Un objectif important de l'atelier était de créer un cadre international pour le débat à Marburg sur la manière dont les disciplines académiques d'aujourd'hui et leurs praticiens traitent du passé colonial, en tenant compte particulièrement du rôle de la collecte et des collections dans l'histoire de ces disciplines. En plus des présentations individuelles, un accent particulier a été mis sur la communication directe avec des personnes originaires des pays d'origine de certaines parties des collections de Marburg, représentées ici par des participants du Brésil, de Tanzanie et d'Indonésie. Les discussions ont porté sur des collections spécifiques que les visiteurs ont explorées conjointement avec les responsables locaux : la Collection de médicaments Wigand, le Musée des Religions et la Collection Ethnographique (voir la contribution : « Discours colonial dans l'histoire des collections de l'Université de Marburg » dans ce numéro).

Parmi les participants invités figuraient des personnes qui, dans le cadre de leur activité professionnelle, s'occupent de la manière de traiter la provenance coloniale des collections scientifiques et de leurs objets dans le secteur universitaire ou muséal. Il s'agissait notamment de Jimson Sanga de l'Université d'Iringa en Tanzanie (également affilié au Musée Régional d'Iringa) et de Jan Kuever (également travaillant avec l'Organisation Culturelle fahari yetu);

d'Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih, chargée de cours à l'Universitas Indonesia (et en même temps doctorante à l'Université de Leyde) et de Nusi Lisabilla Estudiantin, employée du Ministère de l'Éducation et de la Culture d'Indonésie (anciennement conservatrice au Musée National d'Indonésie à Jakarta) ; et de Claudia Leonor López Garcés du Musée Paraense Emílio Goeldi à Belém, un grand musée axé sur l'histoire naturelle, l'ethnographie et l'archéologie au Brésil. Avec son aide, une délégation de trois personnes de l'ethnie Ka'apor au Brésil, Valdemar Ka'apor, Irakadju Ka'apor et Rosilene Tembê, ont pu assister à l'atelier après avoir participé à un projet d'échange financé par le Conseil européen de la recherche à Leyde. Un nombre similaire de contributions a été présenté par des universitaires européens : des Pays-Bas, Jos van Beurden (chercheur indépendant, Utrecht) et Paul W. Mitchell (Université d'Amsterdam) ; du Royaume-Uni, Bruno Brulon Soares (Université de St. Andrews) et Miranda Lowe (conservatrice principale au Musée d'Histoire Naturelle de Londres) ; de Suisse, Caroline Widmer (conservatrice des peintures indiennes au Musée Rietberg à Zurich) ; de Suède, Michael Sappol (Université d'Uppsala) ; d'Allemagne, Ina Heumann (Musée pour la Nature - Institut Leibniz pour l'Évolution et la Biodiversité à Berlin) et Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz (Association des Musées de Thuringe).

Introduction aux contributions de l'atelier sur " Décolonisation des disciplines académiques et des collections "

La conférence a été ouverte par une conférence inaugurale de Jos van Beurden (Utrecht) intitulée « Collections coloniales, restitution et questions d'inégalité ». Comme van Beurden l'a développé davantage dans son livre récemment publié (van Beurden, 2024), il s'intéresse à trois forces différentes dans le contexte des collections coloniales, qui doivent être comprises dans leurs dimensions politiques, culturelles et sociales. Parmi ces forces, la recherche de provenance dans le champ de tension Nord-Sud n'est qu'un élément, complété par le rôle des marchands d'art et collectionneurs privés actifs à l'échelle mondiale, et enfin, dans le Sud global, une controverse couramment observée entre représentants officiels et non officiels concernant leurs responsabilités respectives dans le processus de restitution des collections.

Miranda Lowe a prononcé sa conférence inaugurale publique « Réinventer la collecte et les collections en utilisant la pratique décoloniale dans les musées d'histoire naturelle » à l'Hôtel de Ville ; ainsi, elle a communiqué le sujet au grand public de Marburg, qui a réagi avec beaucoup d'intérêt. Sa conférence a examiné une variété de colonialismes qui peuvent être rencontrés dans le paysage muséal, depuis l'émergence des collections d'histoire naturelle à l'époque des grands empires coloniaux et le mépris pour le rôle des sociétés autochtones dans l'émergence des disciplines scientifiques jusqu'aux inégalités persistantes dans les structures sociales d'aujourd'hui, qui doivent également être abordées par le personnel des musées. Introduisant des études de cas du Musée d'Histoire Naturelle de Londres (NHM) et au-delà, Lowe a souligné les contributions faites par les individus et populations autochtones en collectant des objets naturels et en échangeant des connaissances botaniques et ethnomédicales. L'absence très courante des récits des acteurs non-européens dans l'histoire occidentale des sciences est contrecarrée de manière exemplaire dans les expositions et présentations du NHM³, complétées par des mesures d'égalité des chances⁴. Bien que la conférence, pour des raisons indépendantes des éditeurs, n'ait pas pu être incluse dans ce numéro, de nombreux aspects du travail de Lowe peuvent être consultés sur le site Web du musée, qui comprend des clips vidéo courts où Lowe explique comment une interprétation plus inclusive, représentative et holistique peut être élaborée⁵.

3 Cet effort est également visible sur la page d'accueil du musée, par exemple, à l'adresse suivante : <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/hidden-figures-forgotten-contributions-to-natural-history.html>

4 <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion.html>

5 <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/black-history-at-the-natural-history-museum.html>

Perspectives théoriques et critiques sur la décolonisation

Le premier panel de l'atelier a tracé quelques lignes directrices pour la discussion sur la décolonisation d'un point de vue théorique.

S'appuyant sur la thèse selon laquelle la Nouvelle Muséologie ne permet qu'une décolonisation limitée du musée, Bruno Brulon Soares a plaidé en faveur d'une réorganisation des autorités et des agences dans le secteur muséal et pour un processus de réhumanisation, selon lequel une plus grande justice et participation de toutes les parties prenantes pourraient être garanties. Dans ce sens - développé plus en détail dans la publication de ce numéro - il soutient qu'il existe non seulement une approche décoloniale mais aussi une approche véritablement anti-coloniale des héritages créés par le colonialisme.

Jan Kuever a basé ses réflexions sur des projets collaboratifs de recherche sur le terrain entre l'organisation du patrimoine culturel fahari yetu à Iringa et des universités et musées allemands, où les partenaires ont collecté des histoires d'objets et leur lien avec l'histoire coloniale allemande dans les potentielles communautés d'origine en Tanzanie. La recherche de provenance, indispensable dans le processus d'une restitution potentielle, nécessite la reconstruction et l'évocation de la mémoire, du sens et de toutes les autres formes de connaissances qui y sont associées. Cependant, comme il l'a souligné, l'objectif de la recherche de la provenance des objets individuels ne devrait pas seulement être de les relier aux communautés d'origine, mais d'en faire des ressources pour leur développement contemporain. Plutôt que de reproduire la connaissance coloniale, Küver soutient que les communautés savantes et locales devraient être impliquées dans la recherche participative produisant de nouvelles connaissances sur les collections étudiées.

Objets sensibles dans les musées et les collections universitaires : Études de cas

Les deux panels suivants ont examiné les approches des objets sensibles dans les domaines des collections religieuses et ethnographiques, respectivement.

Perspectives interdisciplinaires sur les objets culturels et religieux sensibles

Dans ce panel, les participants ont été invités à partager leur point de vue sur les artefacts culturellement et religieusement sensibles dans les musées et les collections universitaires, ainsi que leurs réflexions sur les raisons pour lesquelles ils devraient être considérés comme sensibles. Les contributions de Nusi Estudiantin et Caroline Widmer ont porté sur leurs perspectives en tant que conservatrices. Estudiantin a été conservatrice au Musée National d'Indonésie à Jakarta pendant environ 20 ans, jusqu'en 2023. Il était donc précieux qu'elle puisse apporter son point de vue en tant qu'initiatrice dans l'histoire et le processus continu de décolonisation d'un musée national dans une ancienne colonie. Widmer est spécialiste des peintures indiennes et est responsable de la collection des peintures indiennes au Musée Rietberg à Zurich, en Suisse. Elle a adopté un point de vue différent. Elle s'est concentrée sur les miniatures qui sont étiquetées comme indiennes, bien que quelques d'entre elles proviennent en réalité du Pakistan. Dans sa contribution, elle illustre particulièrement que « les temps des déséquilibres de pouvoir et de la précarité ou des conséquences coloniales » doivent être pris en compte de toutes les manières possibles lors de la discussion de ces images. Cela s'applique aussi bien rétrospectivement qu'en termes de recherche, de publication, de traitement et de pratiques d'exposition dans les musées d'aujourd'hui. Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz rapporte ses expériences de recherche dans un musée missionnaire en Allemagne, le « Forum der Völker » à Werl. En 2023, elle a été invitée par l'ordre des Franciscains en tant que consultante pour examiner leur impressionnante collection afin d'identifier des objets sensibles. Ces conseils devraient également inclure

des considérations de restitution ou de rapatriement. Sa contribution offre un aperçu des nombreux aspects que doit connaître un chercheur avant de décider du futur des objets dans un musée qui abrite toutes sortes d'objets des régions où les missionnaires étaient actifs avant, pendant et après la période coloniale. La quatrième contribution de ce tour est celle d'Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih, également une experte d'Indonésie. Elle enseigne l'histoire à l'Université Nationale (Universitas Indonesia) et mène des recherches sur la muséologie dans les musées à travers l'Indonésie. Elle analyse l'histoire et les changements actuels dans les musées provinciaux à Aceh (Sumatra), Makassar (Sulawesi) et Jakarta (Java), en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur la façon dont ils traitent « leurs » héros nationaux : Teuku Umar d'Aceh, Hasanudin de Sulawesi et Diponegoro de Java.

Les contributions à ce panel ont permis d'éclairer le problème des objets sensibles dans les musées du point de vue des experts muséaux et d'obtenir des perspectives sur les différences fondées sur l'emplacement respectif des acteurs - que ce soit dans les zones des anciennes colonies ou dans les territoires des puissances coloniales. Tant l'aspect de la colonisation ultérieure des objets de musée que la diversité des points de vue sur les aspects pouvant être attendus dans les processus de décolonisation ont enrichi la réflexion sur ce sujet.

Décoloniser les choses, les collections et les relations

Le panel suivant s'est concentré sur le rôle des connaissances autochtones dans la gestion des collections ethnographiques, en réunissant les communautés sources locales avec les institutions dans les pays d'origine ainsi que les collections dans les anciennes puissances coloniales. Claudia Leonor López-Garcés et une délégation de trois personnes du peuple autochtone Ka'apor vivant dans le Maranhão, dans la région amazonienne brésilienne, incarnaient l'approche programmatique qu'ils préconisent. López-Garcés, Valdemar Ka'apor, Irakadju Ka'apor et Rosilene Tembé ont rejoint l'événement à Marburg lors de leur retour d'une visite de recherche au Musée national d'ethnologie et à l'Université de Leyde (Pays-Bas), où ils avaient étudié conjointement une collection d'objets Ka'apor. L'année précédente, des partenaires de Leyde avaient également participé à un atelier conjoint à Belém, dans le cadre du projet ERC BRASILAE, visant à réexaminer le rôle des connaissances autochtones dans la « fabrication de la science ». Le concept central de ce projet était une collaboration sur un pied d'égalité entre les initiateurs et les gardiens actuels des sources matérielles de connaissance, explorant le sens de l'objet et essayant de retrouver et préserver les techniques traditionnelles de leur production à travers l'engagement avec les anciens de leurs communautés. Au cours de l'atelier, V. Ka'apor, I. Ka'apor et R. Tembé ont fait une courte présentation orale dans leur propre langue sur le rôle des connaissances naturalistes dans leur vie communautaire. La version publiée rassemble plus de références de première main d'un plus grand nombre de participants au projet de recherche conjoint et élargit le spectre des types de connaissances pertinents provenant de différentes communautés.

Dans sa présentation⁶, Jimson Sanga a présenté l'histoire complexe d'un ancêtre des Hehe à Iringa, le chef Mkwawa, du point de vue de la mémoire collective parmi les descendants vivants. Le chef Mkwawa est décédé en 1898 après une poursuite violente par la « force de protection » coloniale allemande (Schutztruppe), et la recherche de son crâne continue de jouer un rôle significatif pour l'identité des personnes à Iringa. Actuellement, les membres de la communauté Hehe demandent le retour d'autres restes ancestraux (comme le squelette du père de Mkwawa, Munyigumba, possiblement détenu à Berlin) ainsi que des objets historiques, y compris des armes et des matériaux connexes, en vue de renforcer la relation entre les vivants et leurs ancêtres. Selon Sanga, le renforcement des liens de

6 Malheureusement, toutes les versions écrites des présentations n'ont pas pu être incluses dans ce numéro

parenté joue un rôle plus important dans ce processus que les aspects couramment discutés d'autodétermination et d'autoreprésentation. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, les chercheurs en Tanzanie doivent être impliqués pour compléter et clarifier les identités personnelles des ancêtres dont les restes doivent être suivis en dehors du pays.

Objets sensibles dans les sciences naturelles et la médecine

Les collections d'objets des sciences naturelles et de la médecine sont moins impliquées dans les débats sur la restitution et les structures coloniales que, par exemple, les collections ethnographiques. Bien que cette distinction puisse sembler évidente, les disciplines médicales et scientifiques reposent largement sur les connaissances générées dans des contextes coloniaux. En conséquence, les contributrices venant de l'histoire naturelle (Miranda Lowe et Ina Heumann) visaient à discuter des expériences spécifiques avec les processus et les discours de décolonisation. Alors que la conférence inaugurale de Lowe présentait l'exemple britannique du Musée d'Histoire Naturelle et de sa collection (voir supra), Ina Heumann du Museum für Naturkunde (Musée d'Histoire Naturelle) de Berlin a étudié en profondeur un épisode du règne colonial allemand dans ce qui est aujourd'hui la Tanzanie. Heumann, qui est co-responsable du département « Humanités de la Nature » du musée (avec Anita Hermannstädter) et dirige également le groupe de recherche « Open Heritage. Exploring Collections, Creating Futures » (avec Christiane Quaisser et Tahani Nadim), a parlé de « On being sensitive. Dinosaurs and national identities ». Sa présentation s'est concentrée sur l'expédition paléontologique (in)fameuse allemande, menée entre 1909 et 1913 dans la Formation de Tendaguru au sud-est de la Tanzanie, où des os fossiles d'un des plus grands dinosaures ont été trouvés et préparés pour le transport à Berlin (Heumann et al., 2018). Ces fossiles sont toujours exposés au Musée d'Histoire Naturelle de la ville, même si des demandes de restitution ont été formulées par la Tanzanie. Heumann a donné un aperçu approfondi de l'expédition et des acteurs impliqués, mettant particulièrement en avant les contributions des travailleurs tanzaniens enrôlés dans le projet à l'époque. Beaucoup de ces fossiles sont considérés comme ayant une importance mondiale, mais la question demeure de savoir si le retour de ces pièces dans le pays où la main-d'œuvre locale les a prospectées et excavées pour la première fois devrait être considéré comme une solution équitable et pratique.

Sa présentation a été suivie d'une déclaration élaborée de Jimson Sanga qui a clairement expliqué sa propre position, soulignant qu'une compensation adéquate pour les gains financiers que le musée a obtenus grâce à l'exposition très populaire des spécimens tanzaniens serait plus utile pour le pays que la restitution des fossiles. Pendant la division de l'Allemagne, le musée - alors situé en Allemagne de l'Est - offrait des postes aux scientifiques tanzaniens pour participer à la recherche sur un pied d'égalité avec leurs hôtes, ce qui n'est plus aujourd'hui considéré comme acquis. Quoi qu'il en soit, les participants ont convenu que les droits sur les fossiles, dont dix ont été inclus dans le registre officiel allemand des biens culturels nationalement importants en 2011⁷, devraient inclure l'assurance que les spécimens sont disponibles sans réserve pour tout chercheur de la communauté scientifique internationale et que le musée se sent responsable de fournir le meilleur stockage possible tout en publiant leur histoire.

Deux contributions ont abordé l'utilisation des corps humains dans l'éducation médicale et la recherche. L'intervention de Michael Sappol lors de l'atelier a été un plaidoyer fort pour une confrontation avec l'histoire à travers la confrontation avec des objets historiques, y compris des spécimens dont la provenance est aujourd'hui jugée problématique ou

⁷ Sous la section 7 de la Loi sur la protection des biens culturels – [Traduction officielle en anglais] (https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_kgsg/englisch_kgsg.html#p0080), la base de données sur les biens culturels de Berlin est accessible à l'adresse suivante : https://www.kulturgutschutz-deutschland.de/DE/3_Datenbank/Kulturgut/Berlin/_function/liste_node.html

carrément inacceptable. Suivant les lignes directrices des associations de musées nationales et internationales, de nombreuses collections comprenant des corps humains ou leurs parties tendent actuellement à restreindre l'accès du public. En revanche, Sappol a plaidé pour la présentation ouverte, avec une contextualisation historique adéquate, de ce qu'il appelle les « biomatériaux humains ». Il a pleinement soutenu la nécessité de la décolonisation comme tentative de faire face aux crimes historiques, soulignant l'importance de connaître d'abord les différentes facettes de l'histoire, notamment à travers les objets attestant de ces crimes. Tout en soulignant l'importance des actes symboliques de réparation, Sappol a soutenu que ces gestes ne devraient pas permettre d'occulter les pertes de terres, de ressources et de pouvoir politique et économique causées par le colonialisme. Pendant son intervention, l'utilisation extensive de gros plans montrant des spécimens de collections anatomiques et pathologiques a soulevé de sérieuses préoccupations.

Paul Wolff Mitchell, chercheur pour le projet « Pressing matter : Ownership, value and the question of colonial heritage in museums » à Amsterdam, s'est concentré sur la manière dont les pratiques et les présomptions remplissant les salles de dissection avec les corps de personnes socialement marginalisées en Europe, et plus tard en Amérique du Nord, à la fin du XVIIIe et au début du XIXe siècle ont été étendues à un réseau impérial colonial pour amasser les os de personnes racialisées pour collection et étude. Il a examiné des cas impliquant la formation disciplinaire de l'anthropologie, centrée dans l'Allemagne contemporaine, en Indonésie, en Afrique du Sud, en Écosse, en Australie, au Liberia et aux États-Unis, en traçant une « politique de désarticulation ».

Table-ronde sur « La décolonisation des disciplines académiques et des collections »

L'atelier international s'est terminé par une table ronde de deux heures sur le thème principal : « La décolonisation des disciplines académiques et des collections », animée par Katja Triplett. En préparation de l'événement, elle avait écrit à tous les participants invités en les encourageant à contribuer à la session de clôture. Lors de l'atelier, les intervenants, Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih, Claudia López, Paul Mitchell, Michael Sappol et Jos van Beurden (dans l'ordre alphabétique du nom de famille), ont présenté une brève déclaration en abordant leur approche personnelle du sujet. Ils ont exposé ce qui était pour eux la « question concrète » la plus importante ayant émergé de leur travail pour une collection ou dans leur propre travail sur des objets sensibles. Les intervenants avaient été invités à réfléchir également à la question de la manière dont ils proposeraient de traiter de manière adéquate les objets sensibles, en considérant leur propre travail et expérience. Ils étaient invités à fournir un exemple, de préférence un objet particulier, pour illustrer leurs déclarations.

Tout d'abord, Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih a relaté un exemple concret lié à son travail et à son histoire personnelle : la peinture d'un esclave. Elle a exposé les diverses réponses à la peinture dans son contexte personnel et comment celles-ci l'ont inspirée à s'engager dans le travail muséal. Elle a également discuté des problèmes spécifiques d'un tel « objet sensible » dans le contexte de la décolonisation.

Paul Mitchell a brièvement discuté de cas concrets réfléchissant aux considérations éthiques et affectives autour de la divulgation des informations sur la provenance des restes humains dans les espaces de collection. Il a également relaté son parcours personnel vers son sujet de recherche pour illustrer le positionnement dans la recherche et la relation émotionnelle sous-jacente avec un objet.

Michael Sappol a exposé son expérience de vie personnelle et comment il est arrivé à son sujet principal de recherche. Il a développé ce que Jos van Beurden a mentionné lors de la conférence : « ne pas parler de nous, mais avec nous », en réfléchissant sur la question de l'identité et de la personne. Sappol a affirmé que les gens sont fondamentalement des êtres anatomiques.

La déclaration de Jos van Beurden s'est centrée autour d'un exemple concret illustrant son approche du sujet : un kris du Java ayant appartenu autrefois à un héros national, ayant disparu puis apparu au musée ethnographique de Leiden en 2019 et a été retourné en Indonésie deux ans plus tard.

Après le tour des déclarations individuelles, le public a été invité à participer à la discussion. La session de clôture de l'atelier international s'est achevée par des contributions de Miranda Lowe, Claudia López et Valdemar Ka'apor, entre autres. Lowe a exhorté les participants à se rendre plus vulnérables, soulignant que les pratiques décoloniales sollicitent l'esprit des gens ; il faut s'engager dans un « travail émotionnel ». Van Beurden a suggéré de « colorer le personnel », créant une plus grande diversité parmi les employés comme une étape vers la décolonisation des collections et des disciplines académiques à Marburg. Claudia López a plaidé pour intégrer véritablement les connaissances autochtones sans séparation académique ; elles devraient être acceptées à l'université. Dans ce contexte, elle a introduit le terme « corazonar », de Guerrero (2010), qui signifie penser et ressentir simultanément. Selon elle, le terme inclut le mot espagnol pour « cœur » mais peut également être compris comme « co(n)-razón », signifiant « avec raison ». Valdemar Ka'apor a soutenu son point de vue en faveur de l'intégration des connaissances autochtones et de la science épistémique, ajoutant d'autres arguments.

Références

- Delbourgo, J. (Ed.). (2008). *Science and empire in the Atlantic world*. Routledge.
- DMB - German Museums Association. (2021). “*Guidelines for German museums: Care of Collections from colonial contexts*”. 3rd edition. Deutscher Museumsbund.
- Findlen, P. (1994). *Possessing nature*. University of California Press.
- Guerrero Arias, P. (2010). *Corazonar: una antropología comprometida con la vida*. Abya-Yala, UPS.
- Heumann, I., Stoecker, H., Tamborini, M., & Vennen, M. (2018). *Dinosaurierfragmente: Zur Geschichte der Tendaguru-Expedition und ihrer Objekte, 1906-2018*. Wallstein.
- Osterhammel, J. (2009). *Kolonialismus. Geschichte - Formen - Folgen*. Beck.
- Van Beurden, J. van. (2024). *The empty showcase syndrome. Tough questions about cultural heritage from colonial regions*. Amsterdam University Press.

Colonial discourse in the history of Marburg university collections

Rainer Brömer

Edith Franke

Ernst Halbmayer

Tanja Pommerening

Susanne Rodemeier

Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios

Katrin Weber

University of Marburg – Marburg, Germany

Abstract

Four collections that originated in the context of formal or informal colonialism served as hosts for the workshop on “Decolonizing academic disciplines and collections” at the University of Marburg: the pharmacognostic, anatomical, and ethnographic collection and the Museum of Religions.¹ Historically, the related academic disciplines had grown based on the study of items often appropriated against the will of source communities. Decolonizing has to go beyond the material aspect of negotiating the future treatment of collections, by examining the role of colonial injustice and transcending Eurocentric taxonomies of academic knowledge as well as pursuing ways of advocacy for the communities of origin. This opening article sets the scene of academic collections within which the rest of the discussions are conducted.

Keywords: colonial trade; engaged anthropology; Eurocentric taxonomies; internal colonialism; religious diversity

Resumen

El discurso colonial en la historia de las colecciones de la Universidad de Marburgo

Cuatro colecciones que se originaron en el contexto del colonialismo formal o informal sirvieron de sede para el taller sobre “Descolonización de disciplinas académicas y colecciones” en la Universidad de Marburg: la colección farmacognóstica, anatómica y etnográfica, y el Museo de Religiones. Históricamente, las disciplinas académicas relacionadas habían crecido basadas en el estudio de objetos a menudo apropiados

1 Email: pommeren@staff.uni-marburg.de

contra la voluntad de las comunidades de origen. La descolonización debe ir más allá del aspecto material al negociar el tratamiento futuro de las colecciones, examinando el papel de la injusticia colonial y trascendiendo las taxonomías eurocéntricas del conocimiento académico, así como buscando formas de defensa para las comunidades de origen. Este artículo de apertura establece el contexto de las colecciones académicas dentro del cual se llevan a cabo el resto de las discusiones.

Palabras clave: comercio colonial; antropología comprometida; taxonomías eurocéntricas; colonialismo interno; diversidad religiosa

After the German Reich had officially begun setting up formal colonies in Africa and the Indo-Pacific region starting in 1884, the appropriation and distribution of objects of scientific interest from the Reich's own and other colonies was controlled in a centralized manner through the "Königliche Museum für Völkerkunde" in Berlin (SMB, n.d.). Accordingly, peripheral universities like the one in Marburg were not in the strongest position when it came to receiving objects for their research and teaching collections. Nevertheless, their holdings are highly significant for an understanding of the history of academic collecting in a colonial context, particularly in places that did not experience major losses during World War II. Thus, today the University of Marburg is in charge of some 40 collections from many areas/fields of academic research, and the historical sections have remained largely intact (Otterbeck & Schachtner, 2014). The provenance of the items curated at Marburg varies widely, yet it has long been clear that a significant part of the holdings came to the university in the context of colonial activities pursued by Germany or other colonial states, both before and after the period of formal German colonialism. Accordingly, the circumstances that allowed for the appropriation of these items have to be investigated.

At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that those objects were of significant importance in the establishment and formation of various disciplines, ranging from natural sciences, like physical anthropology, biology, pharmacy, and anatomy, to human sciences and humanities, including ethnology, cultural and social anthropology, study of religions, and art history. It is not possible to separate the colonial past of academic collections from the colonial impact on the disciplines taking shape and evolving through the study of these collections and in return affecting the activities of individuals in the field trying to fulfill the requests of the scientific community in the colonial centers.

The article shows how very complex discussions of "decolonization" can be for academic collections. What does it mean to ethically collect, curate, or display items in a world of power imbalances? Marburg collections demonstrate the many challenges – and opportunities – for engaged academics to consider and reconsider their historical collections. Four collections in particular serve as examples: the Pharmacognostic Collection, the Medico-Historical Anatomical Collection, the Ethnographic Collection and the Collection of the Museum of Religions.



Figure 1: Samples of China bark, Pharmacognostic Collection (Wigand's Drug Collection), Photo © Susanne Saker, Marburg University Library

The Pharmacognostic Collection: Wigand's drug collection

Attempts to control trade routes for spices and pharmaceutical drugs were among the early drivers of expansion already in ancient Egyptian times. With the growing range of seafaring in the 15th century, new knowledge reached Europe from recently contacted or newly accessible continents. The impact of these encounters can be impressively demonstrated from the 16th century until today. Spices and medicinal plants in the form of seeds, pressed herbarium material, plants to be grown in botanical gardens or applied as medicinal drugs arrived in Europe together with translated reports of Indigenous knowledge revealed in books produced in large print runs (Sánchez-Menchero, 2016). Until the 19th century, the *materia medica* used for healing consisted of parts of plants, animals, and minerals. Their use and preparation into medicinal products was described in pharmacopeias. Knowing the appearance of an individual medicinal plant drug and the ability to distinguish it from counterfeits circulating on the market was necessary for any person working in the medical sector. Accordingly, with the emergence of professional training for pharmacists at universities in the 19th century, we find the first teaching collections of such drugs to appear in places of pharmaceutical training, whereas they had existed already in so-called cabinets of naturalia built by apothecaries since the 17th century.

In Marburg, the pharmacognostic collection² was founded in 1854 by Albert Wigand (1821-1886), professor of botany and pharmacognosy (Rumpf-Lehmann, 2014). His purpose was to create a collection for teaching and presentation to students of pharmacy at the University of Marburg. He built his collection based on a small *materia medica* collection inherited from his father Friedrich Wigand (1788-1850), apothecary in Treysa near Marburg. Albert Wigand expanded the collection until eventually it contained up to 4000 crude drugs, including a rich selection of China barks and related counterfeit substances of varied provenance (for a somewhat earlier history of China barks and their globalization, cf. Gänger, 2021).

At present, the collection still holds approximately 2600 herbal and animal drugs not only from Europe but also from Western Africa, Brazil, and North America. In addition to crude drugs in the form of plants, animals and minerals, the collection contains commodities typical for 19th-century pharmacies, such as tea and coffee, as well as other substances still in use in today's food and drug industry. The collection took shape in the context of global trade relations in the 19th century when Europe evidently benefited from colonial structures, which in turn encouraged the professionalization of disciplines like pharmacy – topics that have been widely studied in recent years (Anderson, 2010; Anderson, 2021). Wigand published a book on pharmacognosy that went through several editions (the first one being Wigand, 1863), demonstrating that the drugs being used and studied in his time were sourced from all over the world.

At the time of the decolonizing academic collections workshop in June 2023, parts of Wigand's drug collection were exhibited at Marburg University Library under the title "News about old pharmaceuticals," providing the opportunity to ask the participants from the Global South specific questions during a guided tour. The visitors were delighted to discover samples of their 19th-century Indonesian or Brazilian flora in Marburg. The local hosts asked for their assessment: How would they deal with the individual drugs? Should historical plant parts from all over the world be returned to their home countries? The responses emphasized the desire to learn together from the objects and exchange experiences on how to study and use them, especially as the drugs on display were known as part of the current global stock of remedies. In these conversations, the historical dimension of the collection faded into the background, especially considering the fact that these objects were derived from organisms that can still be found in the regions of origin where they had been collected under colonial conditions. Although the exhibition had been designed with a focus on the continued pharmaceutical relevance of traditional *materia medica*, the visit brought out once more the importance of addressing the historical context of colonial drug trade in far greater depth than what was possible during one brief tour. It is intended to examine the history of the Wigand collection from the perspective of decolonization in the context of a planned PhD project.

2 Pharmacognosy is the science of medicinal drugs, their provenance, appearance, and content of active ingredients. To this day, pharmacognosy continues to be an important topic in the training of pharmacy students. However, the subject name has been changed to "Pharmaceutical Biology," given that approaches to drug examination nowadays are no longer limited to macroscopic and microscopic inspection but include a variety of current methods from the life sciences more broadly.

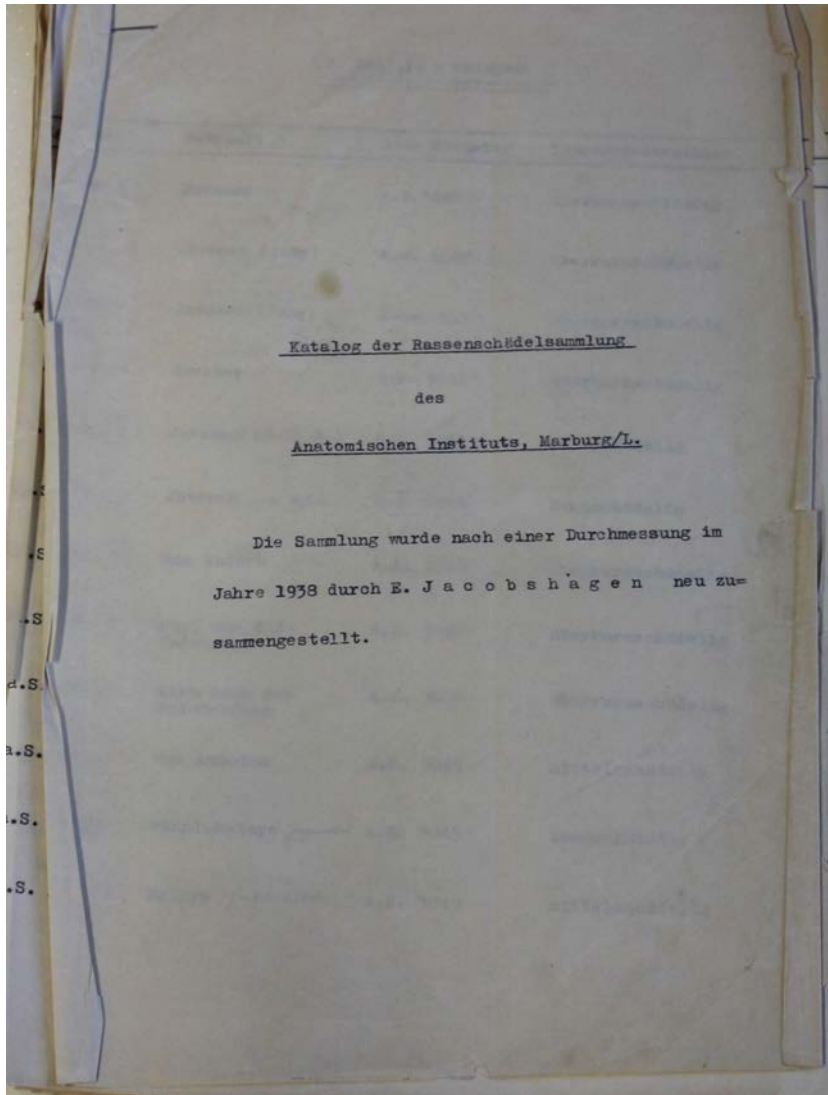


Figure 2: Catalog of the “Racial Skull Collection” reexamined by Eduard Jacobshagen 1938,
 © Institute for the History of Pharmacy and Medicine, Philipps University Marburg,
 Photo: Katrin Weber

Medico-Historical Anatomical Collection

In the 18th century, collecting parts of human bodies became an important element of medical education. Given the central role of anatomy in the exercise of medicine, the scarcity of corpses available for teaching and research was in part compensated for by preserving dissected body parts by various methods, under liquids like “spirit of wine,” in dried form, and as bones, using increasingly sophisticated techniques. The entire spectrum of preparation techniques can be seen in the Marburg collection started in 1812 by anatomist Christian Heinrich Bünger (1782-1842), though he integrated numerous specimens created or purchased in the 18th century for the Collegium Carolinum in Kassel (Ulrich 2017). Given the particular status of the human body, tight regulations applied from the beginning, even though they were often bypassed. In most cases, the bodies of persons with no known next of kin who would pay for a regular burial were statutorily transferred to anatomical facilities. From this perspective, it becomes obvious that the sourcing of anatomical specimens was inherently characterized by social imbalances: members of marginalized groups were

infinitely more likely to be dissected and potentially preserved in anatomical collections compared to socially well-integrated individuals. The structural gradient of power has been labeled “internal colonialism,” which not only describes the relationship between regions within a state, but may also refer, as in the case presented here, to the hierarchies of power between groups within a community, such as the educated elites of the government ministries and universities managing the processing of the dead bodies of persons who did not have the means to determine their own posthumous fate.

The ambivalence of anatomy regarding enlightened claims to equality among human beings becomes even more apparent when looking at the entanglement of the discipline with the emerging “racial” anthropology in the late 18th century. Over the course of the 19th century, Marburg anatomists purchased a number of human skulls from all over the world, mostly through colonial trade, and during the Nazi period, the extant specimens were reevaluated by anatomist Eduard Jacobshagen (1886-1968), who eclectically used and modified dominant concepts of human “races” promoted by leading anthropologists closer to the regime (Grundmann, 1995, pp. 363, 365).

In the second half of the 20th century, the collection lost much of its relevance for teaching and research and was mostly neglected until the middle of the 1980s, when anatomist Gerhard Aumüller found some space to curate a permanent exhibition, known as the Museum Anatomicum, opened in 1988 with support from biologist Kornelia Grundmann. The exhibition became a popular albeit at times controversial fixture in public life in Marburg (Grundmann and Aumüller, 2012; Aumüller, 2014).

After the closure of the museum to public visitors in 2019 due to safety and ethical concerns, the university’s Institute for the History of Pharmacy and Medicine devised a series of initiatives to assess ethical and didactic issues arising from the curation, potential scientific research, and public display of human remains, including questions regarding potential repatriation of skeletal remains from colonial and imperial contexts. The so-called “racial skull collection” is the current PhD project of Katrin Weber. Her research includes “collecting activities” of local professors of anatomy from the 18th to the 20th century, their organization and restructuring of the collection, and the use of the skulls in research and teaching. It also examines possible political and socio-cultural influences on the scientists’ studies concerning the collection. Other aspects of the dissertation will include a historical reappraisal of the contexts of injustice through which the skulls came into the collection. Where possible, the regional and cultural origins of the individuals will be analysed on the basis of historical source research. According to the current state of knowledge, the remains of the deceased were appropriated from various countries occupied by former European colonizers, such as various countries on the African continent, Oceania, the Americas, and Asia. For those human remains acquired through colonial contexts, the project will help decide future steps for the treatment of the remains in conversation with communities in the regions of their presumed origin.

Ethnographic collection



Figure 3: Makonde masks, Collection Ronsiek, Tanzania (East-Africa), acquired by the Ethnographic Collection Marburg in 1967. The masks were originally part of a larger collection donated by Friedrich Ernst Ronsiek, a plantation administrator to the Wiesbaden Collection of Nassau Antiquities in 1918. © Ethnographic Collection Marburg, Photo: Hannah Jacobs

Ethnographic university collections were mainly used for teaching social and cultural anthropology and to document academic research activities at the respective universities. In contrast to anthropological museums – at least in Germany – ethnographic university collections have only very limited possibilities in terms of funding, staff, and infrastructure to systematically engage in collection-related research or to curate exhibitions for a larger audience. The same holds true for acquiring objects. Their nevertheless highly relevant activities are often based on personal engagement of academic anthropologists and anthropology students, departmental activities, and the strategic use of contextual opportunities, while they may be limited by institutional restrictions.

Re-writing history: The collection's entanglements with formal colonialism

Academic anthropology in Marburg goes back to Theodor Waitz (1821-1864) and Karl von den Steinen (1855-1929). While Karl von den Steinen left Marburg University in the 1890s arguing that there is no point in teaching anthropology without a museum (Voell 2001), it took until 1925 to decide to establish an ethnographic collection within the area of geography, as ethnography or social anthropology was not yet institutionalized as a

discipline of its own. In 1929, the first objects arrived as loans from the ethnographic museum in Berlin.

Thus, the collection was established after World War I, at a time when Germany no longer had any colonies. Its main focus was instructional. Most objects entered the collection as donations, via the incorporation of parts of other collections, or were collected during research activities and travels of department members and students. Therefore, the Marburg collection never was a colonial institution established in the context of the German empire, yet colonial relations were nevertheless inscribed into it from the very beginning, as a critical re-examination shows, with regard to both objects and acting persons.

The founder of the collection was Leonhard Schultze-Jena, professor of geography in Marburg from 1913-1937. Today, his legacy is assessed quite ambivalently. His ethnographic and language-based research in Mesoamerica (1929-31), with a focus on ritual and the 360-day calendar system, later served to decipher sequences from pre-colonial codices. His translations of Quiché and Aztec texts (see Schultze-Jena, 1933-38) are still held in high esteem by renowned contemporary Mesoamerican scholars (Broda, 2008; Dehouve, 2012).

However, before his time in Marburg he had been actively engaged in colonial activities and research. From 1903-1905, he conducted physical anthropological research among the Nama in German South West Africa (today Namibia) (Schultze-Jena 1907, 1928). His activities were supported by the German Schutztruppen and General Lothar von Trotha, who was responsible for the genocide of the Herero and Nama, and he participated as a war correspondent in the fights against insurgent Nama. Schultze-Jena conducted research and examined bodies of dead Nama persons, most likely in hospitals related to German concentration and internment camps, and was involved in shipping human remains of Herero and Nama individuals to Germany (Förster & Stoecker, 2016). Between 1910 and 1911, he led a German-Dutch New Guinea Border Expedition to determine the position of the border meridian between German New Guinea (Kaiser-Wilhelmsland) and Dutch New Guinea. During his time in Marburg, he became the founding director of the Institut für Deutschtum im Ausland (Institute for Germandom Abroad), later called Institut für Grenz- u. Auslandsdeutschtum (Institute for Germandom in Borderlands and Abroad), which arose from an initiative of colonial scholars at the University of Marburg with initial support of the late German Empire.

The first objects received from Berlin and other collections, such as the one in Göttingen, were at least partly colonial objects. Until the 1960s, items from French, British, and Dutch colonies acquired through trading houses or in the context of research activities also entered the collection. However, the most substantial number of colonial objects came to Marburg in the 1960s on the initiative of Horst Nachtigall, Professor for Social and Cultural Anthropology from 1963 to 1989, when the non-European section of the collection of Nassau antiquities moved from Wiesbaden to Marburg. More than a thousand objects were transferred, acquired mainly by German and Dutch soldiers and colonial officials (on account of the connection between the Duchy of Nassau and the Dutch Oranje) as well as by private entrepreneurs. These objects, whose original appropriation dates reach back to 1828, originate from regions today located in countries including Cameroon, Tanzania, South Africa, and parts of West and North Africa, as well as from China, Japan, Indonesia, Oceania, Australia, and a few even from South America, including Chile, Venezuela, and Mexico.

Provenance research in the ethnographic collection as a contribution to decolonization

The objects from Africa – in particular Tanzania and Cameroon – appropriated under German colonial rule were part of the first provenance research project in Hesse, “Provenances of ethnographic objects from colonial contexts in Central Hesse” (2020-22), funded by the German Lost Art Foundation. This project brought together the Marburg holdings from the Nassau antiquities collection – with highly dispersed documents about their possible provenance – and the ethnographic collection of Gießen City Museum (Oberhessisches Museum). In addition, contacts were established with representatives of the countries of origin, Cameroon and Tanzania. The ensuing collaboration not only served the regional identification of objects, but also enabled the development of different perspectives on the colonial past.³

The ethnographic collection as a document of the history of decolonial efforts and engaged anthropology

While many objects of the collection become relevant in view of colonialism, there are also objects that document the history of decolonial efforts: The early South American anthropologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg (1872-1924) is the focus of a series of national and international projects. He traveled to Brazil and neighboring regions of Colombia and Venezuela on four occasions: 1899-1900, 1903-1905, and 1911-1913. At the beginning of his fourth and final journey in 1924, he unexpectedly passed away in Brazil. Koch-Grünberg’s scientific legacy, including his writings, correspondence, sound recordings, and photographs have been part of the university’s ethnographic collection since 1999 and continue to attract academic attention. The travel diaries and his documentation of Indigenous languages are the core of the *Nachlass*, providing valuable information about Koch-Grünberg as a researcher. In 2014, a conference and a workshop on the Koch-Grünberg Collection were organized at the Ethnological Museum Berlin with the participation of Indigenous representatives from the Rio Negro Area (Kraus, Halbmayer, Kummels, 2018). The diaries from Koch-Grünberg’s first journey have been available in print since 2004; the diaries of his third journey, titled *From the Roroima to the Orinoco*, have recently been published to commemorate the 150th anniversary of his birth (Kraus, Halbmayer, 2023). In addition, an exhibition titled “Theodor Koch-Grünberg and the Production of Science” has been installed in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology as part of three special exhibitions called “Focus on Theo” set up in Marburg, at the Museum im Spital in Grünberg, and at the Oberhessisches Museum in Gießen, respectively (Schweitzer de Palacios & Halbmayer, 2023). The exhibition in Marburg focuses on Koch-Grünberg’s research goals and the collection of data and forms of documentation, reflecting the colonial conditions in which the researcher worked as well (see also Halbmayer & Halbmayer-Watzina 2023). The presentation highlights the emerging field of ethnology and the developing method of participant observation.

The collection of Aché objects from Eastern Paraguay dates back to field research by Mark Münzel in the early 1970s. During his stay in Paraguay, Münzel found the Aché, a nomadic group of hunters and gatherers being confronted with genocidal forms of internal colonialism and oppression. In the early 1970s, the persecution and decimation of the Aché reached a sad climax under the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner. Their habitat, the

3 The documentation of the results has been published on the university’s collections website and the analyzed objects are on display https://www.uni-marburg.de/de/fb03/ivk/fachgebiete/sozial-und-kulturanthropologie/ethnographische-sammlung/provenienzforschung/objekte_marburg_german.pdf

forest, was to be used for livestock farming, resulting in the subjugation of the remaining Aché population through violent and cruel means as well as by missionary practices. During this period, anthropologists began analyzing ethnocide and became engaged in supporting Indigenous rights and self-determination, an emancipatory and decolonial stance which has ever since been central for Marburg's social and cultural anthropology. In Münzel, the Aché had a tireless advocate (Münzel 1973; 2008). The publication by Münzel and his collaborators on the ongoing genocide was to make a significant contribution to bringing the bloody persecution of Indigenous groups onto the world political stage and to the attention of the judicial authorities, serving as the basis for an international indictment of the Stroessner regime (Schweitzer de Palacios, 2018, p. 436; Parellada & Beldi de Alcántara, 2008).

Current projects and student involvement

A project on "The relations between German-speaking and Brazilian social anthropology in the 20th century: Theory flows and ethnographic collections" has just been started jointly with the Universidade Federal do Pernambuco, funded by the CAPES and the DAAD, in order to publish the correspondence between Koch-Grünberg and Curt Unckel Nimuendajú, a founding figure of Brazilian anthropology and restless advocate for the Indigenous groups. The question of ontological and epistemological decolonization is also at the heart of the EU Horizon Project "EDGES. Entangling Indigenous Knowledges in Universities," which involves a network of 18 European and (mainly Latin) American Universities (EDGES, n.d.).

Students participate in all activities related to decolonization. Courses focus on colonial appropriation and debates on how to handle objects in collections. One example is the Koch-Grünberg exhibition, which was organized with the participation of students. Another example is the teaching research project "May this be on the exhibition display?" ("Darf das in die Vitrine?"), where students analyzed sensitive objects to shed light on ethical issues in exhibition practice.

Museum of Religions (Religionskundliche Sammlung/collection of religious objects)

The founding of the Museum of Religions (1927) was intended to facilitate knowledge of religious diversity (Franke & Matter 2022, p. 26; Runge 2022, pp. 327-329). This concern pervades the history of the collection until today and can be understood as an interest in the diversity of religious ideas and practices that goes beyond a Christian-influenced understanding of religion. However, this openness in terms of content was not linked to its consistent reflection of Eurocentric and Christocentric perspectives in processes of acquiring, inventorying and presenting religious objects. Against the background of a sensitization for the influences of colonial power relations, we now see it as an outstanding task to contribute to the decolonization of museums, university collections and scientific disciplines.

The collection and exhibition of religious objects in a university and museum context was and is unique not only in Germany, but also internationally. Unlike disciplines such as ethnology, anthropology or the natural sciences, the comparative study of religions and history of religions has focused for a long time on texts as essential sources for research into the history and development of religions. The Philipps-Universität Marburg founded the Museum of Religions as a teaching and research collection in 1927 on the initiative of the Protestant theologian and historian of religion Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) (Franke



Figure 4: Reduction of religious complexity through Eurocentric perspectives: Ancestor Figure, Baule /Ivory Coast; RS: Ag 196/1897 under Rudolf Otto's tropical helmet. Photo: Heike Luu © Museum of Religions

& Runge, 2017, p. 2). In 1917, Otto published his now famous book *Das Heilige*.⁴ His intention was to show the variety of manifestations of the “holy/sacred” in different religions – and to achieve a better understanding of religious diversity through objects from different regions and religions. With his interest in religious objects and rituals as well as the dimension of experiencing religion, Otto established an important cornerstone for researching religions not only through written sources, but also by explicitly focusing on religions in their practiced forms. The objects he acquired on various journeys to Asia and the Near and Middle East formed the basis of the Museum of Religions’ collection (Otto, 1926). This was successively expanded over the years through acquisitions and the inclusion of collections and bequests from scholars and missionaries. As in the first exhibition entitled “Fremde Heiligtümer” (“Foreign Shrines / Sanctuaries”), the focus of acquisitions was on religious cultures that were perceived as “foreign,” particularly Islam and the religions of India and East Asia (*Fremde Heiligtümer: Ausstellungstext*, 1929, p. 2). The fact that a second section of the first exhibition was run by Christian

⁴ English edition: *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*. London u.a.: Oxford University Press, 1969 (English translation first appeared in 1923). The book has now been translated into more than 35 languages.

missionary societies and displayed objects and object ensembles from African countries, Southeast Asia, and Oceania is an indication that, compared to religions with extensive written traditions, these were regarded as the “Religion und Kultur der sog. Primitiven” (“Religion and culture of the so-called primitives”) (Runge, 2022, pp. 336-364) and that their categorization in museums was characterized by taxonomies and stereotypes that did not do adequate justice to the autonomy and complexity of these religious traditions.

The founding of the Museum of Religions came at a time when the still young discipline of the Study of Religion, with its focus on different religions, was explicitly distancing itself from a Christocentric and Eurocentric understanding of religion and striving to emancipate from theological, denominational restrictions and a missionary attitude towards non-Christian religions. Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) provided an essential foundation for this attitude and the emergence of comparative study of myths and the Study of Religion with his 50-volume work *Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford 1879 to 1910). The focus of research interest on historical texts as sources for gaining knowledge about religions is clearly recognizable here. Rudolf Otto, on the other hand, saw the study of religious experience and the material culture of religion as an essential key to understanding religions in their lived and practiced forms. Although the founder of the Museum of Religions thereby broadened the research perspective, he remained largely committed to a Christian-influenced understanding of religion and set the Christian religion as the highest standard: “im Kreuze Christi hat das christliche Gefühl die lebendigste Anwendung der ‘Kategorie des Heiligen’ vollzogen und damit die tiefste religiöse Intuition hervorgebracht die je auf dem Gebiete der Religionsgeschichte zu finden gewesen ist”⁵ (Otto, 2014, p. 200 [1. ed. 1917]).

Whereas under Otto’s direction the focus was mainly on a comparative presentation of religious diversity, his successor, the Protestant theologian, scholar of religious studies and missiology Heinrich Frick (1893-1952), focused his acquisitions on objects from missionary areas outside Europe, and at the end of the 1930s also on Germanic and German religious history (Heinrich, 2002, pp. 123, 152-157). Friedrich Heiler, who directed the collection from 1953 to 1968, acquired objects on his travels to Japan and Southeast Asia, while Martin Kraatz, as long-time director (1968 to 1998), maintained close contact with Japan and encouraged research and exhibitions on East Asia. It is clear that the acquisition and presentation of objects is closely linked to the research interests of the scholars responsible for the collection and changes accordingly. Objects originating from colonial contexts primarily became part of the collection in the 1930s to 1950s (acquisitions, donations and bequests). Since the early 2000s, objects have been acquired in close cooperation with the contexts of origin, that is, with those who previously used the objects. The focus of the collection work is increasingly on researching the existing holdings with regard to their provenance, analyzing the power relations in the context of their acquisition and problematizing museum and scholarly taxonomies and interpretations. This work benefits from the recent prominence of contemporary research in the Study of Religion on the materiality of religions, which is often summarized in a comprehensive sense under the keyword “aesthetics of religion” (Houtmann & Meyer, 2012; Grieser et al., 2019, pp. 1-19; Koch et al., 2020), and from the far-reaching, critical examination of Eurocentric taxonomies in the study of religion (Masuzawa, 2005). A persistent difficulty, however, is that greater consideration of emic perspectives can lead to difficult-to-resolve collisions with the influence of internal religious perspectives.

⁵ “In the cross of Christ, Christian feeling has carried out the most vivid application of the ‘category of the holy’ and thus produced the deepest religious intuition that has ever been found in the field of religious history.”

We have to ask ourselves and discuss with the (religious) communities what is appropriate when exhibiting objects that have been or are still considered sacred: What processes of musealization might be acceptable? Furthermore, it is the concern of exhibitions curated with a Study of Religion approach to show processes of change and the respective historical context of religious objects as well as to take into account intra-religious diversity and thus non-dominant religious traditions. This is true for objects from colonial and missionary contexts as well as for exhibitions that show competing religious traditions side by side. We see an opportunity to contribute to the decolonization of the Study of Religion and the Museum of Religions in a consistent and transparent examination of emic and religious perspectives, questions of provenance and the origin, scope and plausibility of scientific taxonomies and epistemes.

Provenance research in the study of religion as a contribution to decolonization

Research on objects from colonial contexts has become a key concern of the Museum of Religions. Since 2021, objects that have been stored in the repository of the Museum of Religions for many years have been on display again in a newly conceptualized exhibition area. The primary aim of this presentation is to highlight the underlying research and the problematic, often unresolved issues surrounding objects of colonial provenance. In the exhibition developed with students, the presentation of objects from Oceania provides insights into the influence of colonial rule and missionary activities as well as the creation of museum collections and the associated ethical challenges. Accordingly, the presentation is less about exhibiting objects and more about revealing museum problems, unequal power relations in the process of musealization and unresolved research questions, which aims to encourage interaction with and participation by visitors interested in research.⁶

The disclosure of questions, working methods and underlying theories of the researchers and curators not only offers the possibility of greater participation of all those involved, but also the prerequisite for the integration of people from the contexts of use and origin of the collection objects. Such an approach abandons the view that museums function as repositories of knowledge or as “mediators of secure knowledge.” It provides space for an attitude of understanding university and museum collections as “laboratories,” as places of encounter and interaction or as “platforms” with a great openness for participation (Cameron, 2015; Clifford, 1999).

Conclusion

Encounters of international visitors from a wide variety of museum and collection contexts on the premises of selected university collections in the hosting institution in Marburg offered a broad spectrum of settings for critical conversations: How are we to deal adequately with the historical circumstances of the events that led to the appropriation of many of the collected items, some of which are considered highly sensitive in different ways? The workshop demonstrated that decolonizing is complex, as all involved try to balance the often-competing interests of colonizers and colonized, researchers and academics, originating community members and governments, visitors and curators, among others. Marburg collections illustrate the complexities of many of these attempts to balance past and contemporary practices. Many participants of the event, therefore, ex-

⁶ The exhibition elucidates a research process that Susanne Rodemeier undertook as curator together with students. Virtual tour through the exhibition space:
https://ilias.uni-marburg.de/data/UNIMR/lm_data/lm_4012025/Rundgang_Koloniales_Ozeanien/index.html

pressed the need to consider multiple approaches to “decolonizing” beyond the strict dichotomy of “community of origin” and former colonial power and beyond the focus on repatriation. Most important, all agreed, was the creation of an equitable international research community in continual dialogue.

References

- Anderson, S. (2010). Pharmacy and empire: The “British Pharmacopoeia” as an instrument of imperialism 1864 to 1932. *Pharmacy in History* 52 (3/4), 112-121.
- Anderson, S. (2021). *Pharmacy and professionalization in the British Empire, 1780-1970*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Aumüller, G. (2014). Der Weg der Marburger anatomischen Sammlung zum Medizinhistorischen Museum. In Sahmland, I., & Grundmann, K. (Eds.), *Tote Objekte, lebendige Geschichten* (pp. 12-22). Michael Imhof Verlag.
- Broda, J. (2008). Leonhard Schultze-Jena y sus investigaciones sobre ritualidad en la montaña de Guerrero. *Anales de Antropología* 42, 117-145.
- Cameron, F. (2015). The liquid museum: New institutional ontologies for a complex, uncertain world. In Witcomb, A. & Message, K. (Eds.), *The international handbooks of museums studies*, Vol. 1: Museum Theory (pp. 345-361). John Wiley & Sons.
- Clifford, J. (1999). Museums as contact zones. In Boswell, D. & Evans, J. (Eds.), *Representing the nation: A reader: histories, heritage and museums*. Routledge.
- Dehouve, D. (2012). Los ritos de expulsión entre los tlapanecos. *Dimensión Antropológica*, 19, 67-97.
- EDGES (n.d.). *Entangling Indigenous knowledges in universities*. <http://www.edgesproject.com/> (acc. May 20, 2024).
- Förster, L. & Stoecker, H. (2016). *Haut, Haar und Knochen. Koloniale Spuren in naturkundlichen Sammlungen der Universität Jena*. VDG-Verlag Bettina Preiß.
- Franke, E. & Matter, A. (2022). Negotiating religion in museums. In Franke, E. & Jelinek-Menke, R. (Eds.), *Handling religious things. The material and the social in museums*. Georg Olms Verlag.
- Franke, E. & Runge, K. (2017). Die Religionskundliche Sammlung der Philipps-Universität Marburg – Ein Museum zur Vielfalt der Religionen. In Klöcker, M. & Tworuschka, U. (Eds.), *Handbuch der Religionen* 52: S. I – 25.5 (12 pp.). Westarp Science Fachverlag.
- Fremde Heiligtümer: Ausstellungstext (1929). No Author, no publisher. (<https://www.uni-marburg.de/de/relsamm/forschen/publikationen/fremde-heiligtuemer-ausstellung-1929.pdf>)
- Gänger, S. (2021). *A singular remedy. Cinchona across the Atlantic world, 1751-1820*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grieser, A. K. & Johnston, J. (2019). What is an *aesthetics of religion*? From senses to meaning – and back again. In Grieser, A. K. & Johnston, J. (Eds.), *Aesthetics of religion. A connective concept*. de Gruyter.

- Grundmann, K. (1995). Die Rassenschädelsammlung des Marburger Museum Anatomicum als Beispiel für die Kraniologie des 19. Jahrhunderts und ihre Entwicklung bis zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. *Würzburger Medizinhistorische Mitteilungen*, 13, 351-370.
- Grundmann, K., & Aumüller, G. (Eds.). 2012. *Das Marburger Medizinhistorische Museum. Museum Anatomicum*. Magistrat der Stadt Marburg.
- Halbmayer, E., & Halbmayer-Watzina, S. (2023). Kolonialitäten und tribale Zonen. Koch-Grünbergs Beziehungen im Feld während der Roraima-Orinoco-Expedition. In *Theodor Koch-Grünberg. Die Roraima-Orinoco-Expedition. Ein Forschungstagebuch (1911-1913)* (pp. 587-635). Böhlau Verlag.
- Heinrich, F. (2002). *Die deutsche Religionswissenschaft und der Nationalsozialismus. Eine ideologiekritische und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*. Imhof Verlag.
- Houtman, D. & Meyer, B. (Eds.). (2012). *Things. Religion and the question of materiality*. Fordham Univ. Press.
- Koch, A. & Wilkens, K. (Eds.). (2020). *The Bloomsbury handbook of the cultural and cognitive aesthetics of religion*. Bloomsbury.
- Kraus, M., Halbmayer, E., & Kummels, I. (Eds.). (2018). *Objetos como testigos del contacto cultural. Perspectivas interculturales de la historia y del presente de las poblaciones indígenas del alto río Negro (Brasil/Colombia)*. Gebr. Mann (Estudios Indiana, 11). https://www.iai.spk-berlin.de/fileadmin/dokumentenbibliothek/Estudios_Indiana/Estudios_Indiana_11_online.pdf
- Kraus, M., & Halbmayer, E. (Eds.). (2023). *Theodor Koch-Grünberg. Die Roraima-Orinoco-Expedition. Ein Forschungstagebuch (1911-1913)*. Böhlau Verlag.
- Masuzawa, T. (2005). *The invention of world religions: Or, how European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism*. University of Chicago Press.
- Münzel, M. (1973). *The Aché Indians: Genocide in Paraguay*. IWGIA.
- Münzel, M. (2008). Prólogo: 35 años después. In Parellada, A. & Beldi de Alcántara, M. de L. (Eds.), *Los Aché del Paraguay. Discusión de un genocidio* (pp. 7-18). IWGIA.
- Otterbeck, C. & Schachtner, J. (Eds.). (2014), *Schätze der Wissenschaft. Die Sammlungen, Museen und Archive der Philipps-Universität Marburg*. Jonas Verlag.
- Otto, R. (2014). *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, expanded re-edition. C. H. Beck (1st edition Breslau 1917).
- Otto, R. (29.04.1926). *Brief an den Preußischen Minister für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Volksbildung Carl Heinrich Becker*, Akten der Religionskundlichen Sammlung.
- Parellada, A., & Beldi de Alcántara, M. de L. (Eds.). (2008): *Los Aché del Paraguay. Discusión de un genocidio*. IWGIA.
- Rumpf-Lehmann, B. (2014). Pharmakognostische Sammlung. In Otterbeck, C & Schachtner, J. (Eds.). (2014), *Schätze der Wissenschaft. Die Sammlungen, Museen und Archive der Philipps-Universität Marburg* (pp. 90-97). Jonas Verlag.

- Runge, K. (2022). *Religion in Museen. Religiöse Objekte zwischen Entzauberung und Verzauberung in Leningrad und Marburg*. Nomos.
- Sánchez-Menchero, M. (2016). Sheets of paper, tobacco leaves: The circulation of knowledge about new world plants through printed books (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). In Wendt, H. (Ed.), *The globalization of knowledge in the Iberian colonial world* (pp. 213-225). Max Planck Institute for the History of Science.
- Schultze-Jena, L. (1907). *Aus Namaland und Kalahari. Bericht an die Kgl. Preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin über eine Forschungsreise im westlichen und zentralen Südafrika, ausgeführt in den Jahren 1903–1905*. Fischer.
- Schultze-Jena, L. (1933-38). *Indiana*. 3 vols. Gustav Fischer.
- Schultze-Jena, L. (Ed.). (1928). *Zur Kenntnis des Körpers der Hottentotten und Buschmänner*. Fischer.
- Schweitzer de Palacios, D. (2018). Objects of encounter - Die Gegenstände der Aché in der Völkerkundlichen Sammlung. In Bieker, U., Kraus, M., Rossbach de Olmos, L., Schröder, I. W., Schweitzer de Palacios, D., & Voell, St. (Eds.), *Ich durfte den Jaguar am Waldrand sprechen. Festschrift für Mark Münzel zum 75. Geburtstag*. (Reihe Curupira, vol. 30). (pp. 431-448). Curupira.
- Schweitzer de Palacios, D., & Halbmayer, E. (2023). *Theodor Koch-Grünberg und die Produktion von Wissenschaft. Eine Ausstellung in der Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie*. (Veröffentlichungen der Marburger Ethnographischen Sammlung, vol. 2).
- SMB - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum (n.d.). *Die koloniale(n) Debatte(n) und das museale Selbstverständnis*. <https://www.smb.museum/museen-einrichtungen/ethnologisches-museum/ueber-uns/kolonialismus/>
- Ulrich, N. (2017). *Das Museum Anatomicum am Fachbereich Medizin der Philipps-Universität Marburg*. Peter Lang.
- Voell, S. (Ed.). 2001. ... *ohne Museum geht es nicht. Die Völkerkundliche Sammlung der Philipps-Universität Marburg*. Förderverein Völkerkunde in Marburg (Curupira-Workshop, vol. 7). Curupira.
- Wigand, A. (1863). *Lehrbuch der Pharmakognosie*. August Hirschwald.

Colonial collections, restitution and issues of inequality

Jos van Beurden

Independent Researcher – Utrecht, the Netherlands

Abstract

This contribution raises three questions about collections from colonial regions.¹ One is about the division of the power over the provenance research into such collections between the Global North and the Global South. A second is about the silence of art dealers and private collectors in the Global North about their possessions and how they were acquired, which makes it hard for former colonies to know about them. The third is about how governments in the Global South on the one hand and traditional royal houses, communities of origin and other sub-statal actors on the other deal with collections after their return.

Keywords: colonial violence, restitution, provenance research, private art sector, non-statal actors

Résumé

Collections coloniales, restitution et questions d'inégalité

Cette contribution soulève trois questions concernant les collections provenant des régions coloniales. La première concerne la répartition du pouvoir sur la recherche de provenance de telles collections entre le Nord global et le Sud global. La deuxième concerne le silence des marchands d'art et des collectionneurs privés du Nord global concernant leurs possessions et la manière dont elles ont été acquises, ce qui rend difficile pour les anciennes colonies d'en savoir davantage à leur sujet. La troisième question porte sur la manière dont les gouvernements du Sud global d'une part, et les maisons royales traditionnelles, les communautés d'origine et autres acteurs infra-étatiques d'autre part, gèrent les collections après leur restitution.

Mots-clés : violence coloniale, restitution, recherche de provenance, secteur de l'art privé, acteurs non-étatiques

1 Email: Jos.vanbeurden@inter.nl.net

Recent years have seen several anniversaries of international regulations on cultural heritage: one in 2023, one in 2020 and one in 2022.² Since 1998, claimants of treasures lost in the Nazi period can rely upon a number of declarations and principles – to start with, the *Washington Principles for Dealing with Nazi-looted Art* – and upon restitution advisory committees in several European countries and in North America. Although non-binding, they have raised public awareness and had a moral effect in favour of the Nazi victims. As a result, the efforts to recover art looted from private and public collections across the globe have grown “exponentially” (Halgren, 2023).

Parties duped by the ongoing illicit trade in art and antiquities got recourse at the 1970 *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* and with the implementation of laws at a national level. In spite of the many years it took northern art market countries to accede to the convention, it has made almost every major museum in the West “refuse to acquire material that left its country of origin after that year [1970] without full documentation” (Alexander, 2020).

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), accepted in 2007, supports First Nations in settler-states Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America and Indigenous minorities in other countries to claim lost ancestral remains and funerary objects. Although non-binding, UNDRIP has clear suggestions for repatriation and “has been recognized as bearing a legal significance which goes much beyond its formal status of declaration of principles [... and] as being the instrument of reference when the rights of Indigenous peoples are concerned” (Lezerini, 2022).

At this moment, former distance-colonies of European powers have no anniversary to celebrate, as they lack general instruments such as conventions, declarations or principles for claiming treasures lost in the colonial period. The 1970 UNESCO Convention has no retroactive effect, and apart from a single exception, they have not investigated the options that UNDRIP could offer.³ Therefore, they depend upon bilateral negotiations and former colonisers’ willingness and moral sense to return collections.

Yet, many of them reclaimed involuntary lost cultural heritage long before their independence. This led to incidental returns only during the transfer of sovereignty. In the decades thereafter, four former colonial powers returned objects: Australia to Papua New Guinea, Denmark to Iceland and Greenland, Belgium to the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Netherlands to Indonesia. Australia and Denmark were fairly generous while the Netherlands and Belgium minimised their returns.⁴

Today, the landscape is changing. Restitution and provenance research are ‘in’. European governments and museums develop new policies. Former colonies, such as Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Ghana have established their own restitution policies and are preparing claims. Most writers point to French President Emmanuel Macron, who promised in November 2017 in Burkina Faso a radical new restitution policy. Although he

2 This contribution is based on: Beurden, J. van. (2024). *The Empty Showcase Syndrome. Tough Questions about Cultural Heritage from Colonial Regions*. Amsterdam University Press.

3 Campens, E. (2021). *Cross-border claims to cultural objects – Property or heritage?* Eleven. p. 165.

4 This has been described elaborately in Beurden, J. van. (2017). *Treasures in Trusted Hands – Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects*. Sidestone Press, chapters 7-11.

deserves credit for being the first European head of state to be so outspoken, the emphasis

on his role wrongly obscures the role of leaders in the Global South in restitutions: one year before Macron spoke, Patrice Talon, the new president of the Republic of Benin, submitted a large claim for war booty in French museums and Macron built on Talon's work. Moreover, in 2010 the Benin Dialogue Group, consisting of the cultural authorities of Nigeria, representatives of the Benin Kingdom and some major museums in Europe, had started to discuss the future of the extensive collections of Beninese objects in Europe. In other words, a new phase in the postcolonial restitution discourse began much earlier and, all in all, most European countries have taken at most two steps forward and at least one step back.

Macron's speech was followed by a report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy (2018), which was a big step forward in favour of claimant countries, and recently by the restrictive guideline of former Louvre director Jean-Luc Martinez (2023), which was a step back. Martinez uses a narrow definition of looted art, which states that weapons could be legally seized according to French law at the time, and, thus, there is no need to return them. According to Martinez's advice, cultural goods – such as books and clothes of rebel leaders – and loot handed by private parties to a French museum should be given back. Out of the 85,000 objects in the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, only 300 have been looted, according to his definition, and can be claimed and returned. This figure reminds one of the relatively small number of 883 objects out of the 80,000 objects from the Democratic Republic of Congo in the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren, which have been earmarked as war booty and therefore are eligible for return. A narrow definition of war booty is also being used in Belgium (Demarsin, 2022). The new French report emphasises that former colonies must ensure that returned works be well kept and exhibited after their return. In the eyes of former French colonies, Martinez brings paternalism back on the stage.

Translated to the context of Indonesia and the Netherlands, Martinez's narrow definition would mean that the Dutch government would have refused to transfer two daggers of great cultural-historical value – one had belonged to Javanese rebel leader Prince Diponegoro (1785-1855), the other to the Balinese King of Klungkung (d. 1908) - to Indonesia. The first one, however, was returned in 2020, the second one in 2023. In dealing with claims, the Netherlands government applies the concept of “involuntary loss of possession”, which is much broader and does not only include confiscated weapons but also, for instance, smuggled and confiscated items.

First thesis:

The decolonisation of collections from colonial areas cannot be finished without the decolonisation of the provenance research into these collections and requires a paradigm shift.

One characteristic of the current phase in the restitution debate is increased attention in the academic world and museums for provenance research. It has become a buzzword, not only in the great ethnological, natural history and art history museums and university libraries but also in smaller institutions and among private collectors and dealers. No museum, exhibition-opening or conference passes, no art fair opens where pieces from a colonial context can be seen, without the words *provenance research* coming up. Universities in European countries offer courses in it. Manuals and handbooks are published. Provenance researchers

are recruited with advertisements. Freelancers are in the starting blocks, extra motivated because this kind of research is about a burning social problem, is exciting and educational, and leads to special histories and places. Provenance research also receives prominent attention in new restitution policy of European governments.

The cannon

The case-study that supports this thesis is about the provenance research process into a ceremonial cannon in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. The cannon had belonged to the Ceylonese King of Kandy and was captured by soldiers of the Dutch East India Company in 1765 (Kamardeen & van Beurden, 2022).

In 2017, the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam initiated a pilot-project for a better provenance research methodology and selected 10 objects from its collection for this, the cannon being one of them. It conducted archival research into the cannon inside the Netherlands for two years. It was the kind of scientific work that many museums do. To finalise the research, it sent an employee to Sri Lanka in 2019 to collect additional information. The employee had a list of Sri Lankan experts, one of whom was professor Naazima Kamardeen of Colombo University's Law department.

In the Dutch media, the Rijksmuseum had created the impression that the research, although intended for developing a better research-methodology, could lead to restitution. That impression also existed in Sri Lanka. Once in Colombo, however, the Rijksmuseum employee stated that the purpose of the visit only concerned the research method. Whether the cannon would be returned was to be decided by its owner, the state of the Netherlands.

This disappointed Kamardeen and some of her colleagues. Why do all this research, while it had been known since 1975 that the cannon is a clear case of a looted piece and that Sri Lanka had already claimed it earlier (Silva, 1975)? Director Taco Dibbits of the Rijksmuseum showed understanding for their disappointment but, when speaking to him, he also emphasized the importance of good cooperation and gave his word that Sri Lankans would be able to express their view and research “on an equal basis” (van Beurden, 2024).⁵

But it was precisely this equivalence that worried Kamardeen and other experts in Sri Lanka, who feared that their contributions would become more of an exercise without equality, a fear reinforced by the Rijksmuseum's long questionnaires about, for instance, the materials from which the cannon was made. Dibbits was sympathetic to this complaint: “The museum understands the critical attitude and distrust towards Western museums and other institutions that in the past did not cooperate with provenance questions and restitution requests from countries of origin” (Dibbits, 2024, as cited in van Beurden, 2024). Kamardeen's worry is not unique but exists in other former colonies too.

While for many museums provenance research as a mostly unilateral, *scientific* activity is something of the past, it now needs an additional dimension: that of the conversation with those to whom the cannon once belonged, which makes it also into a *societal* activity. To make this mix a success requires a different vision and different competencies.

To find the right track for provenance research we have to go to the core of decolonisation and restitution: the building of trust and the breaking down of asymmetric power relations. This requires a paradigm shift in which former colonies are given decisively more power

⁵ Beurden, J. van. (2024), *The Empty Showcase Syndrome*, p. 69.

over this type of research.

Currently, there are many provenance research programs in the Global North. The initiators involve experts from the Global South and invite cultural authorities in the Global South, sometimes to point to collections or objects which they want to be investigated. They give scholarships to experts from the South. At the same time, most of these programs are conceived in the Global North. They are led by established institutes and experts in the North. They must meet the standards of the Northern academic world and of Northern subsidy-providers. These programs are institutionalized before they have even started. This one-sided institutionalization is difficult to relate to the pursuit of trust and equality. It is an ingrained imbalance that gives Northern institutions an unavoidable advantage over their counterparts in the South.

At the workshop in Marburg, Jimson Sanga, anthropologist at the Iringa Boma Museum in Tanzania, said:

Now we are often an extension or appendage of Northern programmes, while we want to develop our own research community that tells our own story about collective memory, kinship and identity. We have to do that, apart from the North, by ourselves. And yes, sometimes we need for this ancestral remains and old weapons that are now in Europe.

Tanzania is not unique in this. Other former colonies also want to decide for themselves which collections are to be researched, what are the main questions, who is to do the research. They want to set up their own research community. This also requires a shift in the control over the money made available by Northern governments and funding agencies.

Another argument for a paradigm shift is that, if European countries admit that many items from former colonies have a problematic origin, or that former colonies, certainly morally, are more entitled to them or that these items are more at home there than in the Global North, they should also take the initiative in examining them. It's about 'their' pieces, pieces that monarchs, families or peoples still use in their ceremonies or rituals, pieces that can be reactivated in their old function.

There is a third argument in favour of a paradigm shift. In current provenance research programmes, too often the central question is whether a piece may have been looted or lost involuntarily. Due to the narrowing of the question to one between *good and bad*, a lot of provenance research threatens to automatically become an investigation into *European* actions, the *European* perpetrators are central and, therefore, also the *European* sources. So, it is again about the former colonisers. If the central question is instead about the importance of an object for the formerly colonised, then the research is also structured differently.

Second thesis:

Provenance researchers have a one-sided focus on items in public collections and forget what is possessed by private collectors and art dealers.

There are many objects, manuscripts and ancestral remains from colonial contexts with private collectors and in the art trade. No one knows how many pieces there are, how valuable these pieces are and how they were once acquired. Only a small portion is visible:

pieces that have ended up in museums as a gift or long-term loan; they can be found on museum websites. For most others, one depends upon lucky hits at antiquarian shops, art fairs and catalogues of physical or Internet sales. Nowadays, the private collectors and art dealers who own these pieces claim to do provenance research into them, but most of them limit their investigations to checking whether a piece is on a database of stolen objects. Only in exceptional cases is this research done more elaborately.

Two daggers

In November 2022, a few months before the 2023 TEFAF in the Dutch city of Maastricht, art dealers Röell & Zebregs – with branches in Amsterdam and Maastricht and specialising in art from colonial areas of the 17th to the 19th century – mailed me with a tough question: “If we have daggers – krisses – that may have been stolen from the bodies of fallen Indonesian fighters, can these be claimed by Indonesia? And are we then legally (apart from our morals) obliged to transfer them?” The daggers at stake were two centuries-old “royal gold krisses”, so precious that they “should be in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam as part of the Lombok treasure” (D. Zebregs, personal communication, 7 November 2022).⁶

The Lombok treasure is comparable to the Benin treasures seized by British soldiers in 1897. In 1894, Dutch colonial soldiers had waged war against the monarch of Tjakranegara on the island of Lombok in the Indonesian archipelago, obtaining 1,000 ceremonial weapons, snuffboxes and jewellery; 230 kilograms of gold coins; 7,000 kilograms of silver money and 400 ancient Javanese manuscripts. It is war booty, and the dealers write: “We will ensure that the krisses (whether or not against the purchase price) go back to Lombok”. But this war booty is in the hands of a private party and the restitution policies of most European countries, including the Netherlands, concern only state collections and contain no means to put pressure on private parties.

Tim Repatriasi in Jakarta, the team that settles claims for the return of colonial items, is keen to retrieve all Lombok treasures. Röell & Zebregs contacted someone close to the *Tim Repatriasi* and are – after a conversation – even more convinced of the desirability of a return of both stabbing weapons.

When the prestigious TEFAF opened, the dealers’ catalogue announced the sale of “a pair of royal, gold, and silver krisses belonging to a nobleman and his wife”. The antique dealers had written “The Lombok Treasure” above it. The officer in question smuggled them to the Netherlands and stored them in the attic of his home, where they remained after his death. Recently, his granddaughter thought it was time to get rid of them. That is how they ended up at the art fair (Röell & Zebregs, 2023).

In the catalogue, the antique dealers added a short sentence: they will only sell them to *selected buyers*. Asked what they mean, they say “only to a private or public party in Indonesia” (Röell & Zebregs, 2023). Finally, they succeeded in finding a *selected buyer*: a European benefactor who was willing to pay the price and then donate them to a party in Indonesia. At the time of writing (February 2024), the two weapons are still in the Netherlands and there is no prospect of their return to Indonesia.

This story about weapons from a colonial region in private possession can be multiplied by many others. It is, therefore, remarkable that most European governments, museums

6 Translation by author.

and academics close their eyes to items with a possibly disputable history in the holdings of art dealers and private collectors. They draw a thick line between public and this sort of private collections, while in practice this line is very thin, it is an “artificial separation” that disrupts “the socio-ethical discussion” on looted items in the private sector (Drieënhuizen, 2023).⁷ Many museums depend upon private collections for filling their showcases or making temporary exhibitions.

Going back to the two krisses at the art fair, suppose that Indonesia claims back these weapons originating from the Lombok war booty - it has no chance of restitution because the Netherlands has no policy on this. At the same time, Indonesia has already been successful in claiming similar weapons and other items of the Lombok treasure that were part of the Dutch state collection. From the perspective of a former colony, this must be strange.

Third thesis:

Frictions between national governments and regional actors in former colonies become the next hurdle in the restitution discourse.

There is a positive development in that governments in former colonies – think of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Namibia and many Latin American countries – are setting up own restitution policies and committees and provenance research programs. In their plans, the national museums usually play a central role. A major challenge for them is to figure out where objects, manuscripts and ancestral remains will go after their return or repatriation. Traditional royal families, communities of origin and other regional actors are eager to retrieve certain historical and cultural treasures or ancestral remains. How do different countries deal with this friction?

Benin dialogue

It may sound strange, but among African countries, Nigeria can perhaps be called the provisional winner of the current restitution phase. The Kingdom of Benin, the federal National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) and the government of Edo state in which the kingdom is located are finally seeing rewarded their decades-long efforts to recover Benin objects from European countries.

Several factors have contributed to this. To begin with, it has been the firmness of the Benin court and the other actors to retrieve pieces. For a long time, they have been convinced of their right to it and have done a lot of research themselves. Experts such as Peju Layiwola, art historian and relative of the Oba (traditional king) of Benin, and Folarin Shyllon (d. 2021) of the University of Ibadan, who attended negotiations as an expert, have continually insisted on this right.⁸

A second factor has been the intention of both the Nigerian actors and some European museums to continue the dialogue they had started in 2010: the Benin Dialogue, a real achievement. Initially, the dialogue had two goals: to exchange knowledge and intensify cooperation, and to make restitutions. After almost a decade, however, the second goal was no closer. The reason was that the most retentive link in the chain of European muse-

⁷ Translation by author.

⁸ See for example Layiwola, P. and Olorunbyomi, S. (2010). *Benin1897.com – Art and restitution question*. Wy Art Editions; Shyllon, F. (2019). Benin Bronzes: Something grave happened and imperial rule of law is sustaining it. *Art, Antiquity and Law*, 24(3).

ums – the British Museum in London – set the pace. The imperial moloch was willing to lend Benin objects to Nigeria but not to return any, while other museums – in Germany, in Great Britain and the Netherlands – were. Only when the Benin Dialogue Group decided to let go of the restitution target – and I vividly remember Folarin Shyllon’s indignation about this move – did more become possible, be it that it had to be arranged bilaterally. As a result, Benin objects have been going home since 2021.

The third and final factor is that the Nigerians have found a solution to the question of to whom returned objects will go. It has taken years to come to this. Each of the three actors wanted to be in control of the return-process and the objects: the federal government, the government of the Edo state and the Benin court itself. At the end of March 2023, this haggling came to an end when outgoing President Muhammadu Buhari stated that the Oba of Benin will become “owner, guardian and manager” of Benin objects that come back from abroad. The Oba decides where they go (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023).

Nigeria is not the only country that faces this friction. Globally, there is some progress. The most advanced is New Zealand, where the government, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington and Māori communities have defined their roles in the process. The three stakeholders are effective in their campaign to repatriate tattooed Māori heads. The governments of several other former colonies – take Indonesia and Cameroon for example – have designated one museum to receive returned items: the Museum Nasional Indonesia in Jakarta and the Historic Museum of Bamoun in Cameroon. Some governments make exceptions for religious objects that are returned if the holy place from where they disappeared from is known. Examples of this policy are Nepal, Ethiopia and Cambodia. It is a complicated discussion in many countries, and it is hard to satisfy all statal and sub-statal stakeholders.

Prospects

Before coming to a conclusion, a few more words have to be said about a new emerging conservatism in European countries such as Germany, France and the Netherlands. For some years, these countries appeared to be making steps forward, but these steps are in danger.

The way in which Nigeria solved the question of to *whom to return?* created quite some commotion in Germany. The transfer of the property title of over 1,100 Beninese objects to Nigeria, and thus to the Oba of Benin – a private person – upset the right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and the Christian-Democratic Union (CDU) in the Bundestag. A number of academics also took part in this debate. The opponents of the Nigerian decision called the transfer of property titles a fiasco; objects should be given back to a government and not to a private party. The proponents counterargued that the opponents were trying to create a scandal that was not a scandal and that it was up to Nigeria and the Nigerians to decide what happens with returned objects (van Beurden, 2024).

The November 2023 elections in the Netherlands brought victory for right-wing parties. The radical-right wing Party for the Freedom PVV came out as the winner, and a PVV member became the Speaker of the Second Chamber. Earlier in that year, the same MP – then still an opposition member – had strongly opposed restitutions to Indonesia and Sri Lanka. He called the party of the secretary of state in question a party of “cultural barbarians”, the body that had advised the secretary of state a “sell-out committee”, and he called for “the dismissal” and even “criminal prosecution” of the museum directors

who had participated in it (Tweede Kamer, Vaste Kamercommissie voor Cultuur, 2023).⁹

Earlier, the advice of Jean-Luc Martinez to French President Macron was also mentioned as a step back. There is a lot of talk about whether the British Museum is changing its conservative relation to claims from former colonies, but there is at the time of writing no prospect of a concrete change.

Are we approaching a moment in history where the restitution discourse can be hijacked by, say, anti-decolonisation parties or neo-colonials in Europe?

Restitution of colonial collections is more and more seen as part of the much broader decolonisation, which is a rearranging of relations between countries and nations in the Global North and the Global South with an aim to diminish inequality and undo a small part of the injustice of the colonial past. So far, other aspects of decolonisation – those dealing with the physical violence and slave trade of the colonial period and the effect and impact of these on the present through racism and discrimination – have dominated the political discourse.

That we are making progress in the restitution dossier is undeniable. At the same time, one should watch out for complacency. Only a start has been made, and much remains to be done. Restitution is not a warm bath or a process with a hug. It is hard work. We will have to overcome colonial attitudes in ourselves. We will have to decolonise both colonial collections and provenance research programs. Sometimes at our own cost! We will have to break down the artificial walls between public and private collections. And remembering how much time colonial powers have needed to reach the present phase, we will have to give time to countries, peoples and forces in the Global South to bring their houses on order. Academic institutions and museums in the Global North are the ones who have to take the first steps in trust-building and equality.

References

- Alexander, H. (2020, June 18). *Fifty years on: The meaning of the 1970 UNESCO Convention*. Institute of Art & Law. <https://ial.uk.com/fifty-years-on-unesco-convention/>
- Beurden, J. van. (2017). *Treasures in trusted hands – Negotiating the future of colonial cultural objects*. Sidestone Press.
- Beurden, J. van. (2024). *The empty showcase syndrome: Tough questions about cultural heritage from colonial regions*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Campfens, E. (2021). *Cross-border claims to cultural objects – Property or heritage?* Eleven.
- Demarsin, B. (2022, maart). Restitutie van koloniaal erfgoed. *FARO. Tijdschrift over cultureel erfgoed* (Restitution of colonial heritage. *FARO, Magazine about cultural heritage*), 1, 6-11.
- Drieënhuizen, C. (2023, 23 maart). De kris aan de muur van de woonkamer. Particulier verzamelen en het restitutiedebat. *Dossier Roofgoed*. (The kris on the living room wall. Private collecting and the restitution debate. *Dossier Looting*.) Royal Netherlands Historical Society.

⁹ Translation by author.

- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2023, March). Notice of presidential declaration – On the recognition of ownership, and an order vesting custody and management of looted Benin artefacts in the Oba of Benin kingdom. *Official Gazette*, 110(57).
- Halgren, M. (2023, October 30). *25 years of the Washington Principles: The strides and stumbles in reclaiming Nazi-confiscated art*. Center for Art Law.
<https://itsartlaw.org/2023/10/30/25-years-of-the-washington-principles-the-strides-and-stumbles-in-reclaiming-nazi-confiscated-art/>
- Kamardeen, N. & Beurden, J. van. (2022). Law, provenance research, and restitution of colonial cultural property: Reflections on (in)equality and a Sri Lankan object in the Netherlands. *Santander Art & Culture Law Review*, 2, 181-206.
- Layiwola, P. & Olorunbyomi, S. (2010). *Benin1897.com – Art and restitution question*. Wy Art Editions.
- Lezerini, F. (2022, June 16) *Written note for the stakeholder consultation on repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains*. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/indigenouspeoples/sr/cfis/indigenous-freedom-religion/subm-indigenous-freedom-religion-ind-federico-lenzerini.pdf>
- Martinez, J-L. (2023). *Patrimoine partagé : Universalité, restitutions et circulation des œuvres d’art*. Ministère de la Culture de la France.
- Röell, G. & Zebregs, D. (2023). *Uit verre streken, (From distant regions)*, art fair catalogue. Röell & Zebregs.
- Sar, F. & Savoy, B. (2018). The restitution of African cultural heritage. Toward a new relational ethics. Ministère de la Culture de la France.
- Shylon, F. (2019) Benin bronzes: Something grave happened and imperial rule of law is sustaining it. *Art, Antiquity and Law*, 24(3).
- Silva, P.H.D.H. de. (1975). *A catalogue of antiquities and other cultural objects from, Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and abroad*. National Museums of Sri Lanka.
- Tweede Kamer, Vaste Kamercommissie voor Cultuur. (2023). *Verslag van een commissiedebat, gehouden op 4 oktober 2023, over erfgoed*. (Second Chamber, Standing Committee for Culture. *Report of a committee debate on heritage, held on 4 October 2023*). <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/commissieverslagen/detail?id=2023Z07459&did=2023D41360>

Decolonising as rehumanising: Some community lessons

Bruno Brulon Soares

University of St Andrews – Scotland

Abstract:

By interrogating the concept of “decolonisation” and its nuanced applications in museology, the article revisits some community lessons to propose a new framework for *decolonising as rehumanising*.¹ A brief sociohistorical reflection places this debate within the historiography of the New Museology movement. The article introduces a critique of New Museology as a conceptual and practical movement that does not break from coloniality and the various forms of colonial oppression perpetuated by global capitalism, notably in neoliberal nations. I will focus on the redistribution of authority and agency in the museum sector and on the limits faced by communities engaged in participatory projects in larger institutions. Finally, the article comments on four grounding lessons that can be learned from social groups practicing museology in the margins of the capitalist world. Facing complex dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion within the established museum sector, communities making museums in their own terms are tackling the limits of decolonisation, reclaiming their own liberation in the present world as a path to rehumanisation.

Keywords: decolonisation, rehumanisation, community participation, New Museology, anticolonial museology

Resumen:

Descolonizar como rehumanizar: Algunas lecciones de la comunidad

Interrogando el concepto de “descolonización” y sus aplicaciones matizadas en la museología, el artículo revisa algunas lecciones comunitarias para proponer un nuevo marco de descolonización como rehumanización. Una breve reflexión sociohistórica sitúa este debate dentro de la historiografía del movimiento de la Nueva Museología. El artículo introduce una crítica a la Nueva Museología como un movimiento conceptual y práctico que no rompe con la colonialidad y las diversas formas de opresión colonial perpetuadas por el capitalismo global, especialmente en naciones neoliberales. Me centraré en la redistribución de autoridad y agencia en el sector museológico y en los límites que enfrentan las comunidades involucradas en proyectos participativos en instituciones más grandes. Finalmente, el artículo comenta cuatro lecciones fundamentales que

1 Email: bcbs1@st-andrews.ac.uk

pueden aprenderse de los grupos sociales que practican la museología en los márgenes del mundo capitalista. Enfrentando dinámicas complejas de inclusión y exclusión social dentro del sector museístico establecido, las comunidades que hacen museos en sus propios términos están abordando los límites de la descolonización, reclamando su propia liberación en el mundo actual como un camino hacia la rehumanización.

Palabras clave: descolonización, rehumanización, participación comunitaria, Nueva Museología, museología anticolonial

In the second half of the 20th century, museologists were forced to face the issue of “decolonisation”, critically looking into the colonial legacies that had shaped our discipline and the museum sector worldwide.² Since the 1960s, when the emergence of social movements for liberation in the former colonies and the denunciation of colonial oppression influenced the social sciences, in museology, a broad debate on the museum’s social and political role was set to advance new practices. Forged as a restored ethos for museums in the 1970s and 1980s, the movement of New Museology and the concomitant imperative of community participation were part of a broader process of reflexivity and accountability that were intended to change museums for years to come. However, it is worth noting that the global reform of museological thinking, which led to a change in museum practices, was first articulated by leading professionals and university scholars (mostly based in Europe) who found in museums targets for cultural analysis and political revision. This “wave” of new ideas that sought to open the museum to a wider diversity of social groups then resulted in the appearance of new ways of making museums, shaped by the very communities that had been historically disempowered in these spaces where colonial power was inherited and reproduced.

Even though defined in Europe, New Museology and other correlated notions, such as the conception of the “ecomuseum”, were influenced by experimental practices situated in the Global South, which were then reinterpreted and seized upon in a new rhetoric that praised “community development” and “social participation”. In the early 1970s, these peripheral initiatives were becoming known to European professionals thanks to larger representation of non-European regions in the International Council of Museums (founded in 1946), and to the creation of new forums for knowledge exchange, notably the International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM), created in 1977, and the International Movement for New Museology (MINOM), officialised in 1985. Looking into the transformations in the sector 40 years after New Museology was spelled out, it is fair to ask: what have we learned, at a theoretical and methodological level, from the communities we have empowered? Asking the question in a different manner, what does museology owe to the peoples who had historically been objectified by museums until they started their fight for self-determination? Moreover, to what extent have these marginalised groups redefined museology as we know it and as we pass it on to newer generations of professionals?

² Some of the reflections in this article were first approached in the monograph *The Anticolonial Museum: Reclaiming Our Colonial Heritage* (Routledge, 2023), which served as inspiration for the keynote speech that originated it.

In this article I will focus on the redistribution of authority and agency in the museum sector – considered in previous works as one of the core actions in the broader process of museums’ decolonisation (Brulon Soares, 2021, 2023). Based on a reflection that contrasts museum theory and practice to find their entanglements in contemporary museology, I will argue that redistribution starts with the recognition of human beings in their own humanisation. Only by lifting the divisions inflicted on humanity, which have racially and politically separated “us” from “them”, can we move towards new forms of working together and to a more unbiased approach to knowledge (hooks, 2013, p. 26). As I have argued before, reflecting on the basis set out by Paulo Freire and bell hooks, we are not there yet. But by refusing defeat, we, as thinkers of a discipline embedded in coloniality, are forced to learn from our former misconceptions: instead of reifying historical erasures and divisions, we gear the museum towards bettering the lives of the living. The focus of my analysis is not on what we want to achieve as the end result – whatever this might be – but on the powerful process of making museums, and on the right of every group or community to do so. In the present day, this work is what binds us as human beings sharing a collective history, and it is also a transformative and regenerative work that was only starting with New Museology and the establishment of MINOM, and that, therefore, must carry on.

A “decolonial turn”? Some background

During the 1980s, the claims for community-based museums as a method for decolonising museology were incorporated in the French movement of New Museology – *muséologie (nouvelle)* – partially based on the invention by ICOM director Hugues de Varine of the ecomuseum (*ecomusée*) as a community-based prototype for local development (1978). Although represented as marginal examples at the time, other forms of such experimental museums had already been put into practice in colonised countries in different regions. These experiences were shaped by negotiations with communities and Indigenous groups and represented in museology through new voices from the Global South, which propelled de Varine himself to propose the decentralisation of museology at the local level (through ecomuseology) and internationally (through the work of ICOM and UNESCO). Contrasting these community-driven initiatives with “classical” museology (reflecting the European canon of what a museum is), New Museology was conceived with a political purpose to include marginal groups and their experiences with heritage in the history of the discipline while shifting the focus of international debates. Nonetheless, this was happening amidst the wide expansion of neoliberalism around the world, and “in the face of unfettered capitalism, market tyrannies, global violence and unprecedented levels of inequity and disenfranchisement” (Kidman, 2020, p. 247).

In 1979, in the title of one of his foundational articles of francophone *nouvelle museologie*, de Varine affirmed that “the museum may kill or ... bring to life”.³ This paradox of a museum that can serve death but can also serve the living is in the origin of the dichotomies reproduced in the wave of new ideas that intended to liberate museums from colonialism while disseminating a New Museology embedded in the dynamics of global capitalism. Some constitutive binarisms of the modern world – life and death, growth and decay, development and underdevelopment – were reproduced in the ambiguous foundations of New Museology when the movement was internationally launched in the mid-1980s.

³ The article was published in the anthology *Vagues : une anthologie de la nouvelle muséologie* organised by André Desvallées in 1992, with its original title, in French, “*Le musée peut tuer ou ... faire vivre*”.

As the Declaration of Quebec from 1984⁴ stated: “[N]ew museology [...] is first and foremost concerned with the *development of populations*, reflecting the modern *principles that have driven their evolution*, while simultaneously associating them with projects of the future” (emphasis added). In the temporality of “new” museology projected to the “communities” of the “developing world”, the future of underdeveloped societies is yet to be accomplished in the present. This statement reflects the assistentialist attitude towards community-based museums explicitly inspired by the evolutionist principle that defined “development” as the goal to be achieved by “underdeveloped” populations. This approach, one that relegated to the communities themselves the goal of working for their own development according to foreign standards, informed the conception of the eco-museum. This so-called ‘new museum’, not necessarily dependent on collections, visitors and a building to exist, would serve as a tool for the social and economic repositioning of communities via a discourse of cultural democracy (Tornatore & Paul, 2003) first forged in Europe to suit the other contexts of the world. This new conception helped museology to narrate the world of museums in terms of “new” and “old” practices: another polarising division set out to differentiate grassroots organisations that were detached from the modern canons orienting hegemonic museology.

Grounding lessons for an anticolonial museology

In this brief sociohistorical reflection, empirically based on my work with community museums in Brazil and my observation of museum practice in different parts of the world, I will outline some grounding lessons I have learned from the social groups I have collaborated with. These are by no means rigid or exclusionary, nor should they be seen as definitive rules for museum work. However, they prompt some important questions about the current distribution of authority and suggest ways to enable communities to make museums in their own terms.

1. Decolonisation, from the perspective of communities, can mean the re-colonisation of museums

The recent requests from marginalised groups to reclaim museums in their own terms can be perceived as part of the *re-colonisation* of the classical temple, which may or may not involve a complete reinvention of the museum. For the past decades, the undisputed dichotomy between museums founded on community work and the classic collection-based museum helped some institutions to ignore community agency and to disregard the calls for expanding museum participation. In the old discourse of New Museology, a contrast between social museums in the Global South and classical museums with resources to preserve collections, the predominant model in the Global North, has been reimagined as if these differences could be naturalised instead of being perceived as politically determined according to the unequal distribution of the right to memory – a symptom of the colonial wound in the contemporary neoliberal world.

The relation between “peripheral” museums and the so-called “classic” museums still presents delimited borders that are placed either by the action of the State or by a distinction that is socially appointed from the outside of the groups marking their collective experiences. The unequal distribution of funding and the lack of the means for institutionalisation are constant reminders for these community museums of their own marginality and precarity

⁴ This Declaration proposed the creation of the International Movement for New Museology, MINOM, which would define the terms for the dialogue between community members and the experts who led such a movement.

vis à vis the central institutions. “To be a museum” for several groups that wish to create their own museum in the margins is the political affirmation of a right to memory, based on agreements, negotiations and frictions that constitute *the community* as a valued instrument in a rapidly changing world and serving as their self-definition and social engagement in the public sphere.

But to what extent is our sector – and its established thinkers and practitioners – considering the agency of communities as an essential force towards the desired decolonisation of museums? While ethical discussions regarding the participation of communities in museums are still emphasising the ownership and care of collections, are professionals open to recalibrating their practices through dialogue and knowledge-sharing? In Brazil, for instance, the wave of new initiatives since the 1980s, under the names of “social museums”, “community museums” or “living museums”, has drastically transformed the museum landscape in a movement that began in the margins of big cities or beyond the reach of state policies and governmental agencies. These “experimental” museums, in their quest for visibility and cultural rights, marked a turning point for the practice of museology as a discipline no longer dominated by academics and museum professionals situated in central institutions. If in the recent past scholars used to instruct communities on the possibilities of social museology – roughly, a museology devoted to the resolution of social problems and to historical reparations – today it is an attribute of these groups to challenge academic knowledge and strengthen in their own practices the political and social uses of museums.

But as we’ve learned in the recent years of political instability in Brazil, which threatened the economic sustainability of most grassroots initiatives, former policies and our still operational legislation do not secure the future of communitarian museology. The situation can be even more drastic for community-driven institutions in countries where no policy has been issued and the museum sector is even more vulnerable to political shifts and the privatisation of culture. Globally, the radical inequality that marks the sector must be addressed. How can we integrate community museums and social museology as practiced by these groups into the larger field of *permanent institutions* with solid grounds? What kind of community development are we promoting, as a sector which has great difficulty in collectively imagining a future involving our museum diversity? What kind of legacies are being created by the re-colonisation of the museum by various communities around the globe?

2. The museum is neither a forum nor a temple

The reflexive revision of museology in the 1970s brought about a critical viewpoint that diagnosed the modern museum as an institution opposed to the living (Adotevi, 1971/1992). This statement questioned the social relevance of the European model in societies still struggling with colonial oppression reproduced through these modern/colonial institutions. Back then, the museum-*temple* was contrasted with a democratic *forum* (Cameron, 1971) – another dichotomy that would be further enhanced by museologists engaged in changing the ethos of museology.

The supposed “decolonial” turn in the museum world had its more explicit roots in a political event involving the participation of several nation-states’ representatives at the 1972 Round Table of Santiago de Chile, where the concept of an “integral museum” (*museo integral*) was proposed as a new paradigm for Latin American institutions. The museum would be understood as an instrument for social transformation, concerned with the problems of “the communities it serves” (UNESCO, 1973, p. 199). In the following decades, some Latin

American museologists developed a basis for critical reflections that led the “new” museum to be defined as a “living institution, embedded in a society”, which must assume an active role of “continually forming and transforming its surroundings” (Rusconi, 1987, p. 241). By deviating from the “classical” museum model, it became possible to acknowledge new experiences that had in common an openness to cultural difference and social participation with no precedents in the history of museology. But despite its relevance for Latin American museologists, the notion of an integral museum, or a museum integrated to societies and committed to the resolution of social problems, was assimilated into de Varine’s concept of the ecomuseum, proposed in 1971 and defined in the French practices that adopted this label after 1973.⁵ The colonisation of museology—as a branch of knowledge with clear centres – was still ongoing.

Even though, in its roots, New Museology was not a deliberate statement against “old” practices and theories, in some circles it was interpreted as a rupture with the structure of the museum – notably, with its most traditional form as a building with material collections. As a result, it stressed the binary opposition between a community-oriented museum and a museum mainly concerned with the preservation of collections. This artificial breach between *new* and *old* would produce a sense of novelty in practices that considered the “community” as the museum-driven force while in central institutions it continued to reiterate the subordination of certain subjects through the continuous objectification of the Other, as European necessary alterity (Brulon Soares, 2023).

Several decades later, the enthusiastic promotion of new collaborative projects in the centre of museological debates, as Conal McCarthy (2023) notes, is a common feature in public-facing museum practice. But as observed in previous analyses (for instance, Boast, 2011), isolated projects and short-term collaboration usually have little impact on the power structures that define institutional management and decision-making processes. As some scholars and curators have been arguing, museums “should work collaboratively with communities – in non-tokenistic ways that bestow equal respect” (Golding & Modest, 2013, p. 3). However, the mere assumption of *symmetry* in museum collaborations – as in the romanticised notion of the “forum” or in the reiterated idea of the “contact zone” (Clifford, 1997) – is the main reason why asymmetric relations continue to generate friction and distress. As several other scholarly works consider (see Coulthard, 2014; Phillips, 2021), notions of inclusion, collaboration, partnership and participation through affirmative action can be perceived as assimilative and neocolonial in nature. In different contexts around the world, they have helped institutions to maintain their dominant role as they state their aim to redress historical inequalities by prioritising a pacifying version of the past, which serves to protect their own coloniality and neocolonial authority in the present.

While the promise of “decolonisation” has become a heavy burden for museums, this often ambiguous notion is usually translated in large institutions into short-term and superficial responses to community claims. Frequent complaints from both curators and community partners highlight the contrast between the need for “slow” projects and lasting partnerships, and the accelerated cultural market with a strong focus on products rather than intricate processes, lacking the resources for long term and meaningful collaborations. As several recent case studies have shown, museums’ inability to confront coloniality and their own colonial heritage led those commonly identified as universalising

⁵ For a sociohistorical analysis of the first museum to adopt the term, see Debary, O. (2002). *La fin du Creusot ou L'art d'accommoder les restes*. CTHS.

temples to engage with source communities in curatorial projects. Nonetheless, the use of neocolonial methods or the recurrence of capitalist structures marketed as “decolonial” result in clear examples of restrictive collaborative agency and institutional impediments for effective decolonial endeavours (see, for instance, Leeder, 2023).

While the notion of the “museum-forum” may reflect an open space for participation and public engagement, it is valid to recall that the “forum” – in its inspiration from the Greek “agora” and in its imaginative interpretation in Western culture – presupposes the definition of citizenship: those who are entitled to participate and who have a voice. In its Roman appropriation, the forum was the centre of judicial and public business, where only authorised men could engage in open debates. Its political function and centrality in ancient cities can help explain why museums, as modern institutions, are being disputed and reclaimed today. But it also informs us of the limits of participation and democracy in spaces continually used to demarcate hierarchies within humanity.

3. Museums are not about developing; they should be about involving

Most of the claims against “developmentalism” that surfaced in Latin America since the 1970s, among which were the theorists of dependency, were inspired by Frantz Fanon’s germinal ideas from the previous decade. According to Fanon, “the formerly colonized territory is now turned into an economically dependent country” (2004/1961, p. 55). Recognised as one of the main influences on decolonial thinking in Latin America, Fanon became one of the first voices to denounce the European myth of progress and civilisation, one that was encrusted in the narratives of independent nations in the “post-colonial” era. He argued:

The [national] agenda is not only to pull through but to catch up with the other nations as best one can. There is a widespread belief that the European nations have reached their present stage of development as a result of their labors. Let us prove therefore to the world and ourselves that we are capable of the same achievements. Posing the problem of development of underdeveloped countries in this way seems to us to be neither right nor reasonable. (Fanon, 2004/1961, p. 52)

It is not surprising that the discourse of development and the progress of nations would be assimilated into the discourse of museums created during or after colonisation. What should call our attention in a critical museology is the fact that this same discourse was somehow preserved in the claims for decolonisation raised by New Museology thinkers since the 1980s, extending even into the present.

The strong expression of New Museology in the so called “developing countries” since the 1980s and 1990s was a symptom of what Johannes Fabian called the “spatialization of Time” (2002/1983), a phenomenon that (re)defines in space the hierarchies of power that maintain the subaltern in the peripheries of the world, and, in the case of museology, creates museum marginality.⁶ The “Western” relation to continuity that defines a universal Time, dividing the world in terms of civilised people and Others, is still present in the definition of “communities” and “community museums” as parts of museology’s neoco-

⁶ For an in-depth discussion on the notion of “museum marginality” in the context of Brazil’s social museology, see “Chapter 3: A Time for the Margins” in my book *The Anticolonial Museum* (Brulon Soares, 2023). Further discussion can be found in the series *Decolonising Museology*, vols. 1-3, edited by ICOFOM between 2020 and 2022.

lonisation. In a way, while New Museology redefined the museum for the margins, both in Europe and in the rest of the world, this international movement has reinforced the material differences between some central museums and the so-called “social museums”.

Finding greater difficulty to be institutionalised as heterodox museums, and evading the scope of universal definitions and local policies, these “social” and experimental museums are constantly divided between two spheres of societies: On the one hand, they must negotiate their existence with the state, basing their claims on the idea of redistribution of authority in the heritage sector; on the other, they are obliged to relate to the market, based on practices of exchange (Maguet, 2011, p. 62) – in the sense of the commoditisation of community heritage. Adhering to systems of co-management and engaging with different actors and interests, these museums struggle to reach a sensible balance between the standardisation of practices by governmental agencies and the fluidity of the market, all of which creates greater precariousness for these initiatives and their professionals, a common scenario that is marked by constant threats to their sustainability and permanence.

Fifty years after the Round Table that spoke of an integral museum, we witness an even more radical fragmentation within the sector, one that enhances the already denounced and increasing inequality between “old” and “new” museums. As a result, we also see an increase in competition between museums with common interests and shared problems. Cooperation and sharing expertise are only possible – or fair – when museum workers operate on the same ground. This should involve museum professionals in all levels understanding that *they cannot do museum work alone*. Currently, however, collaborations are being practiced that maintain the centrality of the curatorial expertise, as if the inclusion of different voices in museums should still be able to produce a single story – despite the many decades of debates on multiculturalism and the increased critique to universalism in museums’ narratives. Finding common ground involves allowing museums to tell multiple, contrasting or even conflicting stories. It means to recalibrate our expertise and expectations on what museum work should look like, because community participation is usually polysemic; it can seem chaotic and it involves constant negotiation and compromising. The time for sharing and finding commonalities across different agendas and social issues also has a cost that most funders are not willing to bear. Yet more frequently than ever before, and with more passion, we speak of community participation and engagement. Perhaps it is time to abandon previous models based on the progress of societies and the sole profit of corporations. As Ailton Krenak (2020, p. 24) proclaimed, “we must stop developing and start involving” (*“Temos que parar de nos desenvolver e começar a nos envolver”*).

4. Decolonising as rehumanising: An anticolonial path

Today, we can see that the notion of the ecomuseum and the hard work of community museums around the world have not changed the colonial foundations of museology. New Museology has not solved the central problem of material inequalities rooted in colonialism and reproduced even now through global capitalism. As we have witnessed in the past few years, some of these community museums are marked by increasing precarity due to the selective distribution of resources, which lead the communities to engage in a “forced privatisation of memory work”, as Tornatore (2006) termed it, taking heritage and history into their own hands. In this gesture, the very labour of heritage preservation is embedded in the fight for self-determination and the conquest of basic human rights (which comprises the right to memory). Their precarious means to care for collections

oblige communities to recur to various forms of cultural activism, calling attention to the necessary changes in the wider sector. What is known as cultural heritage from the perspective of these marginal groups, is, therefore, a kind of *counter-heritage*, preserved as evidence of the counter-narratives that defy the sense of continuity and reconfigure history as narrated in central institutions.

“Authentic liberation”, as taught by Paulo Freire, is part of the process of humanisation. “Liberation is a praxis”, Freire writes (1970), one that involves the action and reflection of human beings upon their world, seeking to transform it while transforming themselves in this process (p. 79). The lessons we learn from the margins today are essential to understanding how museology can be used by various social groups to attain their emancipation within civil society – emancipation through dialogue, as Freire proposed. In this sense, the right to memory is a human right of every group. The right to make a museum, thus, should be secured in the public sphere, through state policies that provide communities with the means to preserve their own references from the past. Thus, in their fight for recognition and reparation, they are constantly challenging the floating limits – redefined by the market and by nation-states – of what can be understood as “decolonisation”.

Since the 1980s, experimental museology – that is, museology based on the rebellion of human experience or *counter-museology* – reinforced its own political dimension, based on the increasing social demands for the right of undervalued groups to culture. In that moment, when some Latin American countries were liberating themselves from authoritarian regimes, we saw an increase in the range and diversity of Indigenous, Black and other minority-driven organisations and projects within the cultural sector. Most of their work was informed by an *anticolonial* agenda used to reclaim control over the definition of their own cultural heritage. The new museologies behind the European New Museology suddenly became more expressive in marginal countries, where some subaltern museums fight for a change from inside unequal social systems. In this particular context, where radical museologies respond to the urgencies of the present, museums have been serving communities to rebel against the injustices of the present world and grassroots organisations are now reconfigured as tools for the permanent contestation of the centre. Examples range from Indigenous museums (led by Indigenous activists and creators), to museums of the African diaspora driven by Black activist groups or in quilombos (traditional spaces of resistance of former enslaved people and their descendants), and LGBTQI+ grassroots organisations advocating for rights, including the right for memory and for the preservation of queer culture, etc.

As both Fanon and Freire articulated, humanisation can only be accomplished through a process of rupture from the established order which maintains the oppressed in their subaltern position. A true liberation from subalternity, therefore, involves violating the very system that inflicts colonial violence. In Freire’s terms, “if the humanization of the oppressed signifies subversion, so also does their freedom” (1970, p. 59). That is why, in most institutional frameworks, there are limits and boundaries being drawn to restrain emancipation. In this sense, a true liberation from colonial oppression can only be attained through trespassing borders and breaking the ways that produce “otherness”. The “primitive”, the underdeveloped, the marginalised, the “minority” are all categories used to define dehumanisation.

Moving beyond the postcolonial and postmodern critique of essentialism and its focus on “Otherness”, bell hooks examines “the authority of experience” (2003/1993, pp. 425-426). According to this notion, the experience of exile and struggle, the pain and suffering encrusted in colonial materials as well as in the subjectivities of those whose identities are defined by them, can be reconsidered to forge a basis for collective bonding (2003/1993, p. 426). This basis, either concrete or metaphorical, also serves in the fight against colonial/capitalist oppression and subjugation. Neither as a temple nor a forum, the museum evolves to be used as a barricade from which the collective counter-fight may rise.

As a barricade, the museum assumes itself as the place where reflexivity may occur in order to transform pain into new ways of reconnecting and living in *community*. In this sense, barricades, which are barriers made of discarded things and waste, can be used as ephemeral walls that protect the defenceless and propel them to fight for the dissolution of power positions and the transformation of the relations that produce dehumanisation.

References

- Adotevi, S. (1992/1971). Le musée inversion de la vie. (Le musée dans les systèmes éducatifs et culturels contemporains). (1971). In A. Desvallees, M. O. De Barry, & F. Wasserman (Coords.), *Vagues: Une antologie de la Nouvelle Muséologie*, vol. 1, (pp. 119-123). Collection Museologia, Éditions W-M.N.E.S., France.
- Boast, R. (2011). Neocolonial collaboration: Museum as contact zone revisited. *Museum Anthropology*, 34(1), 56-70.
- Brulon Soares, B. (2023). *The anticolonial museum: Reclaiming our colonial heritage*. Routledge.
- Brulon Soares, B. (2021). Decolonising the museum? Community experiences in the periphery of the ICOM museum definition. *Curator: The Museums Journal*, 64(3), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12436>
- Cameron, D. (1971). The museum, a temple or the forum. *Curator*, XIV(1), 11-24.
- Clifford, J. (1997). Museums as contact zones. In J. Clifford. *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century* (pp. 188-219). Harvard University Press.
- Coulthard, G. (2014). *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Debary, O. (2002). *La fin du Creusot ou L'art d'accommoder les restes*. CTHS.
- Déclaration de Québec. (1984). *Principes de base d'une nouvelle muséologie*, Adoptée par le 1er Atelier international Écomusée / Nouvelle muséologie, Québec, le 12 octobre, 1984. MINOM-ICOM.
- de Varine-Bohan, H. (1979). Le musée peut tuer ou... faire vivre. *Technique et architecture*, 326, 82-83.
- de Varine, H. (1992/1978). L'écomusée (1978). In A. Desvallees, M. O. De Barry, & F. Wasserman (Coords.), *Vagues: Une antologie de la nouvelle muséologie*, (vol. 1, pp. 446-487). Collection Museologia, Éditions W-M.N.E.S., France.
- Fabian, J. (2002/1983). *Time and the other: How anthropology makes its object*. Columbia University Press.

- Fanon, F. (2004/1961). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
- Freire, P. (2014/1994). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.
- Golding, V., & Modest, W. (Eds.) (2013). *Museums and communities: Curators, collections and collaboration*. Bloomsbury.
- hooks, b. (2013/1993). Postmodern blackness. In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory. A reader* (pp. 421-427). Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community. A pedagogy of hope*. Routledge.
- Kidman, J. (2020). Whither decolonisation? Indigenous scholars and the problem of inclusion in the neoliberal university. *Journal of Sociology*, 56(2), 247-262.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319835958>
- Krenak, A. (2020). *A vida não é útil*. Companhia das Letras.
- Leeder, L. (2023). Taboos of coloniality when collaborating on Google Arts and Culture. *ICOFOM Study Series [Online]*, 51(1-2) <http://journals.openedition.org/iss/5048>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/iss.5048>.
- Maguet, F. (2011). L'image des communautés dans l'espace public. In C. Bortolotto (Dir.), *Le patrimoine culturel immatériel. Enjeux d'une nouvelle catégorie* (pp. 47-71). Éditions de la Maison de sciences de l'homme.
- McCarthy, C. (2023). New museology. In F. Mairesse (Ed.), *ICOM dictionary of museology* (pp. 393-396). Routledge (Preprints).
- Phillips, R. B. (2021). "Changing up" the museum: Cultural translation and decolonial politics. *ICOFOM Study Series*, 49(2), 196-212.
- Rusconi, N. (1987). El museo, la museología y su praxis social. *ICOFOM Study Series*, 12, 239-249.
- Tornatore, J.-L. & Paul, S. (2003). Publics ou populations ? La démocratie culturelle en question, de l'utopie écomuséale aux «espaces intermédiaires». In O. Donnat, & P. Tolila (Dirs.), *Le(s) publie(s) de la culture. Politiques publiques et équipements culturels* (pp. 299-308). Presses de Sciences Po, vol. II.
- UNESCO. (1973). *The role of museums in today's Latin America. Resolutions adopted by the round table of Santiago (Chile)*. *Museum International*, XXV(3).

Framing participatory methods in provenance research: From the restitution of objects to a collaborative production of knowledge

Jan Kuever

University of Iringa and fahari yetu – Iringa, Tanzania

Abstract:

Provenance research on European museum collections of colonial origin is a process of knowledge production from the reconstruction of collection items' trajectories and the memories and meanings attached to them, often envisioning an eventual restitution to their supposed communities of origin.¹ This paper examines how this process of examining and possibly returning physical relics of colonial extraction risks reproducing colonial knowledge and its accessibility. In order to counter this risk, it proposes a conceptual shift towards participatory approaches of engaging the scholarly as well as local communities on both sides in sharing and developing knowledge about and from the collections and creating equitable mutual access to the different layers of the produced knowledge. The thoughts presented here are supported with examples and experiences from collaborative field research on selected object collections from German museums in possible communities of origin in Tanzania.

Résumé :

Encadrer les méthodes participatives dans la recherche de provenance : De la restitution des objets à une production collaborative de connaissances

La recherche sur la provenance des collections de musées européens d'origines coloniales est un processus de production de connaissances à partir de la reconstruction des trajectoires des objets de collection ainsi que des souvenirs et significations qui y sont attachés, envisageant souvent une restitution éventuelle à leurs supposées communautés d'origine. Cet article examine comment ce processus d'examen et de retour éventuel de reliques physiques de l'extraction coloniale risque de reproduire les connaissances coloniales et leur accessibilité. Afin de contrer ce risque, il propose un changement conceptuel vers des approches participatives engageant à la fois les communautés académiques et locales des deux côtés, pour partager et développer des connaissances sur et à partir des collections, et créer un accès mutuel équitable aux différentes couches des connaissances produites. Les réflexions présentées ici sont étayées par des exemples et des expériences de recherche sur le terrain collaboratives sur des collections d'objets

1 Email: jkuever@fahariyetu.net

sélectionnées des musées allemands dans des communautés potentielles d'origine en Tanzanie.

Mots-clés : recherche participative, provenance, Tanzanie

Iringa Boma Regional Museum and Cultural Centre is a cultural space housed in a former German colonial building in Iringa. The space is run by the culture and heritage conservation and promotion initiative fahari yetu Tanzania. Apart from its core function of curating exhibitions on the culture and history of Iringa and the Southern Highlands, Iringa Boma supports community artisan groups in basket weaving, pottery, music and dance, and contemporary arts, develops a regional archive and library, and hosts cultural events. In the last several years, it has increasingly been engaged as a Tanzanian partner in different collaborative provenance research projects with German museums and universities, mostly conducting ethnographic field research on the origin, meaning, and acquisition of selected object collections from these institutions in Tanzanian communities. In my role as the team leader of these research tours, I have come across a number of questions waiting to be addressed in theory as well as in practice:

- What is object knowledge, in which ways is it generated, and how can it be shared and negotiated?
- How does provenance research relate to colonial collecting?
- What is the aim of restitution and what is to be restituted?

This paper sets out to explore these conceptual questions through selected object stories from the project “Provenance Research on the East Africa Collection of the Museum Wittenhausen.” The project was funded by the German Lost Art Foundation and carried out by the German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (DITSL), a successor of the German Colonial School (DKS). It investigated the holdings of East African origin in the collection that were collected in colonial contexts by former DKS graduates.

The following analysis starts with a conceptual reflection on the meaning and rationale of provenance research and object restitution, followed by an interrogation of the practice of provenance research and its possible references to colonial collecting as experienced in the above-named project. From there I will ponder questions of collaborative knowledge production and sharing and conclude with thoughts towards a decolonial research practice.

Object restitution and provenance research

Provenance research on collections from colonial contexts in European museums and universities investigates the origin and acquisition of selected objects or object groups. It is basically about creating knowledge about the objects – the reconstruction and evocation of memory, meaning and all other forms of knowledge associated with them – together with creating inclusive access to that knowledge in society. While provenance research usually has focused on contexts of forced or violent acquisition of belongings, recent positions suggest it should more generally address the social, economic and political persistence of colonial structures in order to contribute to a comprehensive decolonization

process. Transnational cooperation and concrete collaboration with representatives from science, art, culture, and local communities in the countries of origin are thereby of central importance. Moreover, provenance investigations should be done with a view toward creating a basis for negotiating concrete prospects and procedures for the restitution of collections with possible communities of origin. The restitution of ethnographic collections from European museums to their societies of origin means reconnecting heritage to local processes that were cut off from their cultural growth. Reconnecting them means not only to link them back to the communities of origin, but also to turn them into resources for contemporary development of these communities.

Collection and archive research

In provenance research practice, knowledge about the objects in question is accumulated in two different spheres. In the first one – collection and archive research – we basically gather knowledge of other people’s belongings in their diaspora² by tracing them through various post-collection spaces such as depots, museum exhibitions, archives and libraries. Following an object-based approach, we first examine the object’s materiality in its depot or exhibition setting. What can be deduced from the object itself regarding the materials that it is made of, its dimensions, its function, its state of preservation and its possible origin? What do entry books, inventory cards, and other available sources of information supporting the collection reveal about these questions and the object’s context of acquisition? To what extent does the information correspond to the objects themselves, and where does it need to be corrected? Are there similar objects in other collections that may serve for comparison of information to support the assumptions made?

Let us take three examples from the Witzenhausen collection: The first is object No. 309 in the inventory, a wooden “headrest” measuring 33 x 14 cm from the Ngoni people in Southern Tanzania. A similar object with similar measurements and description is found in the holdings of the Ethnographic Collection of the University of Göttingen, hinting at the possibility that we are indeed dealing with Ngoni headrests. We also take four spear shields of different sizes, which according to the inventory numbers 1, 2, 3 and 6 may be the oldest objects in Witzenhausen. Despite the possibly correct term “Zulu shields,” I had doubts about their country of origin being South Africa. I knew that this type of shield was also introduced to East Africa by the Ngoni people, originally a splinter group of the Zulu who migrated into southern Tanzania during the 19th century (Makukula, 2022). The type of shield was then adapted from the Ngoni by the Hehe people further north. Therefore, the shields could be Ngoni or Hehe shields from Tanzania. The State Museum of Lower Saxony in Hanover (NLMH) holds a collection of shields, of similar make but different size, which are almost certainly Hehe shields. And in our cooperation with the city museum Gießen, we examined another Hehe shield of about the same size as the ones in Witzenhausen, whose inventory card conveyed contradicting information about year and place of collection. The third example is a bangle made of ivory, 10 cm in diameter and 5.5 cm high, that the DKS received as a gift for the collection in the spring of 1905 (Museum und Sammlungen, 1904/05). The Ethnological Museum Berlin has two similar ivory bangles from the same collector in its collection.

² In his concept of object diasporas, Paul Basu addresses the question of ownership of museum collections of colonial origin. He recognizes that objects from these collections exist in a space between one sociocultural context and another and mediate across the different worlds encompassed in their biographies. For more information, see Basu, 2011.



Fig. 1: Headrest ³, collection of shields, and ivory bangle ⁴

Secondly, in the same sphere we apply a historiographic approach to further investigate the collection. While the object's historicity is implied in the supporting information attached to it, we can trace its history through separate historiographic sources such as archival material and historic or academic literature. A particular focus thereby lies on the reconstruction of the object collectors' biographies through available archival sources. In the case of the headrest, the collector was the physician and colonial politician Wilhelm Arning, who served in the *Kaiserliche Schutztruppe* as well as being engaged in independent research explorations in German East Africa at different points in time. It is likely that he acquired the headrest on one of his travels through the south-eastern part of the colony. Art historians have highlighted the importance of carved headrests in African arts and crafts and point to their prominent function, particularly in South African societies, where they served not only as pillows but also as a medium of communication with ancestors in dreams (Vendryes, 1999; Nettleton, 2007). In German colonial literature, there are some indications of the distribution of these objects among the Ngoni people. At the beginning of the 20th century,

3 <https://www.ditsl.org/de/kultur-kunst/inventar-online/inventar-508>

4 <https://www.ditsl.org/de/kultur-kunst/inventar-online/inventar-322>

Fülleborn (1906) noted that carved headrests could be found here and there, but that they were no longer needed due to simplified hairstyles. A few years later, Weule (1908, plate 22) identified a comparable object as a stool and not a headrest.

The provenance of the shields in the NLMH has been clarified: They were acquired by force in the battles of the Hehe Wars.⁵ The largest collection was taken from Hehe warriors who were killed in their attack on Useke in 1893. The collector Bernhard von Bothmer was himself killed in the subsequent retaliatory raid of the Schutztruppe on Konko (Herrmann, 1895). We can only make assumptions about the provenance of the shields in Witzenhausen. It seems plausible that they were taken from Hehe warriors who were killed under the command of the above-mentioned Wilhelm Arning in the Battle of Munisagara in 1892 (Arning, 1893). Arning brought them to the nearby military station Kilosa, from where they were shipped to Witzenhausen around 10 years later. In their ethnographic descriptions and accounts of the war, both Herrmann (1895) and Nigmann (1911; 1908) point to the high importance of shields as a symbol of recognition and source of pride for the Hehe warriors.

The ivory bangle was donated by former student Richard Kracke, who was employed by the Berlin Mission Society after leaving the DKS and worked as an accountant for the Mwakaleli mission station in the southwest of German East Africa from 1904–1911. In August 1917 he was killed in action during World War I in East Africa. Today, numerous handwritten letters from Kracke to the school director E.A. Fabarius in his student file are available in the DITSL archive, several of which were also printed in the school's publication *Der Deutsche Kulturpionier*. There are also extensive files on Richard Kracke and the Mwakaleli mission station in the Berlin Mission Archive, all of which are available online in digital form.⁶ However, none of the available files provided further information on the ivory bangle.

Basically, in the sphere of collection and archive research we seek to gather explicit knowledge that – in a Polanyian sense⁷ – has been codified into formal taxonomies of the objects in question. The selected examples headrest, shields, and ivory bangle refer to the above-mentioned knowledge taxonomies of materiality, dimensions, function, origin, and ownership.

Field research in communities of origin

In addition to gathering knowledge about belongings of the other from post-collection spaces, the second sphere of provenance seeks to investigate them in the context of their supposed location of origin or space of pre-collection. Based on Viktor E. Frankl's school of psychotherapy (Frankl, 1978), Timothy King Lent (2016) conceptualizes the difference between “indirectly knowing about” and “directly knowing” in the context of human relationships, whereby the latter expands the former through a personal encounter which requires leaving one's own world and entering the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional world of the other.

⁵ The term Hehe wars, as coined by Alison Redmayne (1968), describes a conflict between the Hehe people and the German imperial forces that arose over the control of the lucrative caravan trade through the central parts of German East Africa. The conflict culminated in a lengthy conquest of the land of the Hehe people against the grim resistance under their famous Chief Mkwawa. For a detailed course of events in the Hehe wars see Redmayne, 1968; Pizzo, 2007.

⁶ <http://kab.scopecarchiv.ch/detail.aspx?ID=88245>

⁷ See Polanyi, 1958; 2009 [1966]

The idea appears to be applicable to the process of provenance research, in which the researcher, after they have known everything about the object from the European archives and libraries, wants to get to know the object itself through personal encounters with its assumed cultural bearers. For this encounter, they have to step out of their own and into the intellectual or spiritual world of the bearers. The knowledge sought from the encounter is not explicit but implicit knowledge embodied by the encountered person, which is articulated in the context of the encounter. Only when the researcher succeeds in accessing this tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 2009 [1966]) and translating it into formalized knowledge is the research process of knowledge production on the object complete.

Assessing tacit knowledge on objects from colonial collections is usually done through ethnographic inquiries of individual or group memories, associations and connections with the object in possible communities of origin. Because the objects rarely travel with the researcher to these communities, the assessment in most cases is not based on the object itself in its materiality, but on object photographs taken in the depots of the holding institutions. In the case of the above-named provenance research projects on collections at the NLMH and in Witzenhausen, we first identified possible communities to visit from available sources of information supporting the collection in order to inquire about the origin, meaning and appropriation of selected objects. Our inquiries were conducted both in the form of group discussions, which are characterized by dynamic interaction between different community members in dealing with the topic, and in the form of individual interviews with local cultural authorities such as chiefs or traditional healers. In addition to the interviews, the research team's participant observation – consciously experiencing and feeling the places visited and interactions experienced, both together with and independent of local intermediaries – was also an important part of the data collection. The research team usually consisted of three to four members – team leader, liaison coordinator, note taker and photographer – in some cases supported by student assistants. Target persons for the focus groups and interviews were generally members of the respective communities – among them especially older people and local authorities such as chiefs, clergy, or village leaders. As a basis for the discussion, we presented them photo prints of the object, along with a series of key questions related to its identification and naming, cultural attribution or belonging, purpose/function and its transformation, materials and manufacturers, links to historical memories or events, potential interest in its restitution, and possible recipients and uses after return.

On our research trips through the Ngoni region Ruvuma and its neighbouring regions, not a single respondent in any discussion or interview identified the wooden objects as headrests. Instead, they were consistently identified as stools or benches to sit on, including by my research teammates. When two of them saw the object in Witzenhausen and realized that it was actually too small to be a stool, they suggested it to be a scaled-down miniature version of a bench, specially made for colonial administrators and anthropologists. I did not buy this theory, but rather suggested the interpretations might be a result of cultural changes. It can be assumed that headrests are relevant to a migratory way of life. Different from Nilotic groups further north, the Ngoni were not a pastoralist people and by the late 19th century had settled permanently in Ruvuma, while the colonial occupation had put an end to their war campaigns against neighboring groups. Moreover, adaptation to Tanzanian national culture has certainly progressed over the past hundred years, in the course of which cultural characteristics brought from southern Africa may have faded. While further research is needed to support these assumptions, the Ugandan art dealer

Joe Ndyabangi (2020) sums them up in advertising a “Ngoni Headrest” on his website: “The headrests were used as pillows to help someone to have good sleep. They were also used to help protect ceremonial coiffure. In some occasions, headrests are used as stools.”

Nowadays, Hehe shields are rarely found in the villages and communities in Iringa. Participants in the group discussions in Iringa identified the objects in the photos as shields, but hardly as typical Hehe shields. In some cases, there were statements that this type of shield used to be important and that there used to be plenty, but today no one is familiar with how to make them. Even at the site of the battle at Munisagara, the villagers were unable to identify the shields. However, they could remember stories of the battle between the Hehe and the German colonial troops on the banks of the nearby Mkondoa River. In order to avoid pursuit by the *Schutztruppe* and to be able to carry out swift attacks of their own, when possible, the Hehe troops were hiding in the surrounding hills at the time.



Fig. 2: Impressions from focus groups in different locations. Photos © Herry T. Sanga

During our research visit to Mwakaleli mission station, we were able to gather interesting information about the coming of the missionaries and the cultural changes they brought with them, but no one remembered the name Richard Kracke. Based on the pictures, the respondents were able to immediately identify the object as an ivory bracelet, called *ikosa* in the local Nyakusa language. They remembered that elephants used to roam the area and were hunted. While they were not sure if it was Arab traders or local artisans who carved bangles from their tusks, they agreed that the bangles were worn by women, especially older women.

Provenance research and colonial collection

The next question is how the knowledge production in provenance research relates to the idea of colonial knowledge. By colonial knowledge we understand knowledge that was created from the systematic extraction of resources from the colonized people to facilitate their governance and exploitation by the colonizers. The process included the collection of culture in the form of material objects and information through various agents such as colonial troops and administrators, missionaries, and anthropologists. The latent aim of collecting culture was to appropriate the tacit knowing of things vested in the objects that were taken and convert them into explicit knowledge of the culture bearers, the people.

The objects or belongings in European museum and university collections of colonial origin are physical relics of the process of the extraction of culture from the colonies and thus loaded with attached layers of colonial knowledge found in colonial archives and literature that overlays their intrinsic meanings and functions. Relying on the historical vocabulary as well as on the stories of the collectors in tracing provenance, conventional provenance research based on these sources inevitably reproduces colonial knowledge to some extent. Consequently, the recent trend of emphasizing elements of involving supposed communities of origin in the research process is a countermeasure to avoid such reproduction through which further layers of knowledge are added to the objects.

But the challenge of reproducing patterns of colonial knowledge is not resolved in this way. Our encounters with various potential communities of origin – as positive and productive as they almost always were – turned out to raise a latent doubt if what we are doing is not again a form of colonial collection, an effort of extraction of knowledge from people with limited agency compared to us. We as scholars are not satisfied with the knowledge that we found in our archives and libraries, so we go again to fill the gaps from the people who once made these things. Whose purpose does the provenance research agenda serve if not a German one? How relevant is the knowledge that we generate for the communities that we visited as well as for the mediating Tanzanian scholars? Or do our efforts of engaging communities of origin as well as knowledge mediators on the other hand support the deconstruction of colonial knowledge that is vested in the diasporic trajectories of the objects? Ultimately, I think what we do in provenance research is a bit of both – recolonizing and decolonizing at the same time, and it is our duty to develop the methods we apply in a way that it strengthens the decolonizing elements. Only then can provenance research and subsequent restitution measures make sense. The question is how we can make approaches more decolonizing, in conceptual thinking as well as in practical application.

Decolonizing knowledge production and sharing

In his contribution to a joint workshop in Dar es Salaam on the question of the collection of human remains in German East Africa, the Tanzanian archaeologist Pastory Bushozi (2023) pointed out that not only the human remains and ethnographic objects in German holdings themselves, but also the knowledge accumulated in connection with them would have to be repatriated to Tanzania in order to conduct collaborative research on an equal footing. His plea refers first of all to German collection inventories, archival material and historical literature. In a private conversation later that day, one of the workshop organizers from the German side told me that he was puzzled about this request, wondering why Tanzanian scholars would want access to the often overtly racist historical information about themselves, why they would want to confront themselves with this degrading image accompanying the knowledge of things and events. In another conversation, Wilson Jilala, conservator at the National Museum of Tanzania, emphasized that in his eyes this thinking is exactly the problem. He said that we cannot today examine collections as if they were separated from their historical context. An equitable discussion first of all requires the acknowledgment of the injustice of the past and its continuing effects in the present, for which European scholars and societies have to face up to their wrongdoings in ideology and practice in front of the former colonial subject. Such confrontation would be necessary to revisit the knowledge and re-interpret the colonial narratives.

In interpreting Jilala's statement further, the problem is not the knowledge gathered in or from colonial collecting itself, but its hegemonic and hardly inclusive character. From the present perspective, the goal must therefore be to share this knowledge equitably, to make it accessible and inclusive for scholars and communities in the formerly colonized countries.

Building scholarly capacities

Archived knowledge on the collections in question is largely based on object descriptions and memories not accessible to Tanzanian scholars due to language barriers as well as because of its fragmented locality. This body of knowledge could be restituted through comprehensive translation, a centralized digital database, and the provision of means for concerted capacity building of Tanzanian scholars in development, management, and use of historical archives, databases, and depots. In addition to creating transparency, such measures could provide Tanzanian researchers with new starting points for researching, for example, resistance movements against German colonial rule, even after the death of the last contemporary witnesses. Research on the Maji Maji war⁸ in Tanzania is a good example in this regard. For decades, Tanzanian scholarship on Maji Maji relied on a number of post-independence research studies which have narrowed the focus of attention to particular sites and regions in the vast area of the war. The same applies to the Hehe wars, which seem to be reduced to the battle of Lugalo, the fall of Kalenga, and the return of Chief Mkwawa's skull.

⁸ The Maji Maji war was an armed rebellion of a united front of different ethnic groups against German colonial rule in the south-eastern part of German East Africa. The war was triggered by German policies of taxation and forced labour in the emerging cash-crop plantation agriculture designed to exploit the local population – and it lasted from 1905-07. The war resulted in up to 300,000 total Africans dead, mostly civilians dying from famine. For detailed accounts and interpretations of the war see Gwassa 2005 [1973], Iliffe 1967; Giblin & Monson 2010.

Now, a number of objects and photographs from the Witzenhausen collection in Germany bear witness to a more diverse range of war events and have served to widen this narrow body of knowledge for Tanzanian scholars. The shields in the Witzenhausen and Hanover collections, for example, widened this geographical scope of the Hehe wars to the more peripheral battlefields of Konko and Munisagara. Similarly, the ivory bangle served as a hook for investigating a publicly underrepresented part of the Maji Maji war history. In a letter to the director of the DKS in February 1907, Kracke reports on events and developments related to the south-western theatre of the Maji-Maji War in Njombe. He describes both the mistreatment and executions of prisoners allegedly involved in the uprising and the rampant famine among the local population as a result of reprisals by the German colonial troops.

After identifying a starting point, tracing biographies and travel movements from historical sources is also necessary preparatory work for planning places and routes to be visited in field research. It appears that the role of Tanzanian scholars in researching the provenance of collections in German museums has been to coordinate the field research in supposed communities of origin and then serve as mediators between the collection holders and the culture bearers or inheritors. Unrestricted access to historical sources would furnish mediating scholars not only with more agency in selecting destination and route planning, but also empower them to design and implement research independent from German collection holders. However, practical participation and coordination supports capacity building in applying ethnographic research methods. We have utilized the provenance research tours as vehicles for every fahari yetu team member to develop their competences in participant observation, interviewing techniques, and focus group moderation, debriefing and reporting, data processing and analysis, and media documentation. As one of the outcomes, my colleagues and I are now fully aware of the scope and diversity of the Maji Maji rebellion and how communities remember and interpret its localized contexts. On another tour, we visited local communities near farms established or worked by former DKS graduates during the colonial era in order to investigate the provenance of selected object groups from the Witzenhausen collection, to link the objects to local memories of the farms and their relationship with the people, and to trace continuities and transformations in the history of the Tanzanian plantation economy. Based on the inspiration he got from the tour, my colleague Jimson Sanga repeatedly expressed his intention of developing this line of inquiry further in future independent research endeavors, emphasizing how important it would be to have access to the archival information without being dependent on a German partner to initiate such projects. While the archival sources in this as in most other cases follow the traces of German farmers and administrators, he said that his aim would be to reinterpret these European narratives by finding African protagonists to project the history on through telling their story – such as those of traditional rulers around the localities of the farms or local labourers who hired themselves out.

Apart from restituting knowledge on the collections through creating access to colonial archival information and participating in community research, the restitution of knowledge also includes knowledge generated from the collections or from their management. This means to share the resources needed to build Tanzanian capacities in collection conservation and management as well as archive and database development, including the provision of any supporting technology needed. Jilala said: “When we get the remains of our ancestors or cultural belongings back, then what? In order to take care of them

properly, we also need to get the means and skills back that have been accumulated from keeping them for so long.” At Iringa Boma, we are trying to put this form of knowledge restitution into practice through the establishment of a physical archive and a digital database of our collection and our work on the regional culture and history. The objects from the collections in Germany that we do provenance research on, whether they will be restituted to us or not, are only a small fraction of the digitized knowledge, but they exemplify the point of converting cultural resources from the past into present capacities in heritage conservation and management.

Community participation and empowerment



Fig. 3: Archive and database development at Iringa Boma. Photos by Jan Kuever.

Due to linguistic and cultural barriers, in most cases the life of the collection objects in the diaspora – documented in the inventory lists, legacies and literature sources of European museums, archives and libraries – remains inaccessible to representatives of their societies of origin even more than to trained scholars. Participatory provenance research in possible communities of origin can therefore be understood as an effort to remove these barriers and instead deliberately create access to and return the knowledge accumulated in the object's biography. This approach engages researchers and members of these communities as possible bearers and inheritors in sharing and negotiating knowledge attached to the cultural belongings in question. In addition to the research interest, the participatory involvement of people is intended to raise awareness of the collections in exile in the communities of origin, to explore options for possible restitution and exhibition projects, to identify links to pressing socio-economic development needs, and to promote intercultural perspectives and skills.

At this point, we engage in the above-raised process of accessing the implicit and often personal knowledge found in the communities and translate it into formal, systematic language. When we take the examples mentioned, the question arises what kind of tacit knowledge there is about objects such as the headrests, the shields, or the ivory bangles, what individual and collective interpretations of particular historical events such as the Maji Maji or the Hehe war, and in some cases also what spiritual memories of the deceased victims of colonial violence exist. First, some technical modalities need to be considered in this process. In the case of the headrest, for example, it was difficult for the respondents to recognize the size or dimensions of the objects from the available photos. In order to generate a stronger response from communities, objects should therefore also be made accessible in their physical three-dimensionality. This can initially be done by creating 3D models and printing them out for use in the field. Furthermore, our field research has shown that a number of historically significant objects are barely extant nowadays in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. One goal must therefore be to return the objects themselves and make them accessible to the people. We are working on returning the Hehe shields and other objects from the NLMH and Witzhausen collections to Iringa and display them at the Boma museum. Once in Iringa, they will become part of the research with the culture-bearing communities as well as of our ongoing education campaigns in primary and secondary schools.

But the technical questions are just the surface. At a deeper layer, I have been dealing with a feeling of discontent over a degree of social inequality between me and the majority of the people I meet and work within our research and conservation activities, inequality in terms of valuable knowledge, education, and most urgently individual economy. I guess those are the parameters of coloniality that we experience and seek to address at the same time. We of course deal with the situation that communities often view me and my team primarily as an economic promise, a premise that we must break down as we interact. The discontent also arises in view of the often precarious economic situation of my teammates at the museum and in the provenance research. I would wish, for example, that a Tanzanian guest would not have to speculate if a German colleague will pay for his dinner at the restaurant when participating in an international workshop, as often happens.

On the other hand, I also argue against a tendency of totalizing the prevalence of asymmetric power relations rooted in colonialism. Similar to object descriptions and memories in the German language for Tanzanian researchers, narratives from possible communities of

origin are initially difficult to access for German provenance researchers. Their command of the implicit knowledge that researchers are looking for furnishes cultural custodians in the communities with a degree of agency to act as gatekeepers who set the terms for knowledge extraction. Just recently, I had a discussion with the Hehe elder Mzee Kasige about the prospect of returning remains of their ancestors and keeping them in the Boma museum. He said that this would be possible in principle as we have the physical and administrative facilities needed. But we would not be able to handle the spiritual custody of the remains, talking to or communicating with the ancestors in the adequately appeasing manner. That work can only be done by competent elders who need to be attached to the museum and be part and parcel of the procedure.

Another example is an incident from researching the provenance of a shield and a historical picture of the Mbugwe people in the Manyara region in central Tanzania. The Ward Executive Officer in a place along the highway called “German Baobab Tree” took us to the clinic of a healer who is also the Chief of the Mbugwe in the area. The clinic was packed with customers waiting for the Chief to perform an ancestral ritual, and we barged into the atmosphere as unwanted intruders with our project vehicle. However, the Chief reluctantly agreed to briefly look at the pictures and said that such shields nowadays are only used in ancestral rituals as the upcoming one. We were not allowed see the one that is part of his shrine, but he showed us a traditional homestead similar to the one seen on another picture. While we were going through the homestead, he told me that his grandfather was taken by the Germans during the colonial era. He would bear all costs himself if I could help to find his ancestor and bring him back where he belongs. I was emotionally touched by the unexpected revelation and tried to apologize for what my ancestors did. Unfortunately, I haven’t found traces of his ancestor’s remains in German depots.

Conclusion

Provenance research is about accessing and mediating knowledge in collection objects from different sources, vested in the objects themselves, gathered in museum depots and archives, and remembered by people in communities of origin. The mediation process may enable collection holders, mediators and inheritors to think of cultural heritage beyond colonial categories and foster decolonial approaches to knowledge, education and human development. Coming to new ways of *knowing about something* and *knowing something* requires turning the direction of colonial extraction around, making it two-way traffic. In cooperation at eye level, in one direction European ethnographers may continue extracting tacit knowledge gathered in communities and translating it into formalized knowledge, while scholars from the countries of origin extract approaches, methods, and resources to build capacities in knowledge generation and management. For the case of fahari yetu projects, two-way traffic also means that experiences from the exhibition, research, and educational measures on the returned objects in Iringa will be incorporated into the exhibitions of the Göttingen Collection, the NLMH, and the Witzenhausen Museum, using comparable objects or their virtual models in order to depict the connections and entanglements between the two places. In this sense, the objects will serve to shape an identity-forming cultural narrative in Tanzania and to address knowledge gaps and stereotypes regarding colonial history in Germany, fostering a relationship ethics of knowing and empowering each other.

The Centre for Advanced Study's project *inherit. heritage in transformation* conceives the decolonization of knowledge as a pluralization of values and meanings (decentring, n.d.). The holdings of museum collections can tell stories about broader historical events or ruptures that took place by the time of their collection. While the events or ruptures themselves emerged from the asymmetric power relations of colonialism, their repercussions in post-colonial societies may have ambiguous implications. This contribution has shown how this ambiguity is reflected in researching shared or entangled heritage with its diverse and ambivalent interpretations and layers of knowledge. To embrace this ambiguity with its doubts and uncertainties is a requirement for an inclusive transformation and democratization of the values of culture and heritage (transforming, n.d.). In this vein, this contribution is an attempt to formulate and arrange my thoughts on the matter. *In medias res*⁹, they are inherently imperfect and unfinished, inviting to be picked up for further development.

Acknowledgment

Field research for this article was conducted within the project "Provenance research on the East African collection of the Witzenhausen Museum," which was funded by the German Lost Art Foundation.

References

- Museum und Sammlungen. (1905). In: *Der Deutsche Kulturpionier* 2, 28.
- Arning, W. (1893). Gefecht gegen die Wahehe. In: *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 4: 58-60.
- Basu, P. (2011). Object diasporas, resourcing communities: Sierra Leonean Collections in the Global Museumscape. *Museum Anthropology*, 34(1), pp. 28-42.
- Bushozi, P. (2023). The history of collecting human remains during German colonial period in German East Africa. Unpublished contribution to the Joint Workshop *Human remains from Africa in Göttingen University collections: Provenances, repatriation, collaboration*. National Museum and House of Culture, Dar es Salaam.
- Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Harvard University Press.
- decentring the west*. (n.d.). *inherit. heritage in transformation*. Käthe Hamburger Kolleg at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.
- Frankl, V.E. (1978). *The unheard cry for meaning: Psychotherapy and humanism*. Washington Square Press.
- Fülleborn, F. (1906). *Das Deutsche Njassa- und Ruwuma-Gebiet: Land und Leute, nebst Bemerkungen über die Schire-Länder*. Dietrich Reimer Verlag.
- Giblin, J. L. & Monson, J. (eds.) (2010). *Maji Maji: Lifting the fog of war. African social studies series*. Brill.
- Gwassa, G.C.K. (2005) [1973]. *The outbreak and development of the Maji Maji War, 1905-1907*. Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.

9 In homage to the work of James Clifford (1997).

- Herrmann, K. (1895). Über seinen Zug nach Konko. *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 6, 70-71.
- Iliffe, J. (1967). The organization of the Maji Maji rebellion. *The Journal of African History*, 8(3), 495–512.
- Lent, T.K. (2016, February 1). The difference between knowing about and knowing a person. LinkedIn.
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/difference-between-knowing-person-timothy-lent>
- Makukula, D. (2022). Art, objects and belief systems among the Wangoni of Tanzania. *Tanzanian Journal of Population Studies and Development* 29(1), 24-43.
- Ndyanabangi, J. 2020. Ngoni Headrest Tanzania (LHRT 042).
<https://www.africagalleryantique.com/product/ngoni-sudan-headrest-lhrt-042/>
- Nettleton, A. (2007). African dream machines: Style, identity and meaning of African headrests. Wits University Press.
- Nigmann, E. (1908). *Die Wahehe: Ihre Geschichte, Kult-, Rechts-, Kriegs- und Jagdgebräuche*. Ernst Siegfried Mittler.
- Nigmann, E. (1911). *Geschichte der Kaiserlichen Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika*. Mittler und Sohn.
- Pizzo, D. (2007). “To devour the land of Mkwawa”: Colonial violence and the German-Hehe war in East Africa c. 1884-1914 [doctoral dissertation]. University of North Carolina.
- Polanyi, M. (1958). *Personal knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy*. Routledge.
- Polanyi, M. (2009) [1966]. *The tacit dimension*. University of Chicago Press.
- Redmayne, A. (1968). Mkwawa and the Hehe wars. *The Journal of African History*, 9(3), 409–436.
- transforming value*. (n.d.). inherit. heritage in transformation. Käthe Hamburger Kolleg at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.
- Vendryes, M. (1999). Africa in repose: Stools and headrests. *Record of the Art Museum* 58(1/2), 38–53.
- Weule, K. (1908). *Wissenschaftliche Ergebnisse meiner ethnographischen Forschungsreise in den Südosten Deutsch-Ostafrikas*. Ernst Mittler Verlag.

Provenance research: Entangled histories of objects from Asia and Oceania in the missionary museum “Forum der Völker”

Mai Lin Tjoa-Bonatz

Independent researcher – Berlin, Germany

Abstract

In the missionary museum “Forum der Völker”, founded by the Franciscan religious order, ethnographic objects – in particular ritual implements or religious art – were transferred to a Christian context by reinterpreting them as counter-images for the missionary task.¹ Missionaries commodified devices of local worship and showed an ambivalence towards human remains and weapons. The museum’s collection was extended in the past thirty years by private collections, including objects obtained by the military from the colonial period or of antiquities theft by art lovers. The initial provenance research in the museum used archive material, gathered information by studying the objects and conducted interviews with relevant actors. The implication of the findings revealed unclear changes of ownership and various potentially sensitive acquisition contexts that offers an orientation in how to deal with objects of problematic provenance in a missionary context.

Keywords: missionary museum, Asia, Oceania, provenance, colonial-period

Resumen

Investigación de procedencia: Historias entrelazadas de objetos de Asia y Oceanía en el museo misionero “Forum der Völker”

En el museo misionero “Forum der Völker”, fundado por la orden religiosa franciscana, objetos etnográficos –especialmente implementos rituales o arte religioso– fueron transferidos a un contexto cristiano reinterpretándolos como contraimágenes para la labor misionera. Los misioneros mercantilizaron dispositivos de culto local y mostraron ambivalencia hacia restos humanos y armas. En los últimos treinta años, la colección del museo se amplió con colecciones privadas, incluidos objetos obtenidos por militares durante el período colonial o robados como antigüedades por aficionados al arte. La investigación inicial de procedencia en el museo utilizó material de archivo, información recopilada mediante el estudio de los objetos y entrevistas con actores relevantes.

1 Email: tjoabonatz@gmail.com

Las implicaciones de los hallazgos revelaron cambios de propiedad poco claros y diversos contextos de adquisición potencialmente sensibles que ofrecen una orientación sobre cómo abordar objetos de procedencia problemática en un contexto misionero.

Palabras clave: museo misionero, Asia, Oceanía, procedencia, período colonial

The “Forum der Völker” in Werl, Germany was founded by the Franciscan order. It hosts the largest ethnological museum in Westphalia and at the same time the largest ethnological collection of a missionary society in Germany, with substantial colonial and postcolonial holdings from Asia and Oceania. After the Franciscans left their convent in Werl, the museum has been closed since 2019. In 2023, I pursued initial provenance research funded by the German Lost Art Foundation DZK (*Deutsches Zentrum für Kulturgutverluste*) that allowed paradigmatic insights into the collection strategies of a proselytizing order and into the entanglement histories of the collected objects. This article focuses on the provenance of artefacts from China assembled between 1903 and 1953 and objects from Indonesia and Papua New Guinea of the early post-colonial period. I aim to reveal the acquisition circumstances of objects and the associated strategies of appropriation of a Christian mission.

During provenance research at the “Forum der Völker“, I examined whether there was or could be a violent or sensitive acquisition context for objects or groups of objects originating from the colonial or early post-colonial time.² I have collected provenance information on more than 1,945 objects. In addition, I pursued a preselection of potentially sensitive photos in the large image collection of probably up to 10,000 visuals from the late 19th century to the 1950s, which are not yet inventoried and thus wait for a more comprehensive documentation.³

My provenance research was carried out using an interdisciplinary approach. I examined the museum’s documentation material and visual sources. In addition to this archival and source-critical historic approach, I pursued an ethnologically oriented methodology through surveys and interviews in order to generate information about the various actors involved. Likewise, an art-historical approach using iconological and stylistic methods helped to collect object-related provenance characteristics. Labels, inventory numbers or price tags provided information on auctions, market value or former ownership whereas signatures, marks, material, working techniques or other stylistic characteristics allude to the producer and add regional or chronological information. This initial provenance research (*Erstcheck*) in a missionary museum lays the foundation for possible more in-depth provenance research and offers an orientation in how to deal with objects of problematic provenance in a missionary context.

The history of the collection is marked by three temporal cornerstones: 1913, 1962 and 1983. In 1962, the museum in Werl took over the collection of the Missionary Museum

2 Erstcheck im “Forum der Völker“ Werl, project-ID: KK_KU03_2022. DZK, 2023 <https://www.proveana.de/de/link/pro00000175> (Retrieved January 26, 2024).

3 The photos reveal complex power dynamics and ambiguities with regard to property issues, the legal system and their ambiguous relation towards violence and poverty.

in Dorsten, Germany, which was founded in 1913⁴ but was closed during World War II. The regional focus addressed the non-European missionary areas of the Franciscans in Palestine, Egypt, East Asia (mainly China), North America and Brazil (Balthasar, 1921). Around 1935, an object from Samoa documents the total outreach of the collection extending as far as Polynesia.⁵ The museum in Dorsten goes back to a study collection of the Franciscan college St. Ludwig in Dalheim-Vlodrop and its predecessor in Harreveld in the Netherlands, gathered by missionary brothers and students in the mission fields since 1902. The concept of the Missionary Museum in Dorsten focused on ethnographic material to visualize their proselytizing efforts. Exhibits were commissioned from the mission field. Crafts from the missionary schools as “examples of Christian culture”, awards and everyday goods of the missionaries were shown in contrast to “objects of moral barbarization”, “images of idolatry” or “devices of superstition” (Missionsmuseum, 1915, pp. 3–4). This fostered ideas of how to generate financial resources for the mission by commodifying artefacts or human remains, as reported by Catholic missionaries from South Shandon in 1912. One proposed to sell his braid, cut off a month before, for a few thousand that “would be a deal for the Church!” Several braids from China are found in the museum of Werl, thus esteemed worth collecting. Another sent “deposed bronze idols” which “silently mourn in a corner” to Europe to get them “silvered” due to financial hardship for the construction of a church.⁶ According to him, if religious images of valuable material were not worshipped by Buddhists, he took the right to commercialize and send them off, which reflects the missionary’s autocratic behaviour and dismissive attitude towards local worship.

In 1983, with the reopening and extension of the museum building in Werl, various collections of Franciscan monasteries of the Netherlands and Germany as well as donations from private collectors were incorporated, aided by new acquisitions. The regional scope of the museum expanded and countries from four continents were represented with a new didactic concept. Today, the ethnographic collection consists of around 15,200 objects, in addition to a collection of 3,186 coins and early currency as well as more than 47,000 visual sources, mainly assembled in the mission territories of the German and Dutch Franciscan order. Between 1983 and 2019, the museum director Fr Reinhard Kellerhoff (1924–2022) expanded the collection while creating a centre for intercultural encounter (Reinking, 1989; Kellerhoff, 1999, 2012).

Among the collectors are 103 Franciscan clerics and 13 different religious institutions to which more than 4,000 objects can be attributed, probably about 300 of them from the colonial period. From Germany, Chinese objects were gathered mainly by three Franciscan monasteries in Dingelstädt, Munich, by the provincial mission Prokurat in Düsseldorf and by the Franciscan missionary society in Munich, which had established an itinerant museum in Landshut.⁷ Artefacts from Oceania, respectively Indonesia and Papua New

4 The concept of a museum arose in 1909. Four cupboards at the entrance of the cloister could not take up all the objects from the missionary fields anymore, so 200 m² were prepared for hosting a museum furnished by display cases and museum didactics (Missionsmuseum, 1915, p. 2).

5 The bark cloth (tapa) (inv. no. 1375) inscribed with letters “XAUMA AUT” was wrongly categorized to South America in the display case “Brazil: about jungle and Indian life” (Brasilien: Aus Urwald und Indianerleben) (Franziskanerkloster Dorsten, ca. 1935, n. p.; Reinking, 1989, p. 179).

6 “Habe vor einem Monat meinen Zopf abschneiden lassen. Es ist ein wahres Prachtexemplar. Könnten Sie den nicht für einige Tausend verkaufen. Das wäre ein Handel für die Kirche!” and “nur einige abgesetzte Götzen aus Bronze trauern still in einem Winkel; werde sie Ihnen nächstens zusenden, vielleicht gelingt es, sie in Europa zu ‘versilbern’” (Schlichte Werbebedanken, 1913, p. 61).

7 The concept of an itinerant exhibition as “means of agitation” for the missionary work was born in 1915 (Missionsmuseum, 1915). See the archive of “Forum der Völker” in Werl: Undated inventories of objects of the itinerant exhibition in Bad Tölz, a visitor’s book of 1927–1939 in Landshut; in the archive of the Franciscan in Paderborn, Germany: PAB 01 – Bavaria, 1921–1934.

Guinea, were donated by the Steyler Missionary Sisters in Witten, the convents of the Franciscans in Vossenack and Cologne. The Franciscans in Fulda contributed Japanese objects. In 1986, the Kommissie Monumentenzorg Minderbroeders Nederland in Tilburg sent 13 big boxes with more than 1,100 objects to Werl from another congregation, probably the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.



Figure 1. Drum (inv. no. 2642, 102 cm, diameter 12 cm), Sibil-region/ Indonesia, probably 20th century, kept by former friars Beiy de Gier and Erik van der Bone, © “Forum der Völker”, Werl

Objects from the Dutch Franciscans are especially numerous and date back to the colonial time. The Franciscan collection in the Netherlands originates from the mission seminar in Sittard, which had been moved to Katwijk before World War II. Katwijk was closed in the 1960s so that the collection went to the mission Prokurat office in Woerden (personal communication Fr Piet Bots, Jan. 1, 2024). Among this stock is a wooden hand drum (inv. no. 2642) of slender hourglass shape with an incised geometric pattern from the Sibil area in the western highlands of Irian Jaya/ Indonesia (Figure 1). The music instrument (*tifa*) is covered by a thick layer of soot. This patina may indicate its old age. This single-headed goblet drum was used throughout the Eastern region of the Indonesian archipelago. A label describes that the drum was given to a friend of the Dutch missionaries Beiy de Gier (1939–) and Erik van der Bone (1938–2020) in the Sibil area, but only for temporary storage. It is added that if the original owner of the drum will claim it, it has to be returned.⁸ The ownership was transferred in the 1950s–60s. The question arises as to whether this was a mutually agreed-upon change of ownership or whether there had been a breach of custody. I suggest investigating the circumstances and establishing contacts with the region of origin. In case the owner is found and claims it, this would be a good example, in a missionary context, for which a voluntary restitution is strongly recommended.

Materiality as a sensitive object category

Human remains are among objects in museums that are addressed as sensitive due to their materiality. The German Association of Museums critiques the display of human remains in museum collections because this violates ethical standards (Turnbull, et al., 2020; Deutscher Museumsbund e. V., 2021). In 1988, four human skulls of the Asmat region from Irian Jaya/ Indonesia were donated to the museum by Dutch collectors: the missionary Carel Kruitwagen (1897–1956) and the pilot Robert Jacques Jansens (1936–?), who worked

⁸ The handwriting reads as follows: “Tifa uit Sibilgebied. Door een vriend van Beiy De Gier aan Erik v. d. Borne gegeven ter Bewaring. Wanner Hy de Tifa terug vraagt, wordt hy teruggegeven.” De Gier left the order in 1985 and van den Borne in 1989. His name is incorrectly written in the database of the museum’s inventory.

for the Franciscan mission in Papua in 1961–1964.⁹ Neither the place of origin, dating nor the purpose of the four skulls is known. It is unclear which ethnic group among the many districts in the Asmat region they originate from. One skull (inv. no. 2210) called *ndambirkus* is polished and richly decorated with a nose ring made of shell and seeds of different colours (probably coix und abrus) set in the orbit (Reinking, 1989, p. 174; Bernhardt & Scheffler 2001, pp. 86–87). A braided vegetal fibre (probably sago) connects the lower jaw with the nose. Woven plaits made of fibre form a band around the forehead, in which white feathers and seeds are added. Molars of the upper jaw are kept. Three skulls (inv. no. 7739, 7741, 2240) are sparingly fashioned by white, red or beige seeds, bands of woven fibre and white feathers.

According to missionary collector Gerard Zegwaard (1955–1994), in the Asmat region prepared skulls underwent ritual treatments and were part of ceremonies such as rite of passage or head hunting practices that he said were connected to cannibalism.¹⁰ Spirits of the deceased play an important part in the society of this region. Today the Asmat fully integrate the skulls into their daily lives; however, historian Fenneke Sysling (2017, pp. 42–46) points to the problematic acquisition of such skulls in the former colonial territory of the Netherlands for anthropological racial studies. The collection of anthropological data such as age, sex, diseases, possible traces of violence are important, assert foreign researchers, to clarify the context of these skulls. These data allow foreign provenance researchers to gain clues about the possible origins of the individuals as well as to distinguish whether they are ancestral skulls or trophies obtained by head hunting, which makes the allocation to their original owners more difficult. A chronological classification and examination of their authenticity on the basis of certain parameters, such as workmanship or decoration, could also be carried out within the framework of further provenance research with the help of an expert in forensic cultural anthropology. As these skulls were collected by a missionary and were displayed in a missionary museum until 2023, it is particularly important to examine the ambivalence as to why missionaries whose faith actually demanded a burial collected human remains while denigrating the Asmat ancestral beliefs.

Other objects in the museum contain human remains such as hair, skull scalps or bone, used in bracelets or musical instruments from Papua New Guinea and as head decoration in China, as well as five artefacts made of skull or bone from Nepal and Tibet.¹¹ The MP and art lover Ernst Majonica (1920–1997) donated his large collection to the museum, including two skull bowls and a bone flute probably made of a thighbone from Tibet (inv. no. 5475, 5503, 5504; Kükenshöner, 2023). The tripartite vessel called *nan-mchod-thod-pa* (*Nangchö Thöpa*) (inv. no. 5504) dated to the 19th century in the inventory of the museum, consists of a triangular basis on which a skull bowl is raised on a baluster with a cover crowned by a trident (*vajra*). Skulls, lotus with flames and the eight Buddhist symbols (*astamangala*) are made of fine silver work. This device uses human remains as “work material” and it is not spiritually charged in Tibetan Buddhism. These are distinguished

9 Joop Sierat’s (1937–?, Franciscan in the order until 1974), letter to Fr Reinhard Kellerhoff of Dec. 12, 2001 (Archive of the “Forum der Völker”).

10 The collection hosts a wooden panel of around 1910 from Irian Jaya donated by Zegwaard probably in 2020 (inv. no. 14491).

11 Dr. Alfons Buhl (1952–) bought one skull bowl (inv. no. 7920) for a relatively high amount (\$80US) at the market of Lahan, Nepal. At the airport he was not permitted to take it out of the country so a local association sent it to Germany by mail (personal communication, January 8, 2024). In 2001, he donated the object to the museum. In 2002, a skull bowl (inv. no. 8104) from Tibet was donated to the museum by Hans-Jürgen Kalbers (?–2002), a pastor from Menden, Germany.

from human remains of highly ranked religious leaders (*lamas*) and reincarnation, which are esteemed sacred, and thus used as reliquaries in sacred buildings (*stupa*) or used in amulets. As the ethnologist Henriette Lavaux-Vrécourt of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin has observed in her field research, exile Tibetan societies in India exhibit objects with human remains from their country in their museums (personal communication August 14, 2023). I want to express that the acceptability of showing human remains depends on various grounds and is not always connected to ancestor display.

Another group of artefacts made of potentially sensitive material concerns at least 35 items made of elephant tusks. Museum experts question whether objects made of this raw material should be displayed, because they are made of an animal species worthy of protection and whose acquisition circumstances would have to be examined in detail.¹² Some of the ivory art objects in the “Forum der Völker” that have not yet been inventoried in 2023 come from India, China or Africa.

Contexts of appropriation in China, 1903–1953

In the large East Asian collection of the museum in Werl, a big part of the objects and pictures were acquired in the Franciscan missionary area of Quangtung in South China, where Franciscan brothers and sisters were stationed from 1903 until their expulsion in 1953.¹³ There are about 300 objects, about 7,000 pictures and 2,964 coins or early currency.

A photograph of the main hall in the Missionary Museum Dorsten shows “China: Boxer weapons” (*Franziskanerkloster Dorsten*, ca. 1935, n. p.; Figure 2) and the museum’s guide explains that “[O]n the wall, Chinese weapon. The large ‘knife’. A strong stringed bow. The weapons were still used in the anti-European movement in 1900.”¹⁴ A newspaper article adds that with these weapons the Belgian Franciscan Viktorin Delbrouk (life date unknown) was murdered (van Bevern, 1935). One of the exhibits in the Austrian Missionary Museum and Archive in Hall, Austria is a lance “looted” by Franciscan Korbinian Pangger (?–1951) during the Boxer Rebellion.¹⁵ In both museums, the Franciscan friars use the same narrative and refer to foreign oppression and anti-European attitudes as the reason for the Boxer War, brought about as a military confrontation by the “United Fists for Justice”, known as “Boxers”. The narrative of a warlike acquisition context was considered to promote the idea of proselyting. The missionaries were subjected to raids, life-threatening attacks and looting (Lange, 1928). However, their way of perceiving this historical conflict as solely anti-European neglects the fact that this movement had much broader reasons. Not only were there changes in values due to the introduction of Western standards and modernity, and economic and political influence by foreign powers, there were also inter-Chinese tension, political discontent and poverty acting as triggers for the military confrontation in 1900–1901 (Leutner & Mühlhahn, 2007, p. 9). The Franciscans

12 The exhibition “Schrecklich schön” (“Terribly Beautiful”) at the Humboldt Forum in Berlin proposed an International Council of Museums’ (ICOM) recommendation for the protection of this coveted material at the expert conference on January 17, 2022 (Humboldt Forum, 2022).

13 In 1948, the archdiocese of Jinan counted 98 Catholic priests, including 53 German Franciscan priests (Westemeyer, 1961–62, p. 329). About the missionary history of the Franciscans and other congregations in China see Herpich, et al., 2023, and von Collani, 2013; about the China collection in Werl see Wilms-Reinking, 2001, and Geilich, 2006; and about the appropriation of works of local worship in the missionary context in Asia see Tjoa-Bonatz, 2009, 2016, and Konrad, 2020.

14 “An der Wand. Chinesische Waffen. Das “große Messer”. Starksehnige Bogen. Die Waffen wurden noch 1900 in der Antieuropäerbewegung gebraucht. Arabische Flinten.” (Balthasar, 1921, p. 34).

15 “Eine Lanzenspitze, die Fr. Korbinian beim Boxerkrieg erbeutete, vervollständigt die kirchliche Sammlung” (Crepaz, 1935, p. 44).

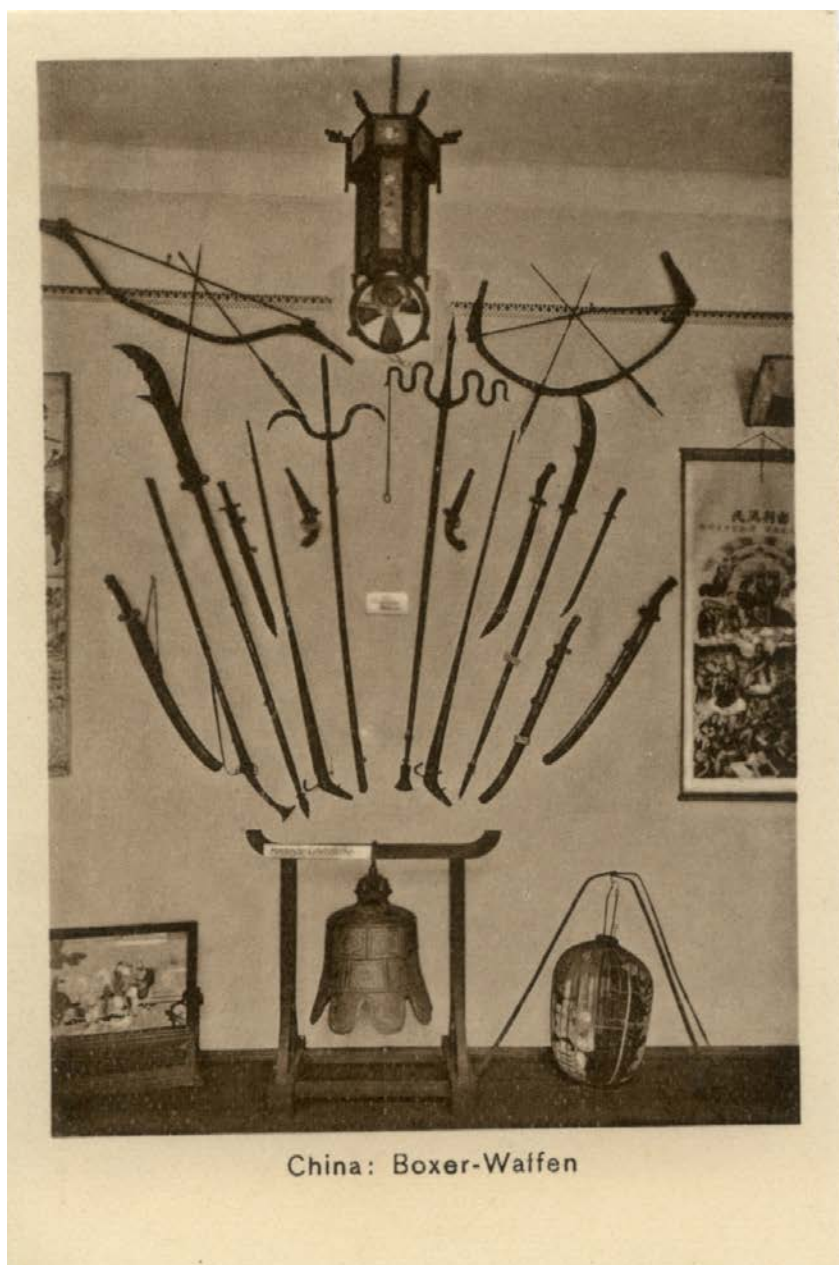


Figure 2. “China: Boxer Weapons” including armory from China but also guns from Albania displayed in the Missionary Museum in Dorsten around 1935, Chinese weapons probably of the 18/19th c., © *Franziskanerkloster Dorsten* ca. 1935, “Forum der Völker“, Werl

lived in an extra-legal space. Until 1919, the mission houses were entitled to bear arms, which were stamped by the Chinese military board. Due to their consular immunity, they were protected by European soldiers, the military or militia.¹⁶ It is not clear if the weapons in the “Forum der Völker“ were confiscated, expropriated or were part of the missionary’s property for their protection.

¹⁶ Lange (1928, fig. on p. 261); see the armed European soldiers to secure the catholic missionary station of Shanxi on two textile images (inv. no. 2921, 2923): one upon the arrival of the missionaries and the other upon the coming of a music group. The images of 1908 were collected by Dutch Franciscan of Sittard.

As shown in Figure 2, various kinds of weapons were hung together in the China section in the main hall of the Dorsten museum. This arrangement was kept unchanged in Werl in 2023, but it is misleading. The contexts of use of each of these arms are diverse and – more intriguing – one gun does not even originate from China. Due to the blade shape and length of the weapons, there are sabre (*dao*) of half-moon or oxtail shape, pistol, bows (*gong*), a spear and a trident (*ji*). Some were used by the army, such as the sword or a Manchu war and hunting bow, whereas a less forceful hunting or war bow was also used by peasants and militias.¹⁷ A single-barrelled steel tube rifle is wrongly attributed to the Chinese collection. It originates from Albania, as indicated by the museum's inventory as well as by the method of manufacture with an "A 5" stamp and the floral chasing with crescents.¹⁸ Various stories about the order's possession of weapons must thus be disentangled in order to clarify why these arms entered a missionary collection whose theological and ethical position demands pacifism and non-violence. Knowing more about the circumstances of the acquisition could also clear up whether there could be a context of violence at all.

In the early 1950s, the Chinese press strongly criticised the collecting of art-historical antiquities and the export of cultural goods by Catholic clergymen (Schütte, 1956, pp. 237, 239). With this background, some art works in the Missionary Museum in Dorsten should be further investigated, such as a small hand bell (*zhong*) of beehive shape without a clapper from the Shandong province (inv. no. 0354). Two inscriptions explain that it is intended as a "musical instrument for the sacred temple", made in 1741 during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (gov. 1736–1795) under the supervision of the district official Pan Long of Dongchangfu.¹⁹ Two dragons decorate the suspension. The bell is portioned in six panels with a *yin-yang* symbol, *ba-gua*-trigrams and eight knobs. Does the transfer from its dedicated Buddhist site to a Catholic institution indicate a devotional appropriation? Has it been re-used in a Franciscan church? Locally made church bells were commissioned by the missionaries, as is documented by undated photos of a Franciscan brother in North Shandong who rings a large church bell with a string. The bell's suspension is also decorated by dragons but the bell is of sugar loaf shape and furnished with a clapper – an object of transculturality.²⁰ By contrast, Chinese bells represented "noise instruments" among other music devices such as drums, cymbal, trombone.²¹ The derogatory interpretation alludes to the fact that missionaries brought objects from afar in order to highlight the counter-culture and differences they were facing in their missionary fields. A Franciscan brother reveals his ignorance towards cultural differences and explains: "The strangeness of the instruments shows how distant it [the music] is from our sensibilities" (Franziskaner-Missions-Ausstellung, n. d., p. 4). The Chinese instrument may have sounded different to European ears and therefore created this strong counter-image.

17 I am thankful for the expert opinion of Sabine Hesemann (personal communication April 19, 2023).

18 Balthasar (1921, p. 34) mentions "Arabic guns" which were hung together with the Chinese arms. Compare a photo of two rifle-bearing "Albanese" in the Franciscan journal (Harm, 1930, fig. p. 196).

19 The first inscription reads: Sheng-miao-yueqi, the second: Qianlong xinxian Dongchangfu tongzhi Pan Long jianzhi (Reinking, 1989, p. 122).

20 Album with 193 photos ("Bilder aus dem Franziskaner Vicariat", ca. 1913): no. 150 "Missionsglöckchen" (Small mission bell) and 160 "Glocke an der Wand eines Gebetshauses" (Bell at the wall of a prayer house).

21 "Die Eigenartigkeit der Instrumente zeigt schon, wie fern sie die Musik unserem Empfinden steht" (Franziskaner-Missions-Ausstellung, n.d., p. 4).

The museum holds 14 Chinese ancestor tablets (called *shén-zhu*) which date from the late 18th century to the middle of the 20th century. The ink inscriptions on the wooden plates clearly assign them to certain persons on the basis of the death dates, genealogical relations and names, including honouring titles or auspicious dates. One of them dated to 1772 is dedicated to the mother Li (1739–1772). Both the tablet and the white cover are inserted in a rectangular socket decorated by three scarves (inv. no. 0505). The cover holds the dedication of the son to his mother who was the first wife of his father and held the title *ru-ren*.²² A red stain draws attention to the fact that it was part of commemorative rituals, maybe a blood stain of an animal. The museum's guide in Dorsten explains that two of these tablets with a red dot on display symbolise the soul of deceased (Borgolte, 1929, p. 4). The tablets were placed in the house. Religious respect was required; the assistance of the deceased was asked. It is not known and therefore has to be examined how these ritual instruments, which were highly important for the Confucian ancestral belief, came into the possession of the Franciscan mission collections in Sittard, Dorsten, Munich or Hürtgenwald. For the missionaries they served as devices for ancestor veneration, thus as a notion of idolatry that is condemned by biblical faith. Ancestor tablets remained of high importance for the Chinese. Only in 1963 was the dispute in the Catholic missions settled by the Taiwanese bishops. In Catholicism, it was determined, ancestor tablets, offerings of fruits or food in remembrance of the deceased, stating his or her name, were permitted. However, neither the reference to the “seat of the soul” (*lingwei*) nor bowing, prostration or the burning of paper money was allowed (K. M, 1963, p. 150). Thus, more questions arise: Did a religious appropriation take place? Were the ancestor tablets given to the Franciscans voluntarily because the family converted to Christianity? Were they pressured by missionaries who took the tablets as devices of their conversion? Or did the family agree to give them away?

In order for provenance researchers to critically illuminate the background behind the missionaries' collecting activities of China objects, more archival work would be needed in order to evaluate the contexts of acquisitions case by case, such as an in-depth study of the order's publications, the missionaries' personal letters, a review of the image archives in Paderborn, where the Franciscan archive is located, and in the large visual collection in the museum of Werl as well as consulting the recording of the museum.

Private collections endowed to the missionaries

In the debate about collecting practices of art works obtained in the art trade or from private collectors, some practices have been recognised as unethical and some have also been proven to be illegal. A wooden and gilded panel (inv. no. 5930) from Beijing, bequeathed by Majonica in 1997, supposedly originates from the private apartments of Empress Cixi (1835–1908) in the new summer palace in Beijing (Figure 3). The finely carved relief may date to the 19th century or refer to an art work of 1735 of Emperor Qianlong. The motif might represent an arbitration scene, and shows a dance performance in a rich man's house. Musician and dancer perform in front of a pavilion where a bearded honorary is seated while a lady holds a fan next to him. The provenance information is given on a handwritten tag on the reverse of the panel and indicates that it either reproduces an

22 The cover reads “ancestor tablet for the deceased mother, first wife of the distinguished gentleman. The son sacrifices respectfully” (Xian bi dai zeng ru-ren yüan-pei yü tai-jün shen-zhu. Nan ko-heng feng-se). The tablet says that “The imperial house of the Manchu confers the title *ru-ren* to the mother Li, the first wife of the distinguished gentleman, official of the 7th grade, ancestor tablet of the first generation. Passed away on 28.12.1772 between 5–9 pm, born on 25.11.1739 in a golden hour (Reinking, 1989, p. 119).

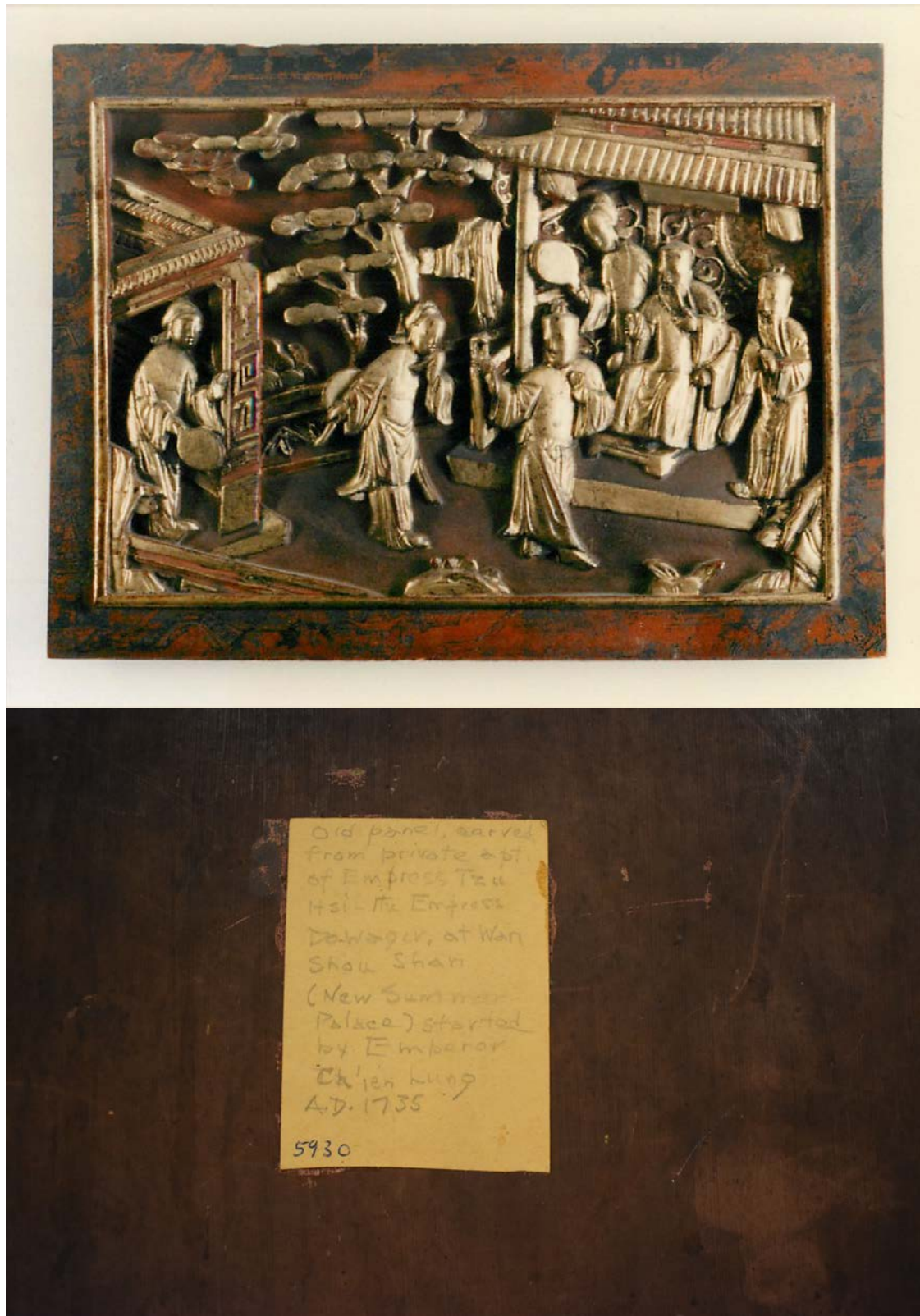


Fig. 3: Gilded wooden relief with music performance (inv. no. 5930, 21.5 x 28.5 cm), probably Beijing/ China, 18th or 19th century, donated by Ernst Majonica, © "Forum der Völker", Werl

art work or actually came from the Beijing palace and was thus looted during the Boxer War.²³ Who made this attribution? Is this information reliable or was it made to promote a better sale in the antiquities trade?²⁴ The attribution can therefore not be uncritically adopted as a provenance statement without doing more research on the iconography and art history of the object itself.

The “Forum der Völker” holds archaeological artefacts from West, Central and Southeast Asia which have to be examined in more detail as to their authenticity and acquisition background. According to Majonica, as representative of the embassy council on his trip to Afghanistan he exchanged 12 religious stone images, reliefs and sculpture from the 2nd–5th centuries for whisky (“Forum der Völker”, 2000, p. 842). The Buddhist images are fragments which might have been broken or damaged deliberately. They represent Gandhara art, connected to the kingdom of Kushan, which is located in Afghanistan and partly in Pakistan today, of high quality in terms of art history and style. The exchange of highly priced archaeological art works for alcohol seems extremely unequal. Or does this payment reflect a market-oriented price at that time? Were the objects looted, violated or stolen? Did he take profit of his official position to avoid taxes and other export restrictions? If so, Majonica supported the illegal export of antiquities and his clean reputation might fade.²⁵ He definitely supported the commodification of heritage goods.

The same collector also donated several religious statues from Thailand and Cambodia to the museum. If proven authentic, this cultural heritage of Southeast Asia also holds significant cultural and religious value for the countries of origin. During the political instability between the 1970s and 1990s in Cambodia, many of these artefacts were looted and transferred to other countries (Phalravy, 2024). More investigations on this stock of Buddhist images might reveal critical provenance backgrounds.

The museum in Werl served as a heritage keeper for non-European objects in the Westphalian region. Most often the provenance of bequests from private collectors, among them colonial-period administrators and military, is not known. Three examples from problematic contexts may demonstrate. In 1990, the museum director accessed a bow from Oceania owned by Adalbert Heppner (?–1917), an admiral of the Hohenzollern shipyard. In 2001, the director also acquired the bequest of photos and art works of the naval ship machinist Hermann Stilcke (1882–1962), including an ink pen with lion carving, silk, statuettes, clothing accessories, jewellery, paintings, and vessels made of porcelain or metal. In 1911, Stilcke was on board of the German gunboat *Iltis II* to China and he took a picture of the vivid art trafficking on the ship (Geilich, 2006, pp. 206–210). He obtained artefacts from China as souvenirs; the context of others such as a “sacred water vessel” seems sensitive. The image collection of the museum also consists of the sensitive holding of a photo album from around 1900–1905 compiled by prison chief guard Curt Arthur Tzschabran (1877–1936) who probably joined the Boxer War. The album shows German military personnel in China, the building of the German railway line and an execution. Four men are being beheaded, guarded by British and Japanese soldiers. Either Fr Kellerhoff did not know about the circumstances of these holdings or took these collectables without critical investigations.

23 It says: “Old panel, carved from private apt. of Empress Tzu Hsi-Hu Empress Do-Wager, at Wan Shou Shan (New Summer Palace) started by Emperor Ch’ien Lung A.D. 1735”.

24 The fact that warlike acquisition stories promoted art sales was pointed out by the speaker of the opening lecture Prof. Cord Eberspächer at the workshop held on March 2–3, 2023 (SMB, 2023).

25 His statement of “keeping his noses clean” (“Ich bin immer sauber durch’s Leben gegangen”) is the title of Kükenshöner, 2023.

Summary: Missionary collections and restitution initiatives

In the article, I have addressed objects, in particular ritual implements or religious arts, which were transferred to a Christian context by reinterpreting them as counter-images for the missionary task in terms of their so-called civilizing mission. Examples in the article reveal that Catholic missionaries commodified devices of local worship and showed an ambivalence towards human remains and weapons. I have referred to unclear changes of ownership, power relations and potentially sensitive contexts that demonstrate an extremely complex and ambivalent relationship between proselytizing actors and the proselytized societies. Some objects, partly donated by private collectors, were taken via looting, art and antiquities theft or just without permission.

Ethnographic missionary collections would pave the way to initiate collaborative museum work with the communities of origin in order to initiate dialogue and communication on their material culture (cf. Scholz, 2021). The renewed understanding of mission in the Catholic Church following the Second Vatican Council of 1962–1965 makes partnership-based cooperation likely today. First, it has to be clarified whether objects were obtained in sensitive contexts, were looted or taken without permission. Second, it has to be investigated if some objects stored in the mission collection have any significance for the communities of origin. Processes of reassessment and the search for tradition must also be taken into account, which often form the basis for negotiations in restitution processes. I therefore argue that direct contact with the communities of origin should be established proactively, arranged through the local Catholic churches in this region that emerged from the missions.

References

- Balthasar, K. (1921). *Franziskanerkloster und Missionsmuseum zu Dorsten i. W.* Druckerei des Provinzialates.
- Bernhardt, G. & Scheffler, J. (Eds.). (2001). *Reisen. Entdecken Sammeln. Völkerkundliche Sammlungen in Westfalen-Lippe*. Verlag für Regionalgeschichte.
- Bevern, A. van. (1935). Das Franziskanermuseum in Dorsten. Das grösste deutsche Missionsmuseum. 31 March 1935 [Newspaper article]. Archive of the “Forum der Völker”.
- “Bilder aus dem Franziskaner Vicariat North Schantung China” (ca. 1913). (LA2). No place, around 1913. Archive of the “Forum der Völker”.
- Borgolte, A. (1929). Das Dorstener Missionsmuseum! [Typewritten script] Archive of the “Forum der Völker”.
- Collani, C. von. (2013). Die Mission in der chinesischen Provinz Shandong im 20. Jahrhundert. In G. Collet & J. Meier (Eds.), *Geschichte der sächsischen Franziskanerprovinz: Missionen* (pp. 327–380). Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Crepaz, F. (1935). Unser Missionsmuseum. *Franziskaner Missionen*, 19, 31–31, 38–46. Archive of the Tiroler Franziskanerprovinz Hall in Tirol.

- Deutscher Museumsbund e. V. (2021). *Leitfaden Umgang mit menschlichen Überresten in Museen und Sammlungen*.
<https://www.museumsbund.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/dmb-leitfaden-umgang-menschl-ueberr-de-web-20210623.pdf>
- DZK. (2023). “Forum der Völker” Werl, project-ID: KK_KU03_2022.
<https://www.proveana.de/de/link/pro00000175>
- “Forum der Völker” (2000). *Dokumentation des Gesamtbestandes*, 3: “Asien Inv. Nr. 5742–8083”. Werl [unpublished inventory]. Archive of the “Forum der Völker”.
- Franziskanerkloster Dorsten i. W. Missionsmuseum* (ca. 1935). Graph. Kunstanstalt Kettling & Krüger Nr. 7787. Schalksmühle [Leporello]. Archive of the “Forum der Völker”.
- Franziskaner-Missions-Ausstellung (n. d.). [Typewritten script of a presentation at the Katholikentag probably in the 1930s]. Archive of the “Forum der Völker”.
- Geilich, B. (2006). Zu Land, zu Wasser, und in der Luft. Unbekannte Weiten in Bild- und Schriftzeugnissen deutscher Asienreisender zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts. In Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe (Ed.), *Die Ferne im Blick. Westfälisch-lippische Sammlungen zur Fotografie aus Mission und Kolonien* (pp. 198–225). Verlag für Regionalgeschichte.
- Herpich, R., Krogel, W., & Theilemann, C. (Eds.). (2023). *Bildkultur und Mission in China 1882–1914*. Aus dem Fotoarchiv des Berliner Missionswerkes. Wichern Berlin.
- Humboldt Forum (2022). Schrecklich Schön.
<https://www.humboldtforum.org/de/programm/feature/schrecklich-schoen-24718/>
- K. M. (1963). Duldung chinesischer Riten. *Die Katholischen Missionen*, 5, 150–151.
- Kellerhoff, R. (1999). “Forum der Völker” – das völkerkundliche Museum der Franziskaner. In Franziskanerkloster Werl (Ed.), *Franziskaner in Werl. 150 Jahre am Wallfahrtsort* (pp. 137–143). Dietrich Coelde.
- Kellerhoff, R. (2012). Museum “Forum der Völker”. In *Völkerkundemuseum der Franziskaner in Werl*. Josef Fink.
- Konrad, D. (2020). “Entfernte Dinge” – Objektgeschichten aus der Sammlung Basler Mission an Beispielen aus Ghana und Südchina. In *Museum der Kulturen*
<https://www.mkb.ch/dam/jcr:1971bfe8-aaed-4727-a658-fcffe1e47d43/Entfernte%20Dinge%20-%20Dagmar%20Konrad.pdf>
- Kükenshöner, G. (2023). Ernst Majonica, MdB MdEP “Ich bin immer sauber durch’s Leben gegangen”. *Verein für Geschichte und Heimatpflege Soest: Mitteilungen mit dem Veranstaltungsprogramm* 52 bis Dezember, 13–19.
- Lange, V. (1929). Das apostolische Vikariat Tsinanfu. *Franziskanische Missionsarbeit in China*. Verlag der Provinzial-Missionsverwaltung Werl.
- Leutner, M. & Mühlhahn, K. (Eds.). (2007). *Kolonialkrieg in China. Die Niederschlagung der Boxerbewegung 1900–1901*. Ch. Links Verlag.
- Missionsmuseum und Missionsausstellung. Prokuratorenkonferenz 23. Juni 1915 (1915). [Typewritten script] Archive of the “Forum der Völker”.

- Phalravy, K. (2024). Western museums join global movement in returning stolen artifacts to Cambodia. *Khmer Times*, 24 Jan. 2024. <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501419193/western-museums-join-global-movement-in-returning-stolen-artifacts-to-cambodia/>
- Reinking, G. (1989). *“Forum der Völker”: Völkerkundliches Museum der Franziskaner in Werl*. Dietrich-Coelde und Missionsmuseum Werl.
- Schlichte Werbegedanken für das katholische Missionswerk, zugleich Vergrößerung von der Missionsausstellung in Mittelbergbach 13-20.6.1913. Reinertrag für den Bau eines Marienkirchleins in Tengkien (Südchantung) (1913). Hausen.
- Scholz, M. (2021). Profis. Laien oder PR-Experten? Missionssammlungen und ihre Macher aus ethnologischer Perspektive. In J. Werz (Ed.), *Erblass "Mission"? Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf gegenwärtige Herausforderungen* (pp. 85–104). Aschendorff.
- Schütte, J. (1956). *Die katholische Chinamission im Spiegel der rotchinesischen Presse. Versuch einer missionarischen Deutung*. Aschendorffsche.
- SMB Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz (2023). Mitgenommen. *Provenance research on museum objects from the Boxer War*. <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-asiatische-kunst/about-us/whats-new/detail/workshop-on-2-3-march-2023-carried-away-research-into-the-provenance-of-museum-objects-from-the-boxer-war/>
- Sysling, F. (2016). *Racial science and human diversity in colonial Indonesia: Physical anthropology and the Netherlands Indies, ca. 1890–1960*. NUS.
- Tjoa-Bonatz, M. L. (2009). From idol to art. Missionary attitudes towards Indigenous worship on Nias, Indonesia, 1903–1920. In T. D. Dubois (Ed.), *Casting, imperialism and the transformation of religion in East and Southeast Asia* (pp. 105–128). Palgrave.
- Tjoa-Bonatz, M. L. (2016). Missionare und Kunst. Ein Spannungsfeld zwischen Kulturzerstörung und Kulturerhalt. *Indonesien Magazin*, 2 May 2016. <http://www.indonesienmagazin.de/index.php/wissen/152-missionare-und-kunst>
- Turnbull, P., et al. (Eds.). (2020). *Missionaries and the removal, illegal export, and return of ancestral remains. The case of Father Ernst Worms*. Routledge.
- Westemeyer, D. (1961/ 62). Das neue Werler Missionsmuseum. Idee, Dienst und Übersicht. *Vita Seraphica*, 42/43, 324–332.
- Wilms-Reinking, G. (2001). Gesellschaft der reisenden Brüder für Christus. Die Sammlungen Asien und Ozeanien des Museums “Forum der Völker” im Spiegel ihrer Sammler (1890–1950). In G. Bernhardt & J. Scheffler (Eds.), *Reisen. Entdecken Sammeln. Völkerkundliche Sammlungen in Westfalen-Lippe* (pp. 90–105). Verlag für Regionalgeschichte.
- Zegwaard, G. A. (1959). Headhunting practices of the Asmat of Netherlands New Guinea. *American Anthropologist*, 61(6), 1020–1041.

Collections off the grid, but in a net: In search for (de)colonial issues of South-Asian paintings

Caroline Widmer

Museum Rietberg – Zurich, Switzerland

Abstract

The starting point of this contribution is the observation that paintings and drawings from the Indian-Pakistani cultural area are rarely discussed in the context of decolonization of museums and their holdings.¹ What can be seen in the discourse of media is constituted in public and national interests, but even more in a systematic institutional blindness. Contrary to sculptures, the paintings and drawings were traditionally private property and had no viewing practice in a public sphere. Although I argue that the property changes leading to the entrance of those paintings and drawing into (Western) art collections and academic scholarship are strongly linked to problematic issues of colonial heritage and power imbalance. Further I support that museums do well to consider not only provenance related research but also their exhibition practices as approaches to decolonization.

Keywords: Indian-Pakistani art, decolonization, Indian painting

Résumé

Collections hors réseau, mais dans un filet : À la recherche des enjeux (dé)coloniaux des peintures sud-asiatiques

Cette contribution part de l'observation selon laquelle les peintures et dessins de la région culturelle indo-pakistanaise sont rarement discutés dans le contexte de la décolonisation des musées et de leurs collections. Le discours médiatique est constitué en faveur des intérêts publics et nationaux et, plus encore, reflète une cécité institutionnelle systématique. Contrairement aux sculptures, les peintures et dessins étaient traditionnellement des propriétés privées et n'avaient pas de pratique d'exposition dans une sphère publique. Je soutiens que les changements de propriété conduisant à l'intégration de ces peintures et dessins dans les collections d'art (occidentales) et dans la recherche académique sont fortement liés aux problématiques d'héritage colonial et de déséquilibre de pouvoir. De plus, je soutiens que les musées devraient considérer non seulement la recherche liée à la provenance, mais aussi leurs pratiques d'exposition comme des approches de la décolonisation.

Mots-clés : art indo-pakistanaise, décolonisation

1 Email: caroline.widmer@zuerich.ch

Discussions about the decolonization of museum objects and museums in general are imperative and necessary. Almost all museums in the Global North, collecting objects of the Global South, are somehow involved and required to participate. Some museums are more active than others. Though I am employed by a museum that is very progressive and has an extremely proactive approach to these issues, it is important to note that not all parts of the museum's collections get the same attention within these discussions. That is, not all collections can be treated the same way, not in terms of research or publicity, nor in terms of finance or emotions.

This contribution is meant to drop some notes and thoughts about a specific kind of object found in many art museums as well as in ethnographic museums, but one rarely on the top of the list of (de)colonial discussions: paintings and drawings from the Indian-Pakistani cultural area. I would like to raise questions about export, provenance, research, publishing, dealing, handling and exhibition practice, arguing that the discussions have to include the times both before and after the colonial era as being times of power imbalances and colonial precarity or consequences. These issues are embedded in a complex net of social, financial, political and legal questions that apply to many collections and objects around the world.

I base my text on the experience of everyday work as a curator in a museum, and my comments are not meant to be complete or systematic. Nor is it my aim to complain or blame anybody. The concrete field of work is the Museum Rietberg in Zurich (Switzerland), and many examples are taken from this spot.

Rarely discussed objects

What is meant by the statement that paintings and drawings from South Asia are rarely mentioned in discussions about colonialism and decolonization or are titled as being “off the grid”?

Three recent examples drawn from public perceptions and media coverage illustrate the different perception of South Asian sculptures and paintings. The examples are simplified and not necessarily linked directly to a colonial context but can be taken as representative of the complex situation. All three examples are connected to legal export practices and provenance research.

From the legal point of view, the situation is as easy as it is clear: Provenance is important to define a legal export. We have the UNESCO Convention of 1970, which is of course historically strongly linked with an archaeological background and does not focus on manuscripts. But there is also the Antiquity Act of India of 1972, which regulates the export of antiquities and explicitly includes manuscripts.

In 2011, a well-known art dealer with worldwide connections and a gallery in New York City was arrested at Frankfurt Airport by Fedpol. Subhash Kapoor was accused of stealing and smuggling art objects from India, Nepal and other Asian countries and of selling them illegally. More than 2,500 objects could be identified in worldwide collections. Not only private collections were involved but also public and private museums and galleries. Kapoor faked export licenses and provenance files. Buyers were deceived on purpose. Even today, museums (as well as private networks) are still identifying objects tracing back to

Kapoor's illegal practices. In 2022, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison in India. Newspapers all around the world reported extensively about this case, including examples and photographs of the objects in question. The story is complicated and provides crime authors with potentially a wide range of material, but the fact is only very few paintings are mentioned in the entire media coverage, mostly in two contexts. The National Gallery of Australia returned 14 works in 2021, including one painted scroll (Solomon, 2021). The Metropolitan Museum of New York also very proactively informed authorities of its search for "infected" objects in its collection, including paintings and drawings (Solomon, 2023). As a consequence, in March 2023, the Met announced the repatriation of 15 sculptures to the government of India² (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2023).

In May of 2023, newspapers spread the information that the Indian government was preparing "the largest repatriation claim faced by the UK" (Harris, 2023). This piece of information has quickly been challenged by official sources, but it created quite some turmoil. The examples mentioned included many sculptures, jewelries and bronzes – but in this case not a single painting. Recently realized repatriations of Indian art to India, effectively put on stage by the media, are closely linked to a personal and political commitment of India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, making the broad decolonization of India and the repatriation of India's artifacts a major priority. Since Modi's inauguration in 2014, the number of repatriated antiquities to India has increased extensively (Oehler & Schaffer, 2024). The handover of 200 stolen artifacts by the US to the Indian government in 2016 was accomplished by a ceremony with the prime minister. Again, however, the images published were only of sculptures and bronzes.

One of the rare big news items dedicated to Indian paintings with problematic provenance occurred when the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford rejected the collection of Indian paintings from Howard Hodgkin, a British artist who passed away in 2017. His art collection included a famous and very exquisite collection of about 120 Indian paintings. His dream of the Ashmolean being home to his entire Indian painting collection failed because of provenance concerns. Despite intensive research, a considerable portion of the collection remained unclear in terms of origin. In July 2022, the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired 84 of these paintings and took the rest with unclear provenance on long-term loan from the Howard Hodgkin Indian Collection Trust. In the ensuing press release, India's official perspective is given by Randhir Jaiswal, Consul General of India in New York:

We warmly welcome the Howard Hodgkin Collection to The Met – an institution with deep and engaging ties with India. This special bond has been nurtured through its rich and varied collection of Indian art and heritage, and the conversations that have happened over decades. With the Howard Hodgkin Collection coming to The Met, a new chapter is being written in this ever-flowing cultural engagement. What makes this acquisition even more special is that it is happening at a time when India celebrates 75 years of its independence and democracy. I am sure visitors to the Museum are going to enjoy the collection and enrich their understanding of India, its people, and their history. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2022)

2 See also: von Schwerin, U. (2023, November 28). *Indiens geraubte Götter: Wie ein New Yorker Galerist gestohlene Skulpturen bis nach Zürich verkauft hat*. NZZ. <https://www.nzz.ch/international/indiens-geraubte-goetter-und-die-spur-nach-zuerich-ld.1762334>

Although the question of the legal property of Indian painting is on stage, pushed by the issues of the Ashmolean Museum's decision, issues of repatriation, legitimacy and colonial heritage are neither discussed nor mentioned.

Context for institutional blindness

One reason for the “off the grid” state of South Asian paintings and drawings may lie in their historical context, the circumstances of their production, holding, audience and viewing practices.

Origins of Indian paintings

What are usually called “Indian paintings” are paintings and drawings from the Indian-Pakistani cultural area, usually pigment paintings on (burnished and layered) paper. The average sizes are comparable to standard-A4, sometimes smaller, sometimes bigger, but rarely much bigger. In the Western context they are often described as “miniature paintings”, a label that is completely unknown in the original context but borrowed from European book illustration and matching with the small size of the paintings – the figures depicted are small, the heads usually only as big as a human thumbnail.

We can roughly distinguish between Mughal painting, produced in the context of the Mughal courts with attached workshops, and the courtly paintings circulating in the Hindu kingdoms of the region which is now India and Pakistan. Both Mughal and courtly painting influenced each other and lived side by side. The oldest paintings on paper date back to the 14th or 15th centuries, and the tradition is still living. It is important that this kind of painting was traditionally restricted to a courtly context. Once the paintings left the artist and his atelier, only the members of the court, their families, friends and guests had access to them. They were not meant for public. Paintings were private property, circulated as gifts, on private and political levels, and were spoils in violent conflicts. They were viewed in privacy, by single persons or in small and well-chosen groups, taken out on purpose from a well-kept and supervised storage (see figure 1). This means that paintings had a totally different viewing practice, property situation, audience and locality than sculptures and bronzes or archaeological pieces. Sculptures usually come from the much older religious and ritual context of a temple, relate to a wider community and can be treated as core objects for establishing a religious and national identity. Paintings were never in the public interest in the way that idols were, and they were never inscribed with the glamour of jewelry.



Figure 1: Purkhu from Kangra (attributed), Maharaja Sansar Chand contemplates paintings with his courtiers. Photo © Rainer Wolfsberger, Museum Rietberg, Inv. No. 2005.9

How the paintings came to Europe

Another reason for a relative blindness to (de)colonial issues around Indian paintings may be the way Indian paintings came into European or general Western collections. It seems at first to be unproblematic: being portable and private property for generations, the paintings were sold or donated by members of princely states. Especially if this happened before 1970 or 1972, there seemed to be no legal reason to intervene or to be alarmed.

In fact, and rarely mentioned, not all the paintings were produced for Rajput families or the Mughal emperors. From the 17th century onwards, the market for paintings opened up, and selected noblemen or Europeans could buy and commission from the same artists as could the members of the different Indian courts. Important collections and albums were put together in the 18th century, at a time when the colonial power was not yet established in India, as for example the well-known album of Antoine-Louis Henri de Polier. The Schlegel Albums held in Dresden are dated from that time and the Museum Rietberg received in 2023 a then-unknown collection of Indian paintings bought by a trader and pharmacist from Yverdon (Switzerland) before 1770.

The argument for unclear provenance of Indian paintings and drawings that is often stated is that in former times the question of provenance or acquisition context was just not of interest for collectors and institutions. This may be true for some cases, but by no means for all. Especially for Indian paintings, as many collections were established at a time the legal conditions were set already, this argument does not work at all. And even before, there were many real efforts for a collaborative exchange of goods or a correct export. An early example: It was in the 1960s when Elsy Leuzinger, then director of the Museum Rietberg, tried to acquire the first paintings for the museum. The correspondence with Alice Boner, a Swiss artist and collector living more than forty years in India, shows that they not only discussed style, value and subjects of paintings but also the process of legal export. Later in the 1980s, it was the legacy of Alice Boner, including not only Indian sculptures but also more than 250 paintings, that initiated today's collection of Indian paintings in Zurich.

But if we have a closer look, there are problematic aspects of property-change strongly connected to colonialism. I want to touch on three points.

First, the often-used label “Indian painting” is questionable. As mentioned before, the objects discussed here have their origin in a cultural region that has undergone major political and national changes. The places where the paintings and drawings were produced and circulated belong now to different nation states: India and Pakistan.³ The differentiation of these states is the result of their decolonization and independence processes in the 1940s. If we talk only about “Indian” painting, therefore, a considerable portion of the objects, collections, painters, workshops, etc. are excluded. Within the process of the national partition, collections have been partitioned as well. Paintings and painting sets have been distributed, for example, among the two countries' National Museums. Nowadays, rules for exporting art works are different in India and in Pakistan.

Second, shortly before and during colonial times, most of the formerly ruling families in India lost not only power and influence but also income. Selling property was one possibility to gain money and, in the end, to survive. However, art was also sold or donated

3 Bangladesh would be included as well; however, it plays a minor role for this field.

to friends, and possibly some royal offspring simply lost interest in these old things. The financial decline, caused or accelerated by the colonial rulers, was a considerable reason for selling. Some of the early European collectors – that means the collectors interested in South Asian drawings and painting before, during or shortly after Indian Independence – were undoubtedly somehow connected with the colonial powers. They were part of the ruling system and had access to the social, financial and administrative elite and only these connections enabled them to get in touch with those possessing, collecting and enjoying art – and also dealing with it.

Third, a narrative which remains strongly present in the memories and perspectives of some royal families is the fear of seizure and confiscation of property by the Indian government. In 1947, when India became independent, the Privy Purse was remitted. It was a payment made to the ruling families to integrate the princely states and end their ruling rights after independence. Explanations of this law do not explicitly mention it, but following the narrative of the formerly ruling families, the law included or was connected to a seizure. In the early 1970s, during the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi, the royal families were heavily pressured. Around the same time, the UNESCO Convention and the Antiquity Act of India were adopted. To save their property, royal descendants turned their art collections into trusts, sold artifacts or sent them abroad. The sudden and massive appearance of Indian paintings on the Western art market was the consequence. Meant as a decolonizing and inclusive strategy in a state-building process of independence after decades of colonialism, the law turned into a catalyst for the distribution of historical and cultural artifacts. Today, the typical provenance of an Indian painting or drawing starts around 1970/72, as being part of a (private) Western collection (meaning the object was out of India).

Academic profile and qualification as art object

Another, completely different aspect of colonial heritage in collections is their academic profile and scholarship. First of all, in a Western perspective the academic interest in a subject is crucial to create and construct a so-called authoritative and objective knowledge about this subject. The language, categories and vocabulary used by scholars to describe, value and categorize certain objects have to be consistent with the academic system of the Western World. And it has often had major effects on the art market.

For a very long time, Indian and Pakistani paintings and drawings played a minor role in the context of Indian art. In introductory books about Indian art (published in the Western world in books far too expensive for many Indian libraries or students), painting was (and still is) – if represented at all – in general reduced to a small chapter which focuses on Mughal painting and maybe a comment on mural paintings. Penguin Random House, for example, included only in the 1980s manuscripts or paintings in their introduction to Indian art, which can be interpreted as a reaction to the presence of paintings from the Hindu courts on the Western art market in a considerable quantity. This is remarkable, because the academic interest in Indian painting (not only focused on Mughal folios) started in 1916 at the latest with A. K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947). Born in Colombo to a Tamil father and an English mother, Coomaraswamy was mainly educated abroad. Being interested in philosophy and philosophy of art, he was the first scholar to establish elementary categories for the classification of Indian paintings and to publish about it internationally. In his work, he used not only Western concepts of art and philosophy but also references to Indian sources and vocabulary. Since Coomaraswamy, South Asian painting as an academic field has always been strongly influenced by Indian and Pakistani scholars. The most important

developments and findings have been due to the efforts of Indian and Pakistani scholars, authors and artists such as Karl J. Kandhalavala (1904-1995), M.S. Randhawa (1909-1986), B.N. Goswamy (1933-2023), F.S. Aijazuddin (*1942), Vidya Dehejia (*1942), Kavita Singh (1964-2023) and many more.

Still, terms originating from Western art history are used not only for description but for qualifying paintings and drawings from South Asia. Styles not matching the Western claims are – to exaggerate a little – labelled as “more Indian” or “more original” or “Indigenous” or “without Western influence” or “naïve”. Is that the reason for the early appreciation of the paintings from the Mughal courts (and later paintings from the Pahari region as well), with their more realistic style, color gradients and environmental compositions? Indian painting is often described as highly emotional, lyrical, leading the audience to fantastic or mystical realms – a world of dreams and visions. Whose perspective is this? And how to combine that with Indian aesthetic philosophical terms in Sanskrit? How many Western connoisseurs understand Sanskrit?

Of course, there are many Indian collections, extensive and published, public and private. But the Indian world of art is still not easy to access, and it works as an internal market. Publications of Western museums and collections are still very important for provenance, identification and prizing. These publications ennoble objects and are sometimes even name-giving. The same painting is more interesting for the market if it comes from a well-known Western collector, has a parallel in a Western museum or is part of an according object-group.⁴ This is of course not news, not at all singular to the field of Indian and Pakistani painting and not even all-encompassing or absolute – but it is still relevant for an effort toward a broad decolonization of collections.

A further aspect goes again back to the origins of the paintings and drawings. At court they were not only used in contexts of entertainment but also in educational processes and practices. Some of them had a deeply spiritual context. They were painted in sets or series and viewed as such by people trained or being trained in culture, literature, religion and aesthetics. Reducing them to objects of art in a Western sense and dispersing them to collections worldwide is depriving the paintings of an essential part of their meaning. While it is not possible to bring back the original context of the paintings, it is important to attempt to reconstruct it, communicate it and take it into account.

Exhibition and viewing practices

Finally, decolonizing collections includes decolonizing exhibition practices and means to provide visitors with information about the context of production, use and history (including provenance) of an artifact. The way they are presented to the audience can vary, and this variance is essential for their perception. I will finish with two examples connected to the viewing practice of Indian and Pakistani paintings and drawings in their historical context.

As already mentioned, the paintings were originally viewed by single persons or small groups on specific occasions. When not being viewed, they were wrapped in fabrics and

⁴ See auctions, referring to the collector, celebrating his or her artistic taste, e.g.: <https://www.christies.com/en/auction/an-eye-enchanted-indian-paintings-from-the-collection-of-toby-falk-30313/> overview (visited in April 2024).

For objects named after a Western collection see: <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/2018.179> or <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/37875> or, as an attempt of renaming https://emp-web-101.zetcom.ch/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t1.collection_lightbox (visited in April 2024)



Figure 2: Park-Villa Rieter: showcases for Indian painting at Museum Rietberg, Zurich.
Photo © Caroline Widmer

stored in wooden boxes or trunks. They were not meant to hang on walls, not for months (during an exhibition) or years (at home for decoration). While contemplating a painting, the connoisseur held it in his hands, moved it in the light and could go very close with his eyes. He or she was sitting comfortably and may have enjoyed music, drinks, food or a hookah (see figure 1).

For several reasons a museum cannot create such a situation of art contemplation, but it makes a huge difference to look at an Indian painting hanging on the wall rather than at an angle which is at least close to the way one would look at it while holding it. That was the way they were meant to be seen; they were painted for this perspective, and it is possible to construct showcases for such a presentation (see figure 2).

Paintings and drawings from the Indian or Pakistani cultural area are almost always composed with a border. The loose folios can be grasped at the border, paintings can be enlarged with borders, albums are characterized by borders – borders have a wide range of functions and information. Museums and publishers have the choice to present a painting showing only the painted section or the entire folio including the border. The significance of the border is something which has been dismissed for a long time and still goes on (see figure 3).



Figure 3: Not yet identified master of the Mughal workshop, Portrait of a Mughal Prince, detail and full folio. Photo © Rainer Wolfsberger, Museum Rietberg, Inv. No. 2023.326

Tentative conclusion

Discourse of media, origins, provenance, use and property, academic profile and viewing practices are the aspects taken from daily work as a curator for “Indian paintings” in a public museum, all of which are linked to the question of decolonization of collections in museums and academic institutions. This list is far from being complete and we could also talk about questions traditionally treated in art history as style developments, subjects, techniques, materials and workshop situations, among others. Collaborative projects with scholars and artists and connoisseurs from the countries of origin are necessary and have been initialized in many institutions for years.⁵ A collaborative approach to research, collection management, acquisition, publishing and exhibition planning seems to be the only way not only to work on colonial heritage but also to find an inclusive and future-oriented handling of collections. It is important to take as many perspectives into account as possible; to step back from monopolizing knowledge and to approve knowledge (including terms, categories, languages etc.) rooted outside the Western academic scholarship, and to concede non-Western aesthetics. However, the projects have to be independent in structure and politics and need to take into account that colonial aspects or workings are not restricted to colonial times. The question of power is still relevant: who pays, decides, selects projects and

⁵ To mention only one example related to Indian painting: <https://rietberg.ch/en/research/gbf-program-2>

people working on them? And for what reason? Collaboration is not needed for reasons of manifestation of ideologies or because it is *en vogue*. Shouldn't the goal be the intrinsic motivation – in my case about the paintings and drawings of the Indian-Pakistani cultural area – to negotiate joint knowledge and historiography?

References

- Harris, G. (2023, May 15). Indian government challenges British newspaper report that it is making 'largest repatriation claim' against UK. *The Art Newspaper*.
<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/05/15/india-to-launch-largest-ever-repatriation-campaign-against-uk-for-return-of-heritage-looted-during-colonial-rule>
- Oehler, M. & Schaffer, S. (2024, January 3). *Wie der umtriebigste Kunsthändler der Welt indische Götter stahl und bis nach Zürich verkaufte*. [Podcast]. NZZ
<https://www.nzz.ch/podcast/indien-die-geraubten-goetter-podcast-nzz-akzent-ld.1769497>
- Solomon, T. (2021, July 29). National Gallery of Australia returns artifacts bought from disgraced dealer to India. *ARTnews*. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/national-gallery-of-australia-returns-indian-artifacts-subhash- Kapoor-1234600261/>
- Solomon, T. (2023, March 17). Investigation links more than 77 Indian antiquities in the Met's collection to prolific trafficker Subhash Kapoor. *ARTnews*.
<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/metropolitan-museum-of-art-subhash- Kapoor-investigation-1234661322/>
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2022, July 21). *The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquires more than 80 paintings and drawings from the Howard Hodgkin Indian Collection*. [Press release].
<https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2022/howard-hodgkin-collection>
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2023, March 30). *The Met to return 15 sculptures to India*. [Press release].
<https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2023/returning-sculptures-to-india>

Transformation in the National Museum of Indonesia: Never-ending decolonisation

Nusi Lisabilla Estudiantin

Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology
– Jakarta, Indonesia

Abstract

Colonial practices in Indonesia that lasted for hundreds of years greatly influenced various aspects of life in a nation.¹ In the postcolonial era, the phenomenon of decolonisation developed in the former colonial countries. One of the decolonising issues that has been on the rise lately is decolonising in museums, including in Indonesia. The National Museum of Indonesia is the largest and most comprehensive museum in Indonesia. After independence, the National Museum did not change its appearance and narrative. Colonial thoughts and perspectives are very strong in this museum. The decolonising of museums in Indonesia is often associated with national identity and pride as an Indonesian nation which leads to the strengthening of national character. Decolonising a museum by changing its face requires a long process and is not an easy thing to do in practice. Gradually, efforts to decolonise the National Museum of Indonesia began in 2004 and have continued to this day.

Keywords: colonial, decolonisation, the national museum of Indonesia, national identity

Resumen

Transformación en el Museo Nacional de Indonesia: Una descolonización sin fin

Las prácticas coloniales en Indonesia, que duraron cientos de años, influyeron enormemente en varios aspectos de la vida nacional. En la era poscolonial, se desarrolló el fenómeno de la descolonización en los países antiguamente colonizados. Uno de los problemas de descolonización que ha estado en aumento últimamente es la descolonización de los museos, incluyendo en Indonesia. El Museo Nacional de Indonesia es el más grande y completo del país. Después de la independencia, el Museo Nacional no modificó su apariencia ni su narrativa. Los pensamientos y perspectivas coloniales son muy prominentes en este museo. La descolonización de los museos en Indonesia frecuentemente se asocia con la identidad nacional y el orgullo como nación indonesia, lo que fortalece el carácter nacional.

1 Email: d.nirartha70@gmail.com

Descolonizar un museo cambiando su imagen requiere un proceso largo y no es algo fácil de hacer en la práctica. Gradualmente, los esfuerzos para descolonizar el Museo Nacional de Indonesia comenzaron en 2004 y han continuado hasta hoy.

Palabras clave: colonialismo, descolonización, Museo Nacional de Indonesia, identidad nacional

Nusantara or archipelago², the name for the range of islands from west to east between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, between the Asia Continental and Australia Continental, is a fertile and prosperous land. Its strategic location makes it a passing place for traders from various parts of the world. Since the beginning of the first century CE, the archipelago has been in contact with Chinese and Indian traders. As a spice-producing country, it then attracted the attention of Europeans to buy nutmeg and cloves. Unexpectedly, the spice trade became the beginning of colonial practice in the archipelago.

In 1511, at the beginning of the arrival of the Portuguese in the archipelago to look for spices, they managed to monopolize the spice trade in the eastern part of the archipelago, especially in Maluku. In 1596, the Dutch also came to look for spices and colonies. After the Portuguese left the archipelago, the Dutch began to grip the archipelago, especially when, in 1602, the VOC, the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* or Dutch East India Company, was formed, which had a monopoly on the archipelago's spice trade. The colonial drama began.

In addition to the trade monopoly, restrictions on rights and space for native populations were imposed, with slavery practices, forced cultivation, tax collection, confiscation of people's land and property, racism, and military expeditions. Resistance was carried out by the natives in the form of both physical war and diplomacy.

The Republic of Indonesia achieved independence in 1945. However, the practice of colonialism, which has been rooted for hundreds of years, has created misery in various aspects of life. Postcolonial decolonising took place in government and society in the social, political, economic, and cultural fields, although it was progressing slowly because the colonial influence is powerful.

In Indonesian museums, the issue of decolonising has only emerged in the last two decades, although in a different term, by changing a traditional museum into a modern one. Several museology scholars who studied abroad in the 1990s began to launch new thoughts and paradigms about museums but did not explicitly mention museum decolonising. The issue of changing the mindset and paradigm of traditional (colonial) museums to modern (post-colonial) museums became a lively conversation in the early 2000s in the museum world in Indonesia. The National Museum of Indonesia has also been in the spotlight and received a lot of criticism from academics, museologists, the community, and others for why it has remained a traditional museum after post-independence for decades. This paper describes the long history of the National Museum of Indonesia trying to rise from the status of a very colonial traditional museum by changing the concept, narration, and appearance of the museum through a process of decolonising.

2 Nusantara is a former name of Indonesia

History of the National Museum of Indonesia

The long history of the National Museum of Indonesia began with the founding of the *Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*, or The Batavian Society for Arts and Sciences (BG). This organization was founded during the occupation of the Dutch East Indies government in Indonesia. On April 24, 1778, this society was formed with the permission of the Governor General of the Netherlands East Indies, Reiner de Klerk. The main objective of the BG was to encourage research that is useful for progress in the natural sciences, health improvement, and agriculture. The history and customs of Indonesian ethnic groups were also used as topics of study. However, these latter fields only received full attention after 1850.

Initially occupying a building owned by J.C.M. Radermacher on Jalan Kali Besar west of the capital, the Batavian Society for Arts and Sciences later became the foundation for a museum and library with the motto *Ten Nutte van het Algemeen*, meaning “for the public interest”.

Since its establishment, the society has collected cultural objects and received items from members donating their collections. This society was also active in producing research articles and scientific journals which were widely spread to various countries. The collections grew: a year later (1779) this society developed into a museum and was open to the public every Wednesday, from 08.00 to 10.00 in the morning (Hardiati, 2005).

During the British rule in Java (1811-1816), Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles provided an additional building behind the *Societeit de Harmonie* building to accommodate the growing collection. This building was located on Jalan Majapahit no. 3 (now the site of the State Secretariat Building). The collections were moved there in 1814.

As the collection continued to expand and the space behind the *Societeit de Harmonie* was no longer able to accommodate the collections, the Dutch East Indies government decided to provide a new building for the society. In 1862, the construction of a new neo-Classical style building was designed for a museum in the *Koningsplein* West area, now known as *Jalan Medan Merdeka Barat*. In 1868, the museum opened to the public. In 1923, this society received the title *Koninklijk* from Queen Wilhelmina for its services in the scientific field and government projects, so the name of the society became *Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen*, or the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences.

After Indonesian independence in 1945 this society underwent several changes in the name and organizational structure of the museum. On January 26, 1950, the *Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* changed its name to the Indonesian Cultural Institute (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia*). On September 17, 1962 the Indonesian Cultural Institute handed over the management of the museum to the Indonesian government, which later changed its name to the Central Museum. Finally, based on the Decree No.092/0/1979 of the Minister of Education and Culture, dated 28 May 1979, the Central Museum was upgraded to become the National Museum.

In 1996, on the initiative of the Minister of Education and Culture, Wardiman Djojonegoro, the expansion of the new building began. This museum building offers a more modern exhibition concept. The first phase of construction of the new museum building (Building B) was successfully completed and opened in 2006. The next construction is Building C, which is currently in the final construction stage.

The National Museum of Indonesia has, thus, undergone various changes and developments in its history, spanning nearly two and a half centuries, including changes in the location of the museum, changes in the name and organizational structure, expansion and development of the building. Changes in the exhibition concept (decolonising) and museum display are merely two of the most recent.

Colonising never ends in the National Museum of Indonesia?

The National Museum of Indonesia has not undergone significant changes in the interior of the building and exhibition concept during postcolonialism until early 2000. On its 100th anniversary, the *Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* launched a book containing the development of the society. This book shows several images of the building along with its plan, drawn up in 1877, and its exhibition room. The layout shows that the exhibitions were arranged in categories of collection types. There were six exhibition rooms consisting of Hindu and Buddhist statues, ethnography, gold, bronze and antiques, shadow puppets, and numismatics.



Figure 1: Ethnography Gallery, © Museum Nasional, 1930. Photo Leiden University Library (KITLV).

One hundred years later, the exhibition concept was still very simple and did not pay attention to the aesthetic elements and safety of the collections. Some exhibition rooms were arranged like shops, others like storage. The museum only contained displays of the antiques, and the narrative was limited.

Entering the 20th century, the exhibition space underwent changes and expansion. In the minutes of the society's meeting on July 1, 1912, it was stated that there were plans to build a second floor at the front of the museum and at the end of 1915 the construction of this second floor had been completed.

The second floor was used as an exhibition space for a collection of gold and bronze. In the minutes of the May 11, 1931 meeting, it was stated that there were extension plans for the museum, especially for ceramics and prehistoric rooms. In 1932, construction of the extensive museum was completed.

The Dutch East Indies government also paid great attention to this museum, providing a large budget for research in remote areas of the country as well as revitalizing its permanent exhibitions. In the exhibition rooms there were new vitrines, modern at that time, made from sturdy teak wood with various types and sizes adapted to the shape and needs of the collections. At the bottom of the vitrines there were shelves that functioned as collection storage.

The concept and the narrations of the exhibitions in 1930s underwent no significant changes; they were still from a colonial perspective, as shown by the ethnography gallery. The archipelago was described as a collection of islands inhabited by various very traditional ethnic groups, and it was equipped with cultural objects with simple narratives. This permanent exhibition presented artifacts that were considered exotic, moreover, demonstrating the colonial power over the colonies.

In the immediate postcolonial era, the museum underwent no changes. This can be seen in the exhibition plan published in 1948. The museum was in a declining condition and almost closed after independence because, one by one, the museum employees returned to the Netherlands, and there was no longer any financial support from the government. This is understandable because the government of the Republic of Indonesia at that time was in a critical situation, which prioritized programs to form a solid government and make improvements in the social, political, security, and economic fields. Luckily, some of the remaining museum workers volunteered to keep the museum open to the public and, most importantly, to safeguard the national treasures because the security situation at that time was not conducive.

In 1960-1980, the museum began to reorganize, but this was not significant considering that revitalizing the museum required a large budget. Since independence until the late 1990s, there were few significant changes, only reductions and exchanges of exhibition space. The concept and display of colonial patrimony continued.

However, consecutively from 2007 to 2010 and 2012, the appearance of the old building's exhibition room was transformed. The appearance was made somewhat modern by paying attention to graphic design, narrative, and lighting, without changing the storyline of the exhibition. The curators did not have the opportunity to conduct provenance research, and apart from that, some curators still have traditional paradigms about provenance originating from colonial perspective.

The exhibition space became more lively, large colorful graphics, lighting, and informative narratives, so that visitors can more easily understand the messages conveyed in the exhibition. Despite widespread praise for this change, though, criticism persists because, once again the colonial aroma still lingers and seems difficult to avoid.

Decolonising the National Museum of Indonesia

When Building B (the new building located next to the old/colonial building) was completed in 2004, the National Museum designed a new concept in collaboration with experts from various fields, such as archaeologists, anthropologists, historian, prehistorian and museologist. It took the form of a thematic exhibition storyline adopted from the seven universal elements of culture, consisting of:

- (1) religious systems and religious ceremonies
- (2) social systems and organizations
- (3) knowledge systems
- (4) language
- (5) arts
- (6) livelihood systems
- (7) living equipment systems and technology

According to Indonesian anthropologist Koentjaraningrat, cultural elements are universal and can be found in the culture of all nations spread across the world. However, two cultural elements are not presented in the exhibition gallery due to a lack of space: the religious systems and religious ceremonies, as well as the arts. Instead, the priority collections are presented, such as the collection of golds/treasures and foreign ceramics on the fourth floor.

The idea of decolonising the National Museum started in the early 2000s. However, at that time the term *museum decolonisation* was not widely known. Efforts to decolonise have been advocated since 2004 by removing the influence of a colonial perspective from what was interpreted as a more modern display system.

However, the public continues to criticize this permanent exhibition because the narrative is considered to adopt a colonial view. Anthropologist Iwan Pirous³, one of the Focus Group Discussion participants to review the exhibition at the National Museum in 2014, gave the example of the treasure room, which displays many heirlooms looted from local kingdoms by the Dutch army during military expeditions. The war between the Dutch and the local kingdoms is not told from the perspective of the cultural actors (Indigenous people), but from the perspective of the colonialists (as the winners of the war).

The tragic aspects of the war seem to be kept under wraps and considered unimportant to convey to visitors. The royal heirloom thus seemed to be a trophy symbol of colonial victory. Decolonising has not been completely successful.

3 The FGD participants were asked to write down their opinions and views after seeing the exhibition rooms in building A and building B as the recommendations for the museum's transformation.



Figure 2: The Treasure Room shows the collections of National Hero Prince Diponegoro.
© National Museum of Indonesia. Photo by the author, 2020.

New themes, decolonising themes

In 2014, an overhaul of the concept and storyline of exhibitions began in Building A and Building B. The National Museum curators worked with experts in their field to develop a new storyline. Tough and lengthy discussions were held. There were two different views: Team A, which was very anticolonial, wanted to radically change the entire display system. Everything influenced by the Dutch must be removed, they said, not only the concept and storyline of the exhibition but also the interior and exhibition facilities, including the vitrines in the old building. Team B agreed to the changes, but this more romanticist team wanted a bit of Dutch heritage to be left as part of the history of this museum.

By accommodating inputs from various parties, the preparation of the storyline, which took up to three years, resulted in three major themes that are applied to the two museum buildings:

1. Becoming Indonesia (Building A)
2. Indonesian Heritage (Building A)
3. Sustainable Indonesia (Building B)

In 2016, a temporary exhibition was held to try out the theme of Becoming Indonesia. This exhibition aimed to capture visitors' opinions to be used as recommendation material when the museum implemented the storyline in a permanent exhibition. In 2019, the themes of

Becoming Indonesia and Indonesian Heritage began to be installed in Building A, a heritage from the Dutch, and were completed in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic brought this project to a halt.

The theme of Becoming Indonesia was applied in the old Ethnography room. This is a very significant breakthrough because the space had not changed since the 1800s. The narrative it built strengthens the identity of the Indonesian people as a nation that is independent, tolerant, cultured and upholds the values of humanity and unity.

The gallery of Becoming Indonesia is divided into several sub-themes:

1. Cultural History of Indonesia narrates the origins of Indonesia from prehistoric times, the classical period (the period of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms), the period of the arrival of Islam, and the establishment of Islamic kingdoms until the arrival of Europeans.

2. *Tanah Air Indonesia*, or Indonesia's Homeland (Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia) presents a visualization of the struggle of the Indonesian people against Dutch and Japanese colonialism. Apart from that, what is very important is the video of the moment of the proclamation of Indonesian independence in 1945, the revolutionary war in the face of post-independence Dutch aggression, and diplomatic efforts with a series of agreements that finally made the Dutch recognize the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia in 1949 during the Round Table Conference in The Hague.

3. Indonesian Symbol narrates the state motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, a quote from the ancient manuscript *Sutasoma* from the 14th century CE, meaning "Unity in Diversity". This motto reflects that Indonesia's people – from various ethnic groups, religions, and cultures – are still one in the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia. This room also displays the national symbol of the *Garuda* bird and *Pancasila* (*Panca* means five and *sila* means principle) as the Indonesian's official state philosophy consisting of five principles: belief in the one and only God; a just and civilized humanity; the unity of Indonesia; democracy, led by the wisdom of the representatives of the people; and social justice for all Indonesian people.



Figure 3: The Indonesia's Homeland room shows the moment of the proclamation of Indonesia's independence in 1945. © National Museum of Indonesia. Photo by Budiman, June 2023..

4. Nature of Indonesia narrates the natural landscape of Indonesia in the Ring of Fire area. Indonesia is an archipelagic country with volcanic mountain ranges, both inactive and active. Its fertile nature is a paradise for animals and plants. Indonesia's nature consists of oceans and mountains as well as a variety of flora and fauna that influence the social and cultural life of the Indonesian people.

5. Indonesian Culture narrates various cultures based on the nature of the place where they live, so that, for instance, maritime culture and agricultural culture are formed with the local wisdom.

The sub-theme of nationality finally appeared at the National Museum, something that had never happened before. It could be said this step was a rather late movement and there is still a lot of work to decolonise the museum. Abandoning old paradigms, changing colonial-style work patterns, being critical in responding to issues that are currently trending (especially about decolonization), and learning from the other decolonised museum's experience are become part of museum decolonising.

The National Museum still has a great task of creating a space with the theme of Sustainable Indonesia, where the storyline will increasingly confirm its status as a decolonising museum. Sustainable Indonesia will emphasize Indonesia's identity as an independent nation, full of creativity in the field of culture both traditional and modern, an educated nation, and a nation with a variety of local wisdom.

Conclusion

Museums, and particularly national museums, play a very strategic role in introducing culture, especially material culture, to their societies in order to enable them to understand cultural dynamics and diversity. This understanding of cultural diversity is greatly needed in Indonesia given its multiethnic nature. Through such understanding, it is hoped that ethnic groups will value and understand the cultures of other ethnic groups, with the result that intersocietal or intercultural conflict will be averted (Sitowati, 2006). Apart from that, the National Museum of Indonesia has a role in increasing a sense of pride and as a marker of Indonesian national identity, which is built through narratives in the exhibition space.

Museum decolonisation is a process that takes time for museums changing their appearance and narrative to become museums that are free from colonial views. There is a need to do provenance research of the collection and to unify perceptions about the meaning of decolonising among museum staffs, because it is possible that each person interprets decolonising differently.

The sustainability of decolonisation at the National Museum has made us aware of the need to continue to explore the potential of what the country has as an independent nation. Decolonization in the National Museum of Indonesia is part of global decolonization which can inspire museums in Indonesia, especially regional museums and former colonial countries.

References

- Hardiati, H., & Keurs, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Indonesia: Discovery of the past*. Kit Publisher.
- Kinderen, T. H. (1879). *Het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen: Eerste eeuw van zijn bestaan 1778-1878, Gedenkboek*. Ernst & Co.
- Koentjaraningrat. (1990). *Pengantar Antropologi*. PT. Rineka Cipta.
- Laporan Ringkas Finalisasi Penyusunan Alur Kisah Museum Nasional Indonesia. (2016). Museum Nasional, Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Kementerian Pendidikan & Kebudayaan.
- Miksic, J. N. (Ed.). (2006). *Icons of art: The collections of the National Museum of Indonesia*. BAB Publishing Indonesia.
- Notulen van de Algemeene en -Directievergaderingen van Het Bataviaasch van Kunsten en Wetenschappen. (1913). Opgericht 1778. Deel L-1912. G Kolff & Co, 's Gravenhage M. Nijhoff.
- Notulen van de Algemeene en -Directievergaderingen van Het Bataviaasch van Kunsten en Wetenschappen. (1915). Opgericht 1778. Deel L-1912. G Kolff & Co, 's Gravenhage M. Nijhoff.
- Notulen van de Algemeene en -Directievergaderingen van Het Bataviaasch van Kunsten en Wetenschappen. (1931). Opgericht 1778. Deel L-1912. G Kolff & Co, 's Gravenhage M. Nijhoff.
- Notulen van de Algemeene en -Directievergaderingen van Het Bataviaasch van Kunsten en Wetenschappen. (1932). Opgericht 1778. Deel L-1912. G Kolff & Co, 's Gravenhage M. Nijhoff.
- Pengembangan Museum Nasional Indonesia. (2017). Museum Nasional Indonesia, Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Kementerian Pendidikan & Kebudayaan.
- Postcard book of Museum of the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences. (1930). Published by the Museum of the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences. Series A. De Unie.
- Trigangga (Ed.). (2016). *Jadilah Indonesia: Pameran Storyline Museum Nasional Baru*. Museum Nasional, Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Kementerian Pendidikan & Kebudayaan.
- Van Der Hoop, A. N. J. Th. (1948). *Short guide to the museum*. Royal Batavia Society of Arts and Sciences.

A story of entanglement between Indonesian national heroes, museums, and decolonization

Ajeng Ayu Arainikasih

Universitas Indonesia – Depok, Indonesia

Universiteit Leiden – Leiden, the Netherlands

Abstract

Sultan Hasanuddin of South Sulawesi (1631-1670), Javanese Prince Diponegoro (1785-1855), and Teuku Umar of Aceh (1854-1899) were all acknowledged in 1973 by the Indonesian government as National Heroes for their resistance against the Dutch colonial power.¹ This article discusses how their stories and belongings – exhibited in museums – intertwine with museum decolonization. The focus of this article relies on research in province museums in Makassar, Jakarta, and Banda Aceh. They were all established in colonial times and are all in some way related to the three heroes. These examples show how the decolonization of Indonesian museums is entangled with changing political regimes.

Keywords: Indonesia, museum, decolonization, politics, colonial history

Résumé

Une histoire d'enchevêtrement entre les héros nationaux indonésiens, les musées et la décolonisation

Sultan Hasanuddin du Sud de Sulawesi (1631-1670), le Prince javanais Diponegoro (1785-1855) et Teuku Umar d'Aceh (1854-1899) ont tous été reconnus en 1973 par le gouvernement indonésien comme des héros nationaux pour leur résistance contre le pouvoir colonial néerlandais. Cet article aborde la manière dont leurs histoires et leurs biens - exposés dans des musées - s'entrelacent avec la décolonisation des musées. Cet article repose sur une recherche menée dans les musées provinciaux de Makassar, Jakarta et Banda Aceh. Tous ont été établis à l'époque coloniale et sont d'une manière ou d'une autre liés aux trois héros. Ces exemples montrent comment la décolonisation des musées indonésiens est imbriquée avec les régimes politiques et leurs changements.

Mots-clés : Indonésie, musée, décolonisation, politique, histoire coloniale

1 Email: arainikasih@gmail.com

After its independence, Indonesian historiography was written as the opposite of Dutch colonial historiography. The ones who used to be the villains became the heroes and vice versa (Kumar, 2011). One who resisted colonial power was then inaugurated as a National Hero. In 1973, the Indonesian government acknowledged Teuku Umar,² Prince Diponegoro, and Sultan Hasanuddin as National Heroes.

Teuku Umar (1854-1899) was a 19th-century Acehese noble who fought against the Dutch during the Aceh War from 1873 to his death in 1899. The Aceh War itself lasted from 1873 to 1904. Prince Diponegoro (1785-1855) was a Javanese prince who resisted Dutch colonial power and led the Java War (1825-1830). After his capture in 1830, Diponegoro spent 26 days as a political prisoner in the City Hall of Batavia, currently the building of the Jakarta History Museum. Subsequently, Diponegoro was exiled to North and South Sulawesi. The prince spent the rest of his life inside Fort Rotterdam in Makassar, South Sulawesi. Two centuries before Diponegoro's exile, Fort Rotterdam was called Fort Ujung Pandang, part of the Sultanate Gowa-Tallo. Sultan Hasanuddin (1631-1670) was a ruler of Gowa-Tallo who fought against the Dutch East India Company (VOC) during the Makassar War in 1666-1669. After the war, Hasanuddin lost his Fort Ujung Pandang to the Dutch who transformed it into Fort Rotterdam. In the present day, the Province Museum of South Sulawesi – the La Galigo Museum – is housed inside the Fort Rotterdam complex.

This article questions and discusses how stories and objects related to Indonesian National Heroes have been presented in museums. This research shows that the stories and objects of Indonesian National Heroes, particularly of Teuku Umar, Prince Diponegoro, and Sultan Hasanuddin, are intertwined with Indonesian museums' decolonization practices. It also shows that the changing political regimes influence the museums and the idea of how to decolonize them.

This research was conducted by examining the Aceh Museum (Banda Aceh), the La Galigo Museum (Makassar), and the Jakarta History Museum (Jakarta), all closely linked to the three National Heroes. All three institutions are museums established during colonial times and transformed into government-run province museums in postcolonial-era Indonesia. To strengthen the argument, museums in the Netherlands are sometimes included in this discussion for comparison.

As Indonesia was a Dutch colony, it is relevant to take a closer look at the way the former colonizers “decolonialize” their museum collections. Dutch scholar Mirjam Shatanawi (2022) argued that in the Netherlands decolonization means repatriating colonial collections, rewriting colonial vocabularies on museum labels, and sharing authorities with source communities. In addition to the repatriation of colonial objects, decolonization in the Netherlands also means challenging the colonial point of view. When looking at Indonesia as a former colony, the practice of museum decolonization is somehow different. It is an ongoing process, and it is also entangled with changing political regimes.³

2 Previously spelled Teukoe Oemar

3 Indonesian museum decolonization is the author's ongoing PhD research. The PhD project is funded by the Indonesia Endowment Fund (LPDP).

Teuku Umar, the Netherlands, and the Aceh Museum

Teuku Umar is perhaps the most famous Indonesian hero in the Netherlands. His story, photographs, and objects related to or belonging to him are exhibited in Dutch museums, both in permanent and temporary exhibitions (i.e. Umar's military jacket and fez in the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam). In comparison, apart from the reproduction of colonial-era photographs and his (new) portrait painting, the Aceh Museum, in Teuku Umar's home province, has no objects related to or from his possession.

The Aceh Museum itself was founded in Banda Aceh in 1915 in the form of a traditional Aceh house. The building was intentionally constructed as the Aceh pavilion during the Colonial Exhibition a year earlier in Semarang (Central Java). Because the Aceh Pavilion won numerous awards during the event, Henri N. A. Swart (1868-1946), the governor of Aceh (in office 1908-1918), sent the house back to Aceh and converted it into a museum (Nagelvoort, 2018). Dutch government employee, Friedrich Wilhelm Stammeshaus (1881-1957), was appointed as the first curator. Initially, Stammeshaus' personal collections were on display. Then, from 1915 to 1930, Stammeshaus also received donations and bought collections for the Aceh Museum. When Stammeshaus had to leave Aceh and return to the Netherlands, he sold his personal collections to the Koloniaal Instituut (now the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam) and left behind the other collections that belonged to the Aceh Museum in Banda Aceh (Nagelvoort, 2019).

In colonial Indonesia, particularly in the 20th century, museum establishments mushroomed. After the French and British interregnum (1806-1816), the Dutch in colonial Indonesia started to establish institutions to learn more about the local culture, customs, language, native law, and beliefs to fully colonize the people in the Indonesian archipelago. As a result, museums were then established by both Indonesians and Europeans – colonial governments, missionaries, and/or learned societies. The purpose was to map further the natural resources and ethnic diversity of the area as well as to safeguard the cultural heritage believed to be about to become extinct (Margana, 2018).

The Aceh Museum was one example of a colonial-era museum. After the independence of Indonesia, the Aceh Museum was managed by the municipality of Banda Aceh and then by the Aceh branch of the Indonesian army. In the 1970s, during the New Order (1966-1998), the reign of Indonesia's second president, Suharto, the Aceh Museum received a grant from the Indonesian central government to erect new buildings within the museum complex. Thus, the collections previously exhibited inside the Aceh house were moved to the new, four-story exhibition building. The old Aceh house became part of the collection of the Aceh Museum and presents the exterior and interior of a traditional Aceh house. The Aceh Museum was nationalized and transformed into the Province Museum of Aceh. As part of the changes at the time, the museum was managed centrally from Jakarta under the Directorate of Museums (*Petunjuk Singkat Museum Negeri Aceh*, 1982).

In 1979-1980, Moh. Amir Sutaarga (1928-2013), the head of the Directorate of Museums, unified the narrative of provincial museums in all of Indonesia. According to the guidelines for province museums, the storyline of the museum(s) should be as follows: the natural environment, the prehistoric era, the Hindu-Buddhist period, the Islamic kingdoms, the colonial period – including resistance against colonial power – and ethnographic objects of local ethnicities of the province. The museum should illustrate the motto of the Indonesian New Order, "Unity in Diversity," but also promote the province

(*Pedoman Pembakuan Museum Umum Tingkat Propinsi*, 1979/1980). The Aceh Museum – as a province museum – followed this storyline.

From the museum's guidebooks, it is known that the permanent exhibition of the Aceh Museum from the 1980s to the 2010s was slightly changed: the first floor shows Aceh's natural environment and prehistoric-era Indonesia; the second floor exhibits the Hindu/Buddhist era of Indonesia and the Islamic kingdoms of Aceh and Pasai, both on Sumatra; the third floor represents Aceh's military expeditions and resistance against colonial power; while the fourth floor displays ethnographic objects of the Aceh, Gayo, Alas, Tamiang, and Aneuk Jamee people – considered as the local inhabitants of the province (*Petunjuk Singkat Museum Negeri Aceh*, 1982; Yunan et al., 1994/1995).

During the New Order, under the guidance of Nugroho Notosusanto (1930-1985), a military historian and Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, the focus of New Order historiography was top-down, following an official military history (McGregor, 2007). The theme of anti-colonial resistance became centralized during New Order rule. It could be said that the New Order decolonized Indonesian historiography in this way. Indeed, during the New Order regime, Aceh was regarded as the place where the anti-colonial spirit and resistance did strongly occur. This attitude featured prominently in history books, films, and other national programs (Reid, 2004).

However, research conducted by historian Jean Gelman Taylor in 2005 shows that colonial Aceh was not only an abode of war. Upon accessing 1,049 colonial photographs of Aceh in the KITLV (The Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) during "Rethinking Indonesian Histories Projects," Taylor recognized that other subjects besides war were perceived. There are pictures of Aceh's natural scenery, the sultan's palace, mosques, pictures of the locals and the Dutch people, as well as traditional houses, colonial buildings, and other infrastructures. Nevertheless, Taylor noted that pictures of the Aceh War and military expeditions dominated the representation of Aceh in museum exhibitions and books about Aceh (2013). This continues up to the present day: the story of Teuku Umar (who was considered a traitor by the Dutch as he was once part of Dutch military troops) and Aceh's resistance is still commonly featured in museums in the Netherlands. Indeed, Aceh was an Islamic kingdom that had political diplomacy with the Ottoman Empire and the British. Therefore, for the Dutch, conquering Aceh was important, particularly as part of their *Pax Nederlandica* policy – a political expansion to conquer all areas of the Indonesian archipelago as Dutch Empire. Also, the Aceh War was one of the latest colonial wars, yet the longest and most difficult.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on anti-colonial resistance has slightly receded in present-day Indonesian museum displays, particularly after 1998, when the New Order was no longer in power. In the post-New Order period, Indonesia employed a decentralization policy. As a consequence, the provincial museums that were once managed centrally under the Directorate of Museums are now run individually under each province's government. Consequently, many museums were neglected (Kreps, 2020). Then, to solve this problem, during the reign of presidents Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (in office 2004-2014) and Joko Widodo (in office 2014-2024), the Indonesian government started a "museum revitalization project" (2010-2019). While not mentioned in the *Practical Guide for Museum Revitalization in Indonesia* (Knox et al., 2011), the museum narrative of the New Order era could be changed. Though in practice, despite slight changes, this is still difficult.

In the case of the Aceh Museum, the revised permanent exhibition was installed in 2015 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the institution. The curator of the museum removed the prehistoric Java man and the Buddhist Borobudur temple in Central Java from the exhibition and emphasized the greatness of the Islamic Kingdom of Aceh. In particular, the revised exhibition showed the friendship between the Sultanate of Aceh and the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the 17th century to illustrate that the relationship between Aceh and the Dutch consisted not only of war (Arainikasih & Hafnidar, 2018).

The curator also removed the photographs of the Aceh War and military expeditions from the permanent exhibition to avoid the image of Aceh being conquered and colonized by the Dutch. Instead, to illustrate colonial Aceh, the curator displays a balanced number of portraits and stories of both Acehnese heroes – including Teuku Umar, and Dutch colonial figures (as the heroes’ enemies) (Arainikasih & Hafnidar, 2018).

During the New Order, decolonizing means presenting anti-colonial resistance and violence. In my point of view, eliminating the image of Aceh being conquered by the Dutch could also be seen as an act of decolonization of the museum, even if it was a slightly different approach compared to that of the New Order. This is in line with Indonesian historian, Bambang Purwanto, who questions whether the anti-colonial sentiment through the portrayal of violence is still relevant in today’s Indonesia (2006). Besides, presenting the friendship between the Sultanate of Aceh and the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the 17th century is also a decolonial act, to show that both kingdoms were once equal, not the subject of the other.

Where is Sultan Hasanuddin – The rooster of the east?

Like the Aceh Museum, the La Galigo Museum was the continuation of a colonial-era museum. According to the wall labels at the museum, the La Galigo Museum was once named Celebes Museum. It was established in 1938 inside the Fort Rotterdam Complex (Permanent Exhibition of La Galigo Museum, 2019). As a colonial-era museum, its collection consists of old (Chinese) ceramics, old coins, as well as agricultural tools and kitchen utensils, clothes and jewellery, musical instruments, weapons, and wooden boats of South Sulawesi (Kadir & Data, 1985-1986).

The fate of the Celebes Museum during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), the Revolution (1945-1949), and the early years of independent Indonesia is unknown. It took 19 years from the idea, in the 1960s, to re-establish the Celebes Museum until it was promoted to be the province museum of South Sulawesi (UPTD Museum La Galigo, 2008), now with the name La Galigo Museum. Celebes was a colonial-era name of the island of Sulawesi, while La Galigo refers to South Sulawesi’s famous ancestral legendary figure and an ancient manuscript: *Surek I La Galigo* (written between the 13th and 15th centuries CE). The figure I La Galigo is widely known in South Sulawesi and is believed to be the ancestor of the kings of all South Sulawesi’s kingdoms (Museum La Galigo, 2011). Therefore, even though the changing of the name from Celebes Museum to La Galigo Museum in the 1970s was not considered a “decolonial act,” effectively that is what it was. At that time, the Indonesian government named newly established province museums after pre-colonial figures, such as the Museum Balaputradewa of South Sumatra (named after the king of the Sriwijaya Kingdom), the Mpu Tantular Museum of East Java (named after the poet of the Majapahit Kingdom), and many other museums (Perkasa & Arainikasih, 2023).

The present-day permanent exhibition of the La Galigo Museum is in buildings D and M of the Fort Rotterdam complex. The two-story Building M exhibits the ethnographic objects (agricultural and maritime culture) of the Makassar, Bugis, and Toraja people who are considered “local inhabitants” of South Sulawesi. Although the La Galigo Museum also mentioned that Makassar was a multicultural city, there were no ethnographic objects or stories of, for example, the Javanese, the Malays, the Bandanese, or the Chinese who have also inhabited the area since the pre-colonial era.

In the 17th century, the dual kingdom of Gowa and Tallo – with Makassar as its main political centre and international trade port – was a strong maritime power in the area. The kingdom was defended by extensive European-style fortifications. Its diplomatic relations expanded from the Spanish in the Philippines to Mecca, including the Moluccas, the Mataram Kingdom in Java, the Aceh Kingdom in Sumatera, the Portuguese and the Keling in India, the English, the Danish, and later the Dutch (Poelinggomang, 2002; Mostert, 2018). Furthermore, after the 1620s massacre on the Banda Islands conducted by the Dutch VOC, some of the survivors (of the Bandanese) lived in Makassar. Further, according to the *Sj'air Perang Makassar*, in 1667 during the war between Gowa-Tallo and the Dutch VOC, the kingdom of Gowa-Tallo fired its cannons from the Chinese Kampong (Wirawan, 2013). This is to say that since the 17th century, there were “others” – like the Bandanese and the Chinese, among other local Indonesians and international people – who already dwelled in Makassar / South Sulawesi, raising the question of how many more centuries it will take to acknowledge them as “locals.”

A striking similarity with the Aceh Museum after its renovation in 2010 is that the La Galigo Museum toned down its war narratives, here the Makassar War⁴ that occurred in 1666-1669 between the Sultanate of Gowa-Tallo and the Dutch VOC. In its permanent exhibition entitled “Symbol of Power and Strength” in Building D, the museum presents a slightly different historical perspective compared to the New Order version of history.

Building D was a former dwelling of Cornelis Janszoon Speelman (1628-1684), a 17th-century VOC Governor General who conquered Gowa-Tallo. Later, Building D was the location of the former Celebes Museum (Sujana & Aswawi, 2021). The first room of present-day Building D exhibits a miniature model of the fort and newly painted scenes depicting episodes of *Surek I La Galigo*. In the next room, the museum displays portrait paintings of Sultan Hasanuddin of Gowa, Arung Palakka of Bone (1634-1696), the Dutch Cornelis Speelman, and Andi Djemma of the Luwu Kingdom (1901-1965), another historical figure declared an Indonesian National Hero in 2002. Each painting is accompanied by a short description of the figure. There are also Gowa, Bone, and Luwu royal family trees and a replica of the 17th-century Bongaya Treaty.⁵

4 The dual kingdom of Gowa-Tallo employed an open-door policy. The kingdom was highly tolerant, allowing and protecting everyone, irrespective of their places of origin, ethnicity, and religion, to trade within Gowa-Tallo. However, the Dutch VOC intended to monopolize the spice trade. Therefore, conflicts between the Dutch and Gowa-Tallo occurred as early as 1615 and reached its peak during the Makassar War in 1666-1669, leading to the treaty of Bongaya, very disadvantageous for Gowa-Tallo, signed by Sultan Hasanuddin, the ruler of Gowa (Poelinggomang, 2002; Mostert, 2018).

5 One of the points regarding the Bongaya Treaty was the transfer of Gowa-Tallo's fort of Ujung Pandang to the VOC. The turtle-shaped Fort Ujung Pandang was then redesigned as a European-style fort and renamed Fort Rotterdam. It became the centre of the VOC's administrative and economic power in the Eastern Indonesian archipelago for two centuries. In 1908, the structure was no longer used as a fortification, and in 1940 it was registered by the Dutch as a protected historical monument (*Forts in Indonesia*, 2012).

The object label accompanying Sultan Hasanuddin's painting describes his biographical information only, including the day, month, and year of his birth as well as his name and royal titles. There is no information on why he was promoted as an Indonesian National Hero. In contrast, the object label of Arung Palakka's painting states that "during his reign, Arung Palakka succeeded in liberating the Kingdom of Bone from the dominance of the Sultanate of Gowa and made Buginese one of the largest maritime forces in the Indonesian archipelago at the time"⁶ (*Symbol of Power and Strength*, 2019).

The information on Arung Palakka's painting is considered "different" from the version of the New Order historiography. An Indonesian national history book published during and on behalf of the New Order states that in the 17th century the Kingdom of Gowa-Tallo defeated the Kingdom of Bone. Prince Arung Palakka of Bone fled to Batavia (present-day Jakarta) to ask the VOC for help. At that time, Gowa-Tallo was also in conflict with the Dutch VOC. Because the VOC was befriended by Bone, the Makassar War occurred. To avoid a high number of local casualties, Sultan Hasanuddin then signed the Bongaya Treaty (Poesponegoro & Notosusanto, 1993).

In other words, during the New Order, Arung Palakka was usually considered a "traitor" while Sultan Hasanuddin – nicknamed the rooster of the east because of his bravery in fighting the Dutch – was the hero. For some people (of Bugis / Bone), however, Arung Palakka was their hero (Raditya, 2019). Therefore, this "different version" of the present-day museum label shows the attempt of the curatorial team of the La Galigo Museum to tell local history from the perspective no longer of the New Order.

Dutch historian Henk Schulte Nordholt argues that during the New Order regime, regional histories and perspectives were marginalized. If regional histories were presented at all, they had to fit into the larger narratives of national Indonesian history (Schulte Nordholt, 2004). Presenting different points of view and/or presenting formerly marginalized local history is a feature of the post-New Order period. It can be said that the La Galigo Museum has challenged the New Order perspective without naming it, but the museum has not yet fully addressed the colonial perspectives; particularly when it comes to its ethnographic collections and displays, much more could be done.

However, unlike Teuku Umar, the representation of Sultan Hasanuddin is somehow absent in the Dutch museums. Perhaps this was the case because he was a 17th-century figure, making objects that were related to him hard to trace. Besides, according to the historical timeline, the Makassar War (which occurred in 1666-1669) was one of the earliest VOC wars in the Indonesian archipelago. The Makassar War was to monopolize the spice trade, while the Aceh War (1873-1904) was one of the latest wars conducted to conquer the Indonesian archipelago as a Dutch Empire. Besides, Teuku Umar was indeed a traitor to the Dutch, while Sultan Hasanuddin signed the treaty to submit. Perhaps, the difference matters.

However, in general, Hasanuddin and/or the grandeur of his kingdom were also under-represented in Indonesian museums. Perhaps, one reason is that there were no objects that related to him. Another reason is that, as a result of New Order anti-colonial military history, stories of Sultan Hasanuddin are only about the Makassar War. The grandeur of his kingdom, his family, and royal council is somehow unknown to the Indonesian public, untold in history books and museums.⁷

⁶ Translated by the author.

⁷ For instance, the story of Karaeng Pattingaloang, the prime minister of Sultan Malikussaid (1595-1639) – the father of Hasanuddin. Pattingaloang mastered both Spanish and Portuguese languages, he also had a library in his palace with European books and maps as its collections (Navarrette, 2012). Pattingaloang

In my point of view, one way to decolonizing the colonial history and museums in post-colonial-era Indonesia could also be done by representing an equal power between past Indonesian kingdoms and the Netherlands, as the Aceh Museum did. In the case of South Sulawesi, instead of only presenting Sultan Hasanuddin's short biography, the La Galigo Museum could tell stories that Hasanuddin and his royal council were well educated, equal to their European counterparts in the knowledge of foreign languages, world politics, military tactics, science, and trading.

The Javanese Prince Diponegoro, his heirlooms, and the exhibitions dedicated to him

Perhaps, Javanese Prince Diponegoro is the most famous National Hero in Indonesia. However, even though Prince Diponegoro spent 22 years inside Fort Rotterdam as a political prisoner from 1833 to 1855 (*Forts in Indonesia*, 2012), his story is absent from the permanent exhibition of the La Galigo Museum. Although Prince Diponegoro was a male, a Javanese royal, and an Indonesian National Hero,⁸ his story did not suit the New Order historiography regarding South Sulawesi's resistance against colonial power. Instead, it shows his defeat. It was also not in line with the storyline of a New Order province museum.

Indeed, inside Fort Rotterdam there is a sign saying "Ruang Tahanan Pangeran Diponegoro" (the Prison Room of Prince Diponegoro). However, the room has not been open to the public since the 2020 pandemic. A reason might be that the room is under the responsibility of the Cultural Preservation Office of South Sulawesi and is not part of the La Galigo Museum (A. Purnamasari, personal communication, August 8, 2023).

Since the late colonial era, to preserve the once-decayed Fort Rotterdam, government offices and museums were housed inside the fort complex (*Het fort Rotterdam en de Matthes Stichting*, 1936). This practice continued during the Japanese occupation in 1942-1945 (*Forts in Indonesia*, 2012) and up to the present day. From the 1970s onwards, the Indonesian government also placed offices inside the Fort Rotterdam complex alongside the La Galigo Museum, including the office of the Cultural Preservation Office of South Sulawesi (Ramli, 2021).

In contrast, the story about Prince Diponegoro is displayed in the permanent exhibition of the Jakarta History Museum. According to historian Peter Carey, who acted as the guest curator, the idea to exhibit the story of Prince Diponegoro at the Jakarta History Museum occurred during public readings of Diponegoro's autobiography *Babad Diponegoro* and Carey's book about Diponegoro, *Kuasa Ramalan*. The readings were held in Jakarta, Magelang (Central Java), and Makassar in 2014-2015. At that time, the Jakarta History Museum was about to be redesigned. Therefore, the new *Kamar Diponegoro* (Diponegoro's Room) was added to the museum's mezzanine floor in 2016. The *Kamar Diponegoro* is located where Diponegoro was temporarily imprisoned for 26 days in 1830 inside the City Hall of Batavia – currently the building of the Jakarta History Museum – before his exile to Sulawesi. As the guest curator, Carey was responsible for developing the storyline and

used to order "modern scientific" objects from the VOC (dictionary, hourglass, compass, magnifying glass, telescope) and he once ordered 1.3 meters in diameter globe, twice the size of the largest globe available in the Netherlands at that time. His order of the globe inspired the VOC to hand smaller-sized globes to Asian rulers as gifts (Mostert, 2017).

8 During the New Order regime, Indonesian National Heroes were predominantly male, Java-born, and from an elite background (Schulte Nordholt, 2004).

selecting the objects and replicas to be exhibited (P. Carey, personal communication, November 8, 2021). The room tells the life story of Prince Diponegoro through the timeline, replicas of furniture, letters, archives, paintings, a portrait sketch of the prince, and a piece of *batik* that depicts the Diponegoro War.

The sketch depicting Diponegoro is a replica of the original in the Rijksmuseum collection, made by Adrianus Johannes (Jan) Bik (1790-1872) during Diponegoro's capture in Batavia. Bik was a Dutch government official artist stationed in the Dutch East Indies. However, the sketch was not a government document. Perhaps it was made on Bik's initiative. The sketch of Diponegoro (inside Bik's sketch album) was presented to the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam in 1898 by Bik's cousin. The sketch album was then kept in the Rijksmuseum drawing archive (Stevens, 2015).

Although the sketch is not on display, the Rijksmuseum displays the painting of Diponegoro by Nicolaas Pieneman (1809-1860) in its permanent exhibition. The painting, originally titled "Den onderwerping van den Hoofd-Muiteling / Diepo Negoro aan den Luitenant Generaal De Kock / Einde van den oorlog op Java. 1825-1830" (The submission of the Rebel Leader Diepo Negoro to Lieutenant General De Kock) was commissioned by Dutch East Indies Governor General Hendrik Merkus De Kock (1779-1845) himself. The painting illustrates the capture of Diponegoro in 1830 by De Kock (in office 1826-1830) during a "peace negotiation" in Magelang, Central Java. The present-day label of the painting states "Prince Diepo Negoro was the most important Javanese leader in the Java War (1825-1830). Although the Dutch promised him safe conduct, he was arrested during the peace negotiations." That is, the new label tried to show the betrayal and the ignoble and unjust treatment of Diponegoro by De Kock under the Dutch flag (Stevens, 2015). This label may be seen as one attempt of the present-day Dutch museum's decolonization practice – to tell its negative self-history regarding colonialism.

Besides Pieneman, Raden Saleh Sjarif Boestaman (1811-1880), Indonesia's most prominent modern art maestro from the colonial era, also painted a slightly different version – a hidden criticism – of Pieneman's painting of the capture of Diponegoro. Saleh's painting ("Gevangennamen van Prins Diponegoro" – "The Arrest of Prince Diponegoro") was created in 1857. It was first a personal gift from Saleh to King Willem III of the Netherlands (reigned 1849-1890). Then, in 1977-1978, the painting was donated by the Museum Bronbeek Arnhem (on behalf of the Dutch royal family) to the government of Indonesia. The painting is now in the collection of the Republic of Indonesia's Presidential Palace Museum (Supangkat, 2015; van Beurden, 2017).

In 1977-1978, the Bronbeek Museum also repatriated Diponegoro's horse saddle and another heirloom, the *Kiai Rondhan* (pike), to the government of Indonesia. The saddle and his heirloom pike were seized in 1829 when Diponegoro was cornered by Major Andreas Victor Michiels (1797-1849) and forced to leap off his horse to hide. Both heirlooms were then sent to the Dutch King Willem I (reigned 1813-1840) as war booty. Upon their return to Indonesia, the heirlooms were given to the collections of the National Museum of Indonesia (Carey, 2015; van Beurden, 2017). Prince Diponegoro seems to be the only one of the Indonesian National Heroes whose personal objects/heirlooms were returned/repatriated from the Netherlands to Indonesia, in 1977-1978, 2015, and 2020, respectively.

In 2015, during the opening of the temporary exhibition "Aku Diponegoro: Sang Pangeran dalam Ingatan Bangsa, dari Raden Saleh hingga Kini" ("A Prince for All Seasons:

Diponegoro in the Memory of the Nation, from Raden Saleh to the Present”) held at the National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta, Diponegoro’s heirloom, the *Kanjeng Kyai Tjokro*⁹ (a spiritual stick), was returned by the descendants of Dutch Governor General Jean Chrétien Baud (1789-1859) to the government of Indonesia (Kraus and Carey, 2015). During the opening of the exhibition, Michiel Baud, a descendant of J. C. Baud, who returned Diponegoro’s heirloom, mentioned his family’s understanding of the importance of the object for Indonesia. Therefore, he hoped that the act of returning the heirloom would forge a new era of mutual respect, friendship, and equality between the Netherlands and Indonesia (Baud, 2015).

In 2020, another Diponegoro heirloom, the *Kris Kyai Naga Siluman*, was repatriated. The *kris*, kept in the Netherlands after the Diponegoro War, was symbolically returned by Dutch King Willem Alexander (reigning 2013-present) to Indonesian President Joko Widodo (in office 2014-2024) (Triyana, 2020). Later that year, the *kris* was exhibited to the public during a temporary exhibition titled “Pamor Sang Pangeran” (“The Heirlooms of the Prince”) held at the National Museum of Indonesia from October to November 2020. The exhibition told the life story of Prince Diponegoro and his spirit of resistance against colonial power through his heirlooms, his autobiography *Babad Diponegoro*, and paintings, presented with new media and digital technology (Mulyadi, 2020).

It seems that Diponegoro became Indonesia’s most renowned National Hero symbolizing the resistance against colonial power. In 1928, Mohammad Hatta (Indonesia’s first vice president, in office 1945-1956) mentioned Diponegoro (along with Teuku Umar and Tuanku Imam Bonjol of West Sumatra) in his book *Indonesië Vrij!* (Free Indonesia!)¹⁰ (Stevens, 2015). During the Indonesian Revolution in 1945-1949, Diponegoro became a popular symbol of Indonesian resistance. Besides Saleh, other Indonesia’s leading visual artists – Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, and Basuki Abdullah among others – have painted Diponegoro in their works, both before and after the independence of Indonesia (Supangkat, 2015). The location where Diponegoro was captured by De Kock in 1830 in Magelang, Central Java, was also turned into a museum named Museum Kamar Pengabdian Pangeran Diponegoro (the Museum Room in the Memory of Prince Diponegoro). The museum shows furniture (a table, chairs, and a glass cabinet) used during the “peace negotiation,” along with Diponegoro’s cloak (Rusmiyati et al. 2018).

Indeed, repatriations of Diponegoro’s heirlooms are considered a decolonization act. However, Diponegoro’s “absence” in the La Galigo Museum Makassar and current temporary exhibitions about him show that the New Order’s legacy of Java-centrism is hard to alter. Pemberton (1994) argued that the New Order regime branded Javanese (the people, the culture, and the tradition) as the “truly high culture” of Indonesia. The absence of Diponegoro from the Province Museum of South Sulawesi (whose story does not suit

9 *Kanjeng Kyai Tjokro* itself was Diponegoro’s spiritual heirloom. Diponegoro always took his spiritual stick on various pilgrimages to the South coast of Java and other spiritual sites in the Yogyakarta area. In 1834, after the Diponegoro War, *Kanjeng Kyai Tjokro* was handed over as a gift to J. C. Baud, the new governor-general (in office 1833-1834), by a Javanese member of the elite, Prince Notoprojo. Notoprojo himself surrendered to the Dutch in 1827. He then became a key political ally for the Dutch (Kraus & Carey, 2015).

10 *Indonesië Vrij!* was written by Mohammad Hatta (1902-1980) when he was a student and imprisoned because of his nationalistic student organization in the Netherlands, Perhimpunan Indonesia (Indonesian Association). The writing criticized the Dutch historiography of Indonesia (Dutch East Indies) that commemorated Dutch glory and exploitation of Indonesia and labelled Indonesians who resisted the oppressions as rebels and rogues (Stevens, 2015).

the New Order historiography), his existence at the Jakarta History Museum, and some temporary exhibitions about him held within the national scope – by national institutions (of the National Museum of Indonesia and the National Gallery of Indonesia) – is evidence of this argument.

Conclusion

Indeed, it can be said that the New Order regime decolonized museums even though, at that time, the attempts were not considered decolonization. The New Order approaches to decolonizing museums were to nationalize the existing colonial-era museums into province museums, change their colonial-era names to those of pre-colonial figures, unify the storyline to suit Indonesia's nation-building program of "Unity in Diversity", and insert anti-colonial narratives.

However, after the New Order regime was no longer in power, it seems that the focus of the province museums (during the revitalization project and under the guidance of each provincial government) is to rectify the New Order narratives by, for example, toning down the anti-colonial narratives and presenting the local history that used to be suppressed and untold during the New Order regime.

Object repatriation seems to have reached its peak during the post-New Order period as an act of decolonization. Although (requests for) the repatriation of objects from the Netherlands to Indonesia were already made as early as the 1950s and continued to the 1970s (Drieënhuizen, 2018), in the post-2010s, hundreds of museum collections were repatriated to Indonesia from the Netherlands.

However, the repatriation of Prince Diponegoro's heirlooms and temporary exhibitions held about him within the national scope, show that New Order Java-centrism is still embedded in the perspectives of present-day Indonesians and hard to alter. It seems that the underrepresentation of Teuku Umar and Sultan Hasanuddin in the Indonesia museum context is somehow also related to the legacy of New Order Java-centrism. Perhaps, to address Java-centrism, Teuku Umar's belongings in the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam could be requested by the Indonesian government for future objects to be repatriated from the Netherlands.

Besides, as this research shows that objects, stories, and representations of national heroes are entangled with museum decolonization, perhaps a similar study could be conducted within different places, both in former colonizer countries and formerly colonized countries.

Acknowledgement

Special thank you to Susanne Rodemeier and Rainer Brömer for their help with editing this article. Also, thank you to my colleagues Tristan Mostert, Nusi Lisabilla Estudiantin, Adrian Perkasa, Alqiz Lukman, and Louie Buana for their precious information and brainstorming session for this article.

References

- Arainikasih, A. A. & Hafnidar. (2018). Decolonising the Aceh Museum: Objects, histories and their narratives. *BMGN Low Countries Historical Review*, 133(2), 105-120. <https://bmgn-lchr.nl/article/view/6795>
- Baud, M. (2015). Opening speech. In W. Kraus & P. Carey (Curators), *A lost pusaka returned* (pp. 3-4). Erasmus Huis, Goethe Institut, and Rijksmuseum.
- Carey, P. (2015). The spirit of the dead keep watch. In *Aku Diponegoro. Sang Pangeran dalam Ingatan Bangsa, dari Raden Saleh hingga Kini* (pp. 66-75) [Exhibition booklet]. Goethe Institut and Galeri Nasional Indonesia.
- Drieënhuizen, C. (2018). Mirrors of time and agents of action: Indonesia's claimed cultural objects and decolonisation, 1947-1978. *BMGN Low Countries Historical Review*, 133(2), 91-104. <http://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10552>
- Forts in Indonesia*. (2012). Ministry of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia.
- Het fort Rotterdam en de Matthes stichting. (1936, August 4). *Het Vaderland*.
- Kadir, H. & Data, M. Y. (1985/1986). *Petunjuk Museum Negeri La Galigo Ujung Pandang*. Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Proyek Pengembangan Permuseuman Sulawesi Selatan.
- Knox, R., et al. (2011). *Panduan praktis untuk revitalisasi museum di Indonesia*. UNESCO & Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Republik Indonesia.
- Kraus, W. & Carey, P. (2015). *A lost pusaka returned*. Erasmus Huis, Goethe Institut, and Rijksmuseum.
- Kreps, C. F. (2020). *Museums and anthropology in the age of engagement*. Routledge.
- Kumar, A. (2011). Indonesian Historical Writing after Independence. In A. Schneider & D. Woolf (Eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 5: Historical Writing Since 1945* (pp. 575-593). Oxford University Press.
- Margana, S. (2018). Sana budaya: Dari orientalisme hingga nasionalisme. In H. Mardianto (Ed.), *Sonobudoyo. Sejarah dan identitas keistimewaan* (pp. 1-14). Museum Sonobudoyo.
- McGregor, K. E. (2007). *History in uniform: Military ideology and the construction of Indonesia's past*. KITLV Press.
- Mostert, T. (2017, November 23-24). Of maps, globes, and diplomacy: The VOC, Asia and the flow of cartographic information in the 17th century [Paper presentation]. Rethinking the VOC: New trends in research and analysis, Den Haag, the Netherlands.
- Mostert, T. (2018). Scramble for the spices: Makassar's role in European and Asian competition in the Eastern Archipelago up to 1616. In A. Clulow & T. Mostert (Eds.), *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, trade and violence in early modern Asia* (pp. 25-54). Amsterdam University Press.
- Mulyadi, U. (2020, October 24). Pameran Pamor Sang Pangeran. Museum Nasional. <https://www.museumnasional.or.id/pameran-pamor-sang-pangeran-3346>
- Museum La Galigo*. (2011). PT Gramajapa Bersaudara Mandiri.

- Nagelvoort, J. K. (2018, January/February). Koloniale tentoonstelling 1914: Het ideale Atjeh. *Geschiedenis Magazine*, 53, 26-27.
- Nagelvoort, J. K. (2019). *Toean Stammeshaus: Leven en werken in koloniaal Atjeh*. LM Publishers.
- Navarrette, D. (2012). Biarawan terdampar di Makassar. In G. Miller (Ed.), *Indonesia Timur tempo doeloe 1544-1992* (pp. 25-29). Komunitas Bambu.
- Pedoman pembakuan museum umum tingkat propinsi*. (1979/1980). Proyek Pengembangan Permuseum Jakarta.
- Pemberton, J. (1994). *On the subject of "Java"*. Cornell University Press.
- Perkasa, A. & Arainikasih, A. A. (2023). Looking back from the periphery: Situating Indonesian provincial museums as cultural archives in the late-colonial to post-colonial era. *Wacana*, 24(3), 363-391. <http://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v24i3.1655>
- Permanent exhibition. (2019). Museum La Galigo, Makassar, Indonesia.
- Petunjuk singkat Museum Negeri Aceh*. (1982). Proyek Rehabilitasi dan Perluasan Museum Daerah Istimewa Aceh.
- Poelinggomang, E. L. (2002). *Makassar abad XIX: Studi tentang kebijakan perdagangan maritim*. Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia.
- Poesponegoro, M. D. & Notosusanto, N. (1993). *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia IV*. Balai Pustaka.
- Purwanto, B. (2006). *Gagalnya Historiografi Indonesiasentris?!*. Ombak.
- Raditya, I. N. (2019, April 6). Arung Palakka diantara gelar pahlawan dan pengkhianat. *Tirto id*. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.tirto.id/arung-palakka-di-antara-gelar-pahlawan-dan-pengkhianat>
- Ramli, M. (2021). Peran dan penamaan benteng Ujungpandang dari masa ke masa. In I. Sumantri (Ed.), *Fort Rotterdam. Benteng di simpang masa* (pp. 84-90). Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Sulawesi Selatan.
- Reid, A. (2004). War, peace and the burden of history in Aceh. *Asian Ethnicity*, 5(3), 301-314. 10.1080/1463136042000259761.
- Rusmiyati, et al. (2018). *Katalog Museum Indonesia Jilid 1*. Direktorat Pelestarian Cagar Budaya dan Permuseuman Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Schulte Nordholt, H. (2004). De-colonizing Indonesian historiography. [Working Paper No. 6, Lund University].
- Shatanawi, M. (2022). *Making and unmaking Indonesian Islam: Legacies of colonialism in museums*. [Doctoral dissertation, Universiteit van Amsterdam].
- Stevens, H. (2015). *Bitter spice: Indonesia and the Netherlands from 1600*. Rijksmuseum and Vantilt Publishers.
- Sujana, A. & Aswawi, N. (2021). Arsitektur Fort Rotterdam. In I. Sumantri (Ed.), *Fort Rotterdam. Benteng di simpang masa* (pp. 199-213). Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Sulawesi Selatan.

- Supangkat, J. (2015). Diponegoro, Raden Saleh, and history in the eyes of Indonesian artists. In *Aku Diponegoro. Sang Pangeran dalam Ingatan Bangsa, dari Raden Saleh hingga Kini* (pp. 12-15) [Exhibition booklet]. Goethe Institut and Galeri Nasional Indonesia.
- Symbol of power and strength [Permanent exhibition]. (2019). Museum La Galigo, Makassar, Indonesia.
- Taylor, J. G. (2013). Aceh: Narasi foto, 1873-1930. In H. Schulte Nordholt, B. Purwanto & R. Saptari (Eds.), *Perspektif Baru Penulisan Sejarah Indonesia* (pp. 313-372). Yayasan Obor Indonesia & KITLV Jakarta.
- Triyana, B. (2020, March 10). Cerita di balik perjalanan pulang keris Diponegoro. *Historia*. <https://historia.id/kultur/articles/cerita-di-balik-perjalanan-pulang-keris-diponegoro-PelXj/page/1>
- UPTD Museum La Galigo. (2008). *Buku Petunjuk UPTD Museum La Galigo*. Pemerintah Provinsi Sulawesi Selatan Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata UPTD Museum La Galigo.
- Van Beurden, J. (2017). *Treasures in trusted hand: Negotiating the future of colonial cultural objects*. Sidestone Press.
- Wirawan, Y. (2013). *Sejarah masyarakat Tionghoa Makassar: Dari abad ke-17 hingga ke-20*. Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, École Française d'Extrême-Orient, and KITLV-Jakarta.
- Yunan, T. M., et. al. (1994/1995). *Buku petunjuk Museum Negeri Propinsi Daerah Istimewa Aceh*. Bagian Proyek Pembinaan Permuseuman Daerah Istimewa Aceh Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.

Indigenous knowledge and scientific collections: Collaborative research with the Ka'apor Indigenous people

Claudia Leonor López-Garcés

Museu Goeldi – Belém, Brazil

Mariana Françaço

Leiden University – Netherlands

Valdemar Ka'apor

Indigenous Education – Xiepihu-rena, T.I Alto Turiaçu, Brazil

Irakadju Ka'apor

Ka'apor Ta Hury of the Gurupi River Association

– Alto Turiaçu, Brazil

Rosilene Tembê

Turizinho, T.I Alto Turiaçu, Brazil

Pina Irã Ka'apor

Pina Ité Ka'apor

Ximorã Ka'apor

Wa'i Ka'apor

Xiepihu-rena, T.I Alto Turiaçu, Brazil

Abstract

This article reflects on the relationship between Indigenous knowledge and scientific collections from the perspective of a collaborative research experience between the Goeldi Museum (Belém, Brazil), Leiden University and the Ka'apor Indigenous people who live in the Alto Turiaçu Indigenous Land – Maranhão (Brazil).¹ We start with a visit to the Goeldi Museum's scientific collections in September 2022, as part of the BRASILAE research project, which prompted memory exercises and reflections on Ka'apor knowledge. We will also reflect on the Ka'apor's own ways of creating and transmitting knowledge, encouraging the participation of

1 Email: clapez@museu-goeldi.br

women in reflecting on Indigenous knowledge and their role in creating and transmitting knowledge.

Keywords: Amazon, Ka'apor Indigenous people, Indigenous knowledge, scientific collections

Resumen

Conocimiento indígena y colecciones científicas: Investigación colaborativa con el pueblo indígena Ka'apor

Este artículo reflexiona sobre la relación entre el conocimiento indígena y las colecciones científicas desde la perspectiva de una experiencia de investigación colaborativa entre el Museo Goeldi (Belém, Brasil), la Universidad de Leiden y el pueblo indígena Ka'apor que vive en la Tierra Indígena Alto Turiaçu - Maranhão (Brasil). Comenzamos con una visita a las colecciones científicas del Museo Goeldi en septiembre de 2022, como parte del proyecto de investigación BRASILAE, que promovió ejercicios de memoria y reflexiones sobre el conocimiento Ka'apor. También reflexionaremos sobre las propias formas de crear y transmitir conocimiento de los Ka'apor, fomentando la participación de las mujeres en la reflexión sobre el conocimiento indígena y su papel en la creación y transmisión del mismo.

Palabras clave: Amazonas, pueblo indígena Ka'apor, conocimiento indígena, colecciones científicas

In the context of the greater Amazon, the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi (MPEG), founded in 1866, is the oldest scientific institution with a museum character, and it holds scientific collections related to two major fields of knowledge as defined by Western science: the natural sciences and the humanities. In the field of natural sciences, the Goeldi Museum holds collections in zoology (entomology, herpetology, ichthyology, mastozoology and ornithology collections), botany (MG Herbarium and the recent Ethnobotany Collection), earth sciences and ecology (paleontology, palynology and soil collections).

In the field of the humanities, the Goeldi Museum holds important and historical ethnographic collections from 120 Indigenous peoples and riverine populations from the Brazilian Amazon and, to a lesser extent, from the Colombian and Peruvian Amazon, as well as from the Maroon populations of Suriname. It also houses an archaeological collection that shows the cultural diversity of ancient human collectives in the Amazon and an important linguistic collection that holds records of the enormous linguistic diversity that exists in the Amazon.

In the area of anthropology, we highlight the research carried out among and with various Indigenous peoples with whom the Goeldi Museum has maintained close relations since the early days of this research institution. A case in point is the century-old relationship that the Goeldi Museum has maintained with the Mebêngôkre-Kayapó Indigenous people, at least since the beginning of the 20th century, mediated by various researchers through-

out this century and throughout the 21st century (Sanjad et al., 2022; López-Garcés et al., 2014).

In terms of methodology, this article is based on the ethnography of a visit by a group of Ka'apor Indigenous people to the Goeldi Museum's scientific collections in September 2022, carried out as part of the ERC BRASILIAE research project,² which stimulated dialogues with the Ka'apor about practices of knowledge production. In short, we wanted to show the Goeldi Museum as a central institution in Western scientific research and how it operates together with Indigenous peoples, to recognize the contribution of Indigenous knowledge to the development of Western science and, finally, to motivate reflections on Ka'apor knowledge and their own ways of creating and transmitting it, thereby encouraging reflections on the important role of women as creators and transmitters of knowledge.

Based on this experience, in this article we seek to articulate a reflection on the relationship between Indigenous knowledge and Western science as knowledge-making practices. We seek to advance in the transformation of inequalities as an alternative in order to build a new science of an intercultural nature, which recognizes and values the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the sustainability of life on the planet. It is through research in collaboration with Indigenous peoples that we can move forward in this direction.

Collaborative research with the Ka'apor people

The Ka'apor, speakers of a language from the Tupi trunk, Tupi-Guarani family, live in the Alto Turiaçu Indigenous Land, located in the north of the state of Maranhão in the Brazilian Amazon, sharing this territory with other Indigenous peoples such as the Tembé and the Awa Guajá, also speakers of Tupi languages. There are around two thousand people who identify themselves as Ka'apor, an ethnonym that comes from the terms “Ka'a,” which means forest or jungle, and “por,” which means inhabitant or dweller, so the term Ka'apor can be understood as “forest dwellers” (Balée, 1994).

In the context of the Goeldi Museum, research among the Ka'apor Indigenous people was initiated by anthropologist William Balée, who carried out an important study on the ethnobotanical knowledge of this people between 1988 and 1991 (Balée, 1994). At the invitation of Professor Balée, in 2005 Claudia López was asked to support the Ka'apor people, who were creating an Indigenous association as an organizational space from which to continue organizing economic and political initiatives. Their aim was to continue the struggle, which began in the 1980s, to defend their territory, the Alto Turiaçu-MA Indigenous Land, which was constantly invaded and affected by illegal logging by non-Indigenous logging entrepreneurs (López-Garcés, 2018).

From this initial collaboration, the Goeldi Museum went on to carry out new research initiatives with the Ka'apor people, focusing on issues considered to be a priority, such as income generation initiatives, especially handicraft production for the market (López-Garcés et al., 2015). From 2013, when one of the authors of this article was curator (from 2011-2018) of the Curt Nimuendaju Ethnographic Collection, we established new research partnerships with the National Museum of Ethnology and the University of Leiden (Netherlands), dedicating ourselves to studying the ethnographic collections of

² The ERC-funded Project BRASILIAE Indigenous Knowledge in the Making of Science: *Historia Naturalis Brasiliae* (1648) was directed by Mariana Françaço at Leiden University and ran from 2018-2023. For more information and results, see: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/715423>

Ka'apor objects kept in the respective museums in Brazil and the Netherlands. As a result of this research collaboration, and thanks to the Ibermuseum Conversaciones II Grant that we received, the research group collectively decided to organize an exhibition about the Ka'apor at the Museu Goeldi. The decision as to the topic (and title) of the exhibition was made quickly by the Ka'apor representatives while in Leiden: *A Festa do Cauim*, that is, The Cauim Party (López-Garcés et al., 2017).³

The exhibition opened in 2014 at the museum in Belém. It reflected our collective attempt to translate essential concepts and values of Ka'apor life to a wider public. These intercultural exercises consisted first of the Ka'apor examining and discussing their objects kept in the museum's storage areas (and on display, in the case of Leiden) – a discussion they carried out in their own language, afterwards translating it into Portuguese for the remaining members of the group. Later, sitting around a table, we – the Ka'apor and the anthropologists and museum staff – looked at the images of the objects, read aloud some of our notes, and from the stories evoked by each object we decided on what to use and how to display the Cauim ritual. This method of working together was similar to those described by other scholars and museum practitioners working with Indigenous peoples in a collaborative manner (Peers & Brown, 2003; van Broekhoven et al., 2010; Silva & Gordon, 2011; Pearlstein et al., 2023). In this sense, it is important to highlight the role of having open, often long conversations about the different partners' interests and views of the work process at hand, instead of following a strict pre-planned schedule or chasing a set of goals to achieve. As we will describe below, this same manner of working was employed when discussing science and knowledge-making with the Ka'apor.

The research partnership with Leiden University continued within the framework of the ERC BRASILIAE research project, which held two workshops on the theme of recognizing scientific collections: one at the Goeldi Museum in Belém in 2022, and the other at the Naturalis Museums and the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden in 2023. In this paper, for analytical purposes, we will focus on the research workshop carried out at the Goeldi Museum, the results and discussions of which were presented at the event “Decolonizing academic disciplines and collections” in Marburg in June 2023.

Getting to know museums and their scientific collections with the Ka'apor

In August 2022, a group of Ka'apor Indigenous people chosen by their communities (co-authors Valdemar Ka'apor, Pina Ité Ka'apor, Pina irã Ka'apor, Ximorã Ka'apor, Wa'i Ka'apor), were invited to visit and talk about the scientific collections kept at the Goeldi Museum.⁴ The five adults were joined by two children who were also present during the visits to the collections. The workshop, “Indigenous knowledge and Western science: a visit to the Goeldi Museum's scientific collections with the Ka'apor,” had the following objectives:

1. to bring the Indigenous people into contact with the world of science produced at the Goeldi Museum through visits to the scientific collections;
2. to motivate reflection on the contributions of Indigenous knowledge to Western science and vice versa;

³ Cauim is the name of a cashew-fruit beverage made by the Ka'apor, which is drunk during a multi-day celebration of four types of important, recurring events for the community: marriages, the baptism of babies, young women's entry into adulthood (first period), and the nomination of a new chief.

⁴ Co-authors Irakadju Ka'apor and Rosilene Tembê participated only at the Leiden 2023 workshop, but they also took part in the discussions and reflections that led to the writing of this article.



Figure 1. Visit to ethnographic collection storage area Curt Nimuendaju at the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, August 2022. Photo © Claudia López

3. to motivate reflection on the Ka'apor's own ways of creating and transmitting knowledge;
4. to encourage the participation of Ka'apor women in reflecting on Indigenous knowledge and their role as creators and transmitters of knowledge.

As part of this experience, we visited the ethnographic, archaeological, linguistic, herpetological, ethnobotanical, herbarium, historical archive and library collections and went on a hike in the Goeldi Museum's Zoobotanical Park to identify plants that are important to the Ka'apor. One of the objectives was to show how Western science is built on the idea of creating scientific collections, which make it possible to obtain, classify and store information about the diversity of plants, animals, minerals and human artifacts and then establish comparisons between different specimens and objects, based on which Western knowledge is consolidated.

In methodological terms, we went on tours of the technical reserves that hold the scientific collections, guided by the curators and/or technicians of each collection, stopping to talk about those specimens or objects that caught the attention of the workshop participants, audio recording the conversations and testimonies about these elements and making photographic records and short videos of these tours. In this article we will focus on the conversions and reflections that resulted from the visits to the humanities collections, mainly the Curt Nimuendaju Ethnographic Collection, but also the Mário Ferreira Simões Archaeological Collection, which holds the largest archaeological collection in the Amazon. We also consider some reflections that emerged during visits to the Ethnobotany collection and the Domingo Soares Ferreira Pena Library.

Memories and reflections on Ka'apor Indigenous knowledge

The first visit was to the Goeldi Museum's Ethnographic Collection, which is called the Curt Nimuendaju Technical Reserve (see figure 1). For most of the Indigenous participants, it was the first time they had visited this ethnographic collection, which holds important collections of Ka'apor objects, amassed by various researchers over the course of the 20th century; only Valdemar, who had participated in a previous workshop, was already familiar with the collection. For this reason, Valdemar led the conversations and reflections and explained, in his own language, to the other Indigenous participants about the Ka'apor ceramic pieces kept in the collection:

We've lost the professionals who used to make what we call *kamuxi* (paneiro) and *kachimã* (ceramic pipe). ... Making pottery is very secretive, you can't be seen, there are only two people [needed], one to make it and another to help. It's very hidden. Men and women do it. The material is *tujuka* [ceramic]. Those older than us can make it. It would be very interesting for us to do it. It's hard even for me, but if we try we can do it. Because first you have to find material, clay that's kind of red, yellow, not all clay can [be used to] make it. Then you have to mix it, the *caripé*, a tree from which you remove the bark and burn it, then you make it like a little cement powder, pour it into the clay, mix it two or three times and when it's very soft, we'll lift it. It's enough to do it once, the second time we'll do it until we get it. You have to do one first. While you're making it, you can't drink water, you can't pee, you can't date if you're married. When it's all finished, you can do it [again], but not while you're doing it, you can crack [the pot], you can't look at anyone either.

The importance of Valdemar's speech lies in the fact that the Ka'apor no longer make pottery. This knowledge has been forgotten but can be recovered. The knowledge is safe, Valdemar argues, and asks:

How did this knowledge that we call *Ukwaha mupytaha* remain forever? *Tupã* [God] gave us every piece of knowledge, every science ... let's say we all get married, what are we going to eat? Are we going to eat snake? Snakes make you sick. God said not to eat [snake]. This [game meat] is the one to eat. So God gave us *ukwaha*, this idea, this knowledge. And so we brought our knowledge. That's where we got this *ukwaha* from. Our history comes from the beginning, from many centuries ago, when *Tupã* existed here on earth, he gave us this knowledge. It's not through books, in those days it was just storytelling. Grandpa is sitting and we're listening, then it's a lesson for us. The one who knows, who has a good memory, will receive and learn, the other doesn't care. Our *ukwaha* is very interesting. That's how we bring *ukwaha*.

When asked how the Ka'apor create new knowledge, Valdemar replies:

Now? Today we're going to preserve what we still have today, first the land, the forest, second our *ukwaha*, our knowledge, how we lived, our grandfathers. So we're going to preserve it. We're still original Indigenous people, so let's talk, have our party, plant. Today we're already among the

karai [non-Indigenous people], they're already teachers, they've been hired, but we have the language. Since we're teachers now, we have to write a history book so that it doesn't end.

Valdemar's reflections on Ka'apor knowledge are reinforced by his daughter Pina Iran, who comments:

We make all this stuff here (feathers). We women know how to make these [cotton fabrics]. Now we don't know how to make this one [ceramics]. We didn't learn, the old men are dead, the ones who knew. The others didn't learn. They used to make ceramic ovens too. I don't know this one (ceramic pipe). I've seen them doing it, Emídio's wife knows how. She makes gourds and pots, then they burn them when they've finished making them.



Figure 2. Cotton fabrics made by women. Ethnographic collection storage area Curt Nimuendaju, August 2022. Photo © Claudia López

Asked about her knowledge of cotton fabrics, she replied:

We know how to weave cotton. I know how to make a belt, weave a sling (see figure 2); we also know how to cut a gourd. Headdresses (*cocar*) only men make, women can't make them because it's all crooked for them. Our heads also hurt, they say, the Ka'apor men, so we [Ka'apor women] don't even pick it up or put it on our heads, only the men do. Clubs [*borduna*], too, only the men take it, we [women] can't even touch it, it gets all hard, they say. In the past, women didn't take it, only men did. They [men] also do this [honking]. Then, if they're going to attack a *karai* [non-Indigenous person], they blow this one here [horn] so that we can gather there [and attack]. Women can't make *tipiti* [to press cassava] either. Women now do the work in the village, to learn from the old people what they used to do, what we don't know, we don't know how to do. Then we talk to them and they teach us what they know how to do. The old people teach us, even the young people and the boys are learning how to make *paneiro*. We do everything with them. We didn't even know anything at first, but now that we need it, we're learning.

These approaches provide an initial understanding of Ka'apor knowledge, in which some specific characteristics are evident: *ukwaha mupytaha* knowledge was given by *Tupã*; it is kept in people's memories; it is transmitted orally; there are professionals who specialize in certain types of knowledge and knowledge-practices; there is specific knowledge for men and women, as well as restrictions in this regard; there is now dialogue with non-Indigenous ways of knowing (teachers, school, books) that contribute to strengthening Indigenous knowledge.

Considerations about other knowledges in scientific collections

The visit to the Ethnographic Collection also included contact with and observation of collections of objects made by other Indigenous peoples and peoples of African origin, which prompted reflections on the diversity of peoples and their knowledge. Suzana, a Karipuna Indigenous woman who works as a conservator at the Ethnographic Collection, explains that the collection of objects from the Juruna people, organized by Henry Couderau, arrived at the Goeldi Museum in 1896, a fact that surprised Valdemar, considering that these objects have been in the museum for almost 130 years. "It's another way of knowing about care," said Valdemar, referring to Western museological knowledge that focuses on the conservation of collections. And thinking about the diversity of Indigenous peoples, Valdemar continued:

Before, God made one house, just one, very big. There the Indigenous people had only one language. At that time, they also had iron teeth. The Ka'apor don't know how to eat with that [iron tooth], which is very sharp, and they cut out their tongues. Boy, I'm going to take this one out and put corn in it. That's why our teeth rot. That also divided them, there's going to be another Indigenous people, they're going to be different. They'll be enemies of each other. Like before, our ancestors fought a lot. We fought with the Temb  and the Guaj , Munduruku.

Reflecting on his visits to the ethnographic collection and the ethnobotanical collection at the Goeldi Museum, Valdemar said:

You can see every culture, different cultures. You get curious. I'm already from another culture. I used to think that culture was just what we have, but there are several cultures. We're curious. [The curator of the Ethnobotany collection] was talking about a lot of things for us to know. We're in the village and there's a lot for us to work with. We thought it was just that knowledge that we have, us Ka'apor. But there are other Indigenous people who have things we've never seen before, not only Indigenous people but also the riverines, the *quilombolas* [maroons]. And the medicines that are very important, like this vine here [*ayahuasca*]. I was curious, so many different cultures ... there's so much around the world, as a *quilombola*, the knowledge we have, each person has their own knowledge. The plants that are used to take care of our health, to make tea, some we don't know, so we're learning, too. ... It's the first time they [Ka'apor youth] are coming, they could be coming to do some work here, or they could be coming from outside, it's going to be very good for them.

And he concludes with this self-reflective statement: "our Ka'apor ethnic group is getting stronger."

Valdemar had the following to say about the visit to the archaeological collection:

I thought it was very important, very interesting and very good at the same time. I had been familiar with [ethnographic collections] several times. But this [visit to the archaeological collection] was the first time, another experience. I was curious because that's another kind of knowledge, in our language you can say *Amon ukwaha*, another kind of knowledge, nobody knew that. I've traveled a lot, I've been to the United States, I've been to Holland, but nobody had seen this kind of work, as if it were another world, in past centuries, how we lived, what happened, each people has its own [...] That pot [Marajoara urn], I was curious, I was thinking today, why is there so much pottery, what is it used for, what do they want a lot of it for, is it their own production? So I thought. When [a technician from the Archaeological Collection who guided the visit] explained that that ceramic object is used for someone to be buried in when they die, then I felt sad, like another relative thinks differently! That's another kind of knowledge. Ka'apor is just burying in the ground, pottery is just for celebrating. [The technician] said that this pot isn't for storing water, it's for burying the dead. That's why I was sad and at the same time it's another way of knowing. People who died, buried them there and don't take care of them anymore, they don't bury them to treat them. This one, put it there for them to take care of.

And since death is a very sensitive subject for the Ka'apor, Valdemar continues his reflection:

That last [urn] we saw had those [human] bones, from a thousand, three thousand years ago, like a necklace that's been collected, right? We Ka'apor don't even want to look at that one. That's why I thought, everyone has a

different way of thinking. That was very interesting for me. The map [referring to the ethnohistorical map drawn by Curt Nimuendaju in the 1940s that was shown to us in the library] was another one, this one more or less, this one was to guide us. Now this ceramics business, I was thinking a lot, this Mr. Raimundo [the archaeological collection technician] works with the heaviest things, he has to renovate everything, this [restoration] work is more laborious than that of the other people we're seeing there. There are maps, feather crafts, which are lighter. That [work on the archaeological collection] was very heavy.

Valdemar's testimony about the Marajoara urns confirms how issues related to death and the exhibition of human remains are sensitive for Indigenous peoples (Atalay, 2006). This reaffirms the need for museums to continue avoiding exhibiting these types of collections, which were organized at a time when anthropology, archaeology and museology were not yet questioning the ethical implications of these types of collections and exhibitions (Curtis, 2003). On the other hand, Valdemar's testimony also shows us the importance of museums and their collections as spaces for learning about and communicating the historical and socio-cultural diversity that characterizes humanity. In this sense, Valdemar's words are an invitation to reflect on the important educational and communicative role of museums, tasks which, in our opinion, should be carried out in collaboration with Indigenous peoples as a way of expanding and consolidating the mission of museums as educational spaces on the historical and cultural plurality of humanity. We therefore advocate for a plurality of participants and publics in museum workshops and other such settings, so that learning experiences are increasingly multicultural (and not only bilateral).

Final considerations

At the end of the workshops at the Goeldi Museum's scientific collections, we got together to evaluate the activities carried out, focusing on the perceptions and reflections of the Indigenous participants. Valdemar insisted on the importance of young people evaluating the activities.

Professor Pina Ité Ka'apor said:

We went to look at the material for the first time. It made us sad; our culture is being left behind, [like] that pottery, that pot that we no longer produce in our village. I thought, this is what we're losing, but we can look again and see if we can make this material, this pottery. But I thought it was very good. It's like traveling back in time, ancient material. ... I think we have to get close to the older people who have this ancient knowledge, we young people have to get close to them, the old people aren't going to offer themselves, we have to get close to them. Now that cameras and audio recorders have arrived, there are six adults who are studying to make films and recordings too. Now that they're starting, the old people are telling stories to make things. I thought it was very important because an old man can pass away, but the video will still be there, I thought it was very important, very *katu* [good]. That's it.

These words show us how collections and museums are spaces for recording the history of the peoples of the world, suggesting new forms of cultural expression for these peoples in contemporary times. It is necessary to expand the spaces for intercultural dialog, so that many different (Indigenous and other) peoples may come to learn about these records and reflect on them in order to advance their own processes of socio-cultural creation. At the same time, collaborative work with Indigenous peoples enables us to reflect on the way in which Western science has been made and shown these records, and how museums need to bring Indigenous peoples closer to these records, promoting reflection and changes in the guidelines for working in museum institutions.

In this sense, we highlight the importance of the reflections of Ximorã Ka'apor, mother of the boy Manoel (see figure 3), whose words were translated into Portuguese by Valdemar:

She couldn't participate because her child was not allowed in [due to the rules of the Ethnographic Collection]. She saw her father's photo there [in the Linguistics Technical Reserve]; she was sad, we're in the forest, the paper that remains in the book we write for others and don't value, we give it to our children, and they tear it up. That's why she wanted another [book], which tells the story of her father [Mr. Jupará Ka'apor]. The others had taken it, her sister-in-law almost finished it, she tore it all up, nobody values it. It's a lot of work, it's very sad, but at the same time it's good because here we've come to learn about appreciating [conserving] things. When the paper arrives for us, we keep it first, then after two or five days, the kids pick it up, nobody values it, nobody says no, don't touch it, it'll be torn up. So now, anything that we have to value, we have to evaluate what is said there, what is being done in the drawing ... we have to study, we have to know, we have to learn more about this.

Ximorã's statement allows us to reflect in different directions. On the one hand, there is a need to make organizational changes with regards to the accessibility of collections so that children can participate in the work carried out with Indigenous peoples. The Indigenous women who take part in these events normally bring their children with them, so museums need to develop forms of working that do not exclude the participation of children in the storage areas and other spaces of the museum. On the other hand, Ximorã's words raise questions about the way in which science disseminates research results using the technique of writing, usually in book format. We are therefore invited to question whether this form of disseminating research is the most appropriate method to reach communities, or if we need to develop other forms of communicating that better align with the orality of Indigenous peoples. Finally, Ximorã shows a self-reflective attitude manifested in the idea of "valorization/conservation", which motivates her to think about the importance of books as tools for learning content. In doing so, she expresses her openness to these forms of communication which, as Valdemar also expressed, are becoming necessary in the current Indigenous education system.

Additionally, according to Professor Wa'i Ka'apor:

I thought it was very important because it's the first time we've come here. For me, it's a study, another knowledge ... That's what I see, we have to sit down with the elders, because they have more knowledge than us young people. Because now we young people are starting to strengthen our culture.



Figure 3: Visit to the library Domindo Soares Ferreira Pena. Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, August 2022. Photo © Claudia López

For me it's a good thing to come to this museum. We take this knowledge from here to our village.

Professor Wa'i expresses his understanding of the museum as a space for disseminating Western scientific knowledge, "another knowledge" as he names it, but he also expresses how the experience of getting to know the museum motivates him to work with young people in order to strengthen the knowledge of his people. In addition, Professor Wa'i's words indicate that museums, when proposing collaborative work with Indigenous peoples, should aim to invite people from different age groups, so that the knowledge exchange that results from working with the collections is broader and reaches segments of the community who will continue passing on that knowledge to new generations. In this way, instead of just receiving knowledge from Indigenous elders and adding it to their collection inventories, the museum provides a broader opportunity for exchange for everyone involved.

We conclude by drawing attention to the "evocative power of objects" (Van Velthem, 2012) and the intercultural experiences that take place in scientific collections when working in collaboration with Indigenous peoples. Recontextualizing scientific collections together with Indigenous peoples goes beyond "qualifying" objects, it implies new learning for museum institutions and Indigenous peoples alike. It suggests ways to promote changes and innovations in the working dynamics of the institutions that hold the collections, but also in the Indigenous communities that visit them. These meetings promote interdisciplinary and inter-epistemic dialogues, facilitating the expression of feelings and emotions that also contribute to the processes of creating knowledge, living together and understanding others. Based on these collaborative experiences, we ask ourselves about the possibility

of advancing in the creation of an intercultural science, with the aim of creating a field of knowledge that integrates the understanding and care of the human and non-human beings who live together on this planet.

References

- Atalay, S. (2006). Indigenous archaeology as decolonizing practice. *American Indian Quarterly*, 30(3/4), 280–310.
- Balée, W. (1994). *Footprints of the forest: Ka'apor ethnobotany - the historical ecology of plant utilization by an Amazonian people*. Columbia University Press.
- Van Broekhoven, L., Buijs, C., & Hovens, P. (Eds.). (2010). *Sharing knowledge & cultural heritage: First Nations of the Americas. Studies in collaboration with Indigenous peoples from Greenland, North and South America*. Sidestone Press.
- Curtis, N. G. W. (2003). Human remains: The sacred, museums and archaeology. *Public Archaeology*, 3(1), 21–32. <https://doi.org/10.1179/pua.2003.3.1.21>
- López-Garcés, C. L., de Robert, P., & Coelho-Ferreira, M. R. (2014). Pesquisas científicas em colaboração com povos indígenas: Uma tradição de diálogos e inovações metodológicas no Museu Goeldi. In I. C. C. Vieira, P. M. Toledo & R.A.O. Santos Jr. (Eds.), *Ambiente e sociedade na Amazônia. Uma abordagem interdisciplinar* (pp. 407–431). Garamond.
- López Garcés, C. L. & Robert, P. de. (2012). El legado de Darrell Posey: De las investigaciones etnobiológicas entre los Kayapó a la protección de los conocimientos indígenas. *Boletim Do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas*, 7(2), 565–580. doi: 10.1590/S1981-81222012000200015
- López-Garcés, C. L. (2018). Conflits territoriaux et modalités d'usage des forêts dans le territoire autochtone Alto Turiaçú (État de Maranhão, Brésil): Savoirs Ka'apor contre exploitation forestière. *Autrepart*, 81(1). doi: 10.3917/autr.081.0021
- López-Garcés, C. L. L., Pérez, S. E. G., Silva, J. A. da, Araújo, M. O. de, & Coelho-Ferreira, M. (2015). Objetos indígenas para o mercado: produção, intercâmbio, comércio e suas transformações. Experiências Ka'apor e Mebêngôkre-Kayapó. *Boletim Do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas*, 10(3), 659–680. doi: 10.1590/1981-81222015000300009
- López-Garcés, C., Françoze, M., van Broekhoven, L., & Ka'apor, V. (2017). Conversações desassossegadas: diálogos sobre coleções etnográficas com o povo indígena Ka'apor. *Boletim Do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas*, 12(3), 713–734. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1981.81222017000300003>
- Pearlstein, E., McIntyre, C. & Pandozy, S. (2023). Central Yup'ik masks in the Vatican Museums; Indigenous American heritage in European museums. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 38(6), 620–642. DOI: 10.1080/09647775.2023.2188479
- Peers, L. & Brown, A. K. (Eds.). (2003). *Museums and source communities: A Routledge reader*. Routledge.
- Sanjad, N., López-Garcés, C. L., Coelho, M. C., Santos, R. A., & Robert, P. de. (2022). Au-delà du colonialisme: La sinueuse confluence entre le musée Goeldi et le peuple Mebêngôkre. *Brésil(s)*, 22. doi: 10.4000/bresils.13303.

Silva, F., Gordon, C. (Eds). (2011). *Xikrin. Uma coleção etnográfica*. Editora da Universidade de São Paulo.

Van Velthem, L. H. (2012). O objeto etnográfico é irreduzível? Pistas sobre novos sentidos e análises. *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas*, 7(1), 51-66.

